WHY NOT CENSOR THE INTERNET? A CASE STUDY OF RUSSIAN NEW MEDIA

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Abstract

In this research, I investigate the social and political circumstances in Russia that affect the level of censorship over the new media. The question at the center of this research is why the government implements a specific level of censorship over the new media. In order to answer it, I use a range of evidence, including comparative data and the statistical results of public opinion polls. I find that the dynamics of the Russian regime are different from both democratic and authoritarian countries. In Russia, the level of censorship over the new media does not match either system of freedom of speech promotion, or complete control over it. The analysis suggests that the regime dynamics, the control over traditional media, historical predispositions to state-owned media, government's popularity, social capital, and low precedence of attempts of mobilization do affect the level of government's censorship over the new media in Russia.

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Introduction

The end of the last century and beginning of the new millennium were marked with drastic changes in the ways political authorities communicate with their electorate. According to Internet World Stats 2013, two and a half billion people around the world use the internet. In this research, I will explore how these developments impacted the relationship between the public and the government.

Relations between politics and the internet raised much concern among researchers in recent years. Politicians, their opposition, voters and media use the internet to achieve faster and more efficient information deliverance. Moreover, the internet made possible the evolvement of "new media," accessible from any digital device, interactive, easy to manipulate and often lacking regulatory solutions. Russia entered 2012 with over 61 million internet users, which is roughly 45 percent of the country's population, which makes it an attractive field for research on this topic (Internet World Stats 2013). Just like many other countries with high internet penetration rate, Russia is now facing the questions of relationship between politics and the internet. These questions are partly common with those in the Western world and partly related to the specificities of Russian politics and society. Statistics showed that in 2010 the percentage of active bloggers and social network users in Russia was higher than in the United States (Etling/Alexanyan 2010). The question at the center of this research is why the government implements a specific level of censorship over the new media. I will examine the connection between the level of regulation and such variables as the regime dynamics and government intent to control the new media.

The case of Russia is particularly interesting in the light of its political regime specificity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of democratization was launched with drastic effects on liberalization of the media. However, the end of 2000's was marked by a return to authoritarian regime, after almost a decade of being a hybrid.

Therefore, one may not apply the methods of assessment of the media that is used for traditional democratic states (like Canada, USA, or any of the Western European democracies). Neither can the application of research methods used for authoritarian regime (like China, Vietnam, or Cuba) be completely appropriate. In the first part of this research, the discussion of current regime dynamics follows the historical development of the relations between the media and the state. I argue that the overarching control obtained by the government resulted from the historical predisposition to state-controlled media and the political struggle between the president and the businessmen known as "oligarchs" in Russia. In the second part, government capacity to control the media is described from the point of view of the following variables: social capital, precedence of mobilization attempts, and government popularity. I conclude that those variables decrease the level of government need and motivation to tighten the censorship policies over the new media with few exceptions at the present moment.

One may easily start a political blog, a website or a social network page on the internet that would openly criticize the ruling government's actions. Examples of such informational resources are numerous, starting from official opposition party leaders' pages (such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's personal Twitter account with over 650 thousand followers), continuing to well-known journalists and bloggers (like LiveJournal blogs of Mikhail Afanasiev and Marina Litvinovich), and ending with thousands of small anti-government YouTube channels, pages on the most popular Russian social network VKontakte, Facebook, etc. In 2010, one could access nearly five million blogs on the Russian internet, 11 thousand of which could be considered as 'discussion cores' among the political and public policy blogs (Etling/Alexanyan 2010). Only a small percentage of them were devoted to support the ruling government, while the rest focused on the critical assessment of the government, politicians, and policies. Despite the relevance of the new media content to political issues, the

government control over it is *not* as strict as in the case of traditional media. In this paper, I will argue that the ruling government's and President Putin's popularity and approval rate, low risk of public opinion mobilization, and weak social capital allows the state to exercise selective censorship instead of substantial filtering.

Two major factors play a role in expecting the Russian government's involvement in controlling the online environment and new media. The first one is the empirical evidence that new media can provide assistance in mobilizing public opinion against the regime (Breuer 2012, Gonzalez-Bailon 2011, Papic/Noonan 2011). The second one is commonly accepted experts' opinion that freedom of speech in Russia suffers from overregulation and state ownership and censorship (Reporters Without Borders 2013, Economist Intelligence Unit 2013).

The first reason for the Russian government to supervise and moderate opposition's internet activity is a certain number of recent cases, in which the initiators successfully managed to bring a given issue to public attention. As a result, most of those cases gained coverage on the most trusted means of media in Russia - television (including both state-owned and private channels). Alexey Navalny's blog gained much popularity in 2011 and 2012, making him one of the most noticeable independent opposition leaders not only on the web, but also during the mass protests on Bolotnaya Ploshad in December 2011. The massiveness of this event is also attributed to effective social networking of oppositional forces on the web (even though the adequacy of this view is questioned in this research). In Khakasia region a blogger from LiveJournal platform, Mikhail Afanasiev, managed to prevent a coverup of an accident at a hydroelectric power station that caused 75 deaths in the summer of 2009 (RIA Novosti 2009). There are also smaller cases of people's mobilization. For example, Marina Litvinovich, a Russian blogger managed to mobilize a 400-strong gathering in support of a soldier whose legs were amputated as a result of physical abuse by

older soldiers (Asmolov 2010). In this research, I investigate on the influence and role of the new media in triggering public opinion, and discuss the variables that influence the level of government involvement in censoring the flow of information in Russian online environment.

The second reason is a widely accepted view of Russian regime as oppressive towards freedom of speech and harsh regulation over mass media. In Press Freedom Index 2013, Russia occupies 148th place among 179 countries accounted for. This goes well along with Economist Intelligence Unit report, where Russia's overall Democracy Index position is 122nd for the year 2012. One may also refer to a large number of cases in which the journalists are assassinated in Russia. The number of killings is estimated at over a hundred between the years 2000 and 2010.

As Bruce Etling claims, television is the most powerful means of communication with regard to its coverage. The two channels with the highest reach, "Channel One Russia" and "Rossiya 1," are state-owned. The Russian government allows private channels to exist as well, but the government censors and puts constrains on sensitive topics. Starting from 1999, when Putin started using the power of television, the spread of private channels started decreasing in numbers and quantity of political content. This may be explained by the fact that during Yeltsin's era, owning TV channels was popular among oligarchs that attempted to gain political power. Therefore, nationalization of the most viewed channels and putting pressure on those that remained private was a part of Putin's campaign against oligarchs' involvement in Russian politics. According to Etling, printed press, radio stations and news websites exercise more freedom than federal television. However, even the most popular radio station (Echo of Moscow with approximately a million of dedicated listeners) was acquired by Gazprom-Media, the state-owned company that now has a control package of shares of many previously independent media channels (Online NewsHour 2001).

Human Rights Watch indicated a tightening of control over civil society in 2007, when amendments to extremism laws were applied. In short, expressions of hatred against social groups from then on were to be counted as extremist, which allowed the government to give sentences to independent media representatives and journalists that openly criticized the regime. For example, since then pointing out police cruelty or corruption has been interpreted as expression of hatred towards the social group of policemen and Federal Security Services (Human Rights Watch 2009). The consequences of such laws could be many: starting from administrative fines to numerous commentators to massive persecution processes for those who own blogs and social network pages. In reality, such cases are very rare. Moreover, the number of examples of virally spreading anti-governmental content is increasing every year.

The situation described above raises the following question: How is it possible for new media to be comparatively free of regulation, while other media is a subject to a high level of governmental restraints? In the following chapters, I will provide a detailed description of the variables that may affect the level of government censorship over the new media. This study is mainly focused on Russia, because of its specificity in historical background and regime development, but also brings a range of evidence including comparative data. The arguments that are brought in this research are based on a combination of the analyses of social and media experts surveys together with the examination of factual properties of the traditional and new media, and their role in mobilizing the public opinion. The first chapter includes both the theoretical framework and the literature review, because the theories regarding my topic have evolved in recent literature. The second chapter describes the methodology that I use to analyze the dependent and independent variables and provides definitions for the concepts used in this research. The next two chapters include the actual analysis of the independent variables and their effects on the level of censorship over the new media in Russia. The paper is concluded with the summary of findings and

discussion of the possible effectiveness of censorship and regulation of the internet environment.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study aims at analyzing production, procession, and effects of information within political context delivered by media on the internet. I will use the key concepts of political communication in order to formulate my arguments and necessary assumptions. Politicians and policy-makers have been using the media to set up the public agenda and conduct electoral campaigns. Research indicates that in developed democracies consistent access to media coverage is one of the factors that have been helping incumbents to defeat the challengers for decades (Mann and Wolfinger, 1980). More precisely, the researchers name such characteristics as accessibility, frequency, and recency of information as what media can effectively use to influence and activate a shift in public opinion (Domke, Shah, and Wackman, 1998). Media coverage may trigger people's cognitions, making specific issues more accessible in both short and long term. This argument has its implications in political psychology and communication, because it suggests that the way media frames the issues has impact on how people evaluate other concepts and ideas (the process also referred to as "priming effect"), for example, when they have to vote on the elections (Domke, Shah, and Wackman, 1998). Even in foreign policy, media coverage is believed to play major role in mobilization of public opinion, which in turn may affect the policy-making procedures (Powlick and Katz, 1998).

The relations between politicians, the media, and the public can be described in many ways, but recently the researchers point out the unprecedented multi-directedness of these relations (Brants and Voltmer, 2011). In other words, the power relations are less clear than they used to be: no longer one can say with certainty whether it is politicians, the people, or journalists that dictate and control the public agenda. All three groups exercise a certain amount of influence on each other. Blumler and Kavanagh argue that the internet caused a major shift of public agenda-setting power towards the media. Due to increased competitive

pressures and increased diversification of the media, that targets many specific audiences on the web. They also claim that internet supported the domination of consumerism over citizenship in this regard, because political campaigning shifted from traditional selling the candidate on TV towards more business-like marketing approach (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999).

However, the situation in Russia is not exactly fitting into this discussion, because the political competition among the presidential candidates and parties has been different. Judging by the electoral outcomes and approval rates, United Russia and Vladimir Putin have been much more successful than their competition.[1] Therefore, the business-like marketing approach that Western democracies' political campaigners exercise is not applicable. In this regard, I will examine the counter-measures that the Russian ruling government takes in order to stay on top of the competition.

National and Global Nature - Institutional Problems of the Internet Governance

On the state government level, committees on censorship, trade, and copyright and potent should be willing to enforce the same policies as they do in real-life. The constraint that they meet is twofold. First, there is a technological burden, since the governmental committees do not normally possess the ability to create the software, and have to delegate that job to organizations that specialize on it. In order to resolve this issue governments delegate regulatory duties over the internet to non-state actors. As Giandomenico Majone suggests, such delegations often results in accountability issues. That happens because the third party or non-state actor who gets the delegated responsibilities is not directly accountable, i.e., voters have no tools to enforce their negative or positive reactions to their actions. He also argues that "it is an open question in any particular case whether the commitment [to regulatory strategies] is most effectively achieved by delegation to national

[1] The precise evidence is discussed in the section on regime dynamics.

rather than supranational agencies" (Majone 1998). Therefore, second side of the online governance constraint is that there is an obstacle caused by the global nature of the internet.

The combination of these two factors was interpreted by a number of experts as a cause for inevitable failure of governments to establish control over the online environment. Daniel Drezner cites scholars suggesting that "no longer will governments be able to set the tax rates or other standards they want," and since in the internet environment "nation-state is not relevant," it is "difficult to design and implement effective regulations through top-down" (Drezner, 2007).

One may also look at the interconnectedness of domestic and international nature of the internet through the prism of the "Coleman's bathtub" (Foss 2008). Set of institutional changes caused by the internet appeared on the global (or macro) level, then went down to the national level, and received individual reactions: acknowledgment of the need for establishing regulatory tools, denial of the challenge (i.e., shutting the internet down), or negligence due to the small scope of the problem (in developing states, where access to the internet is very low). According to this model, national governments should take rational actions resulting in an aggregate action on the macro level. In other words, governments have to reach consensus.

In practice, the consensus is reached only in certain cases, when national or regional policy-makers unanimously agree on the approach. Drezner denies possibility of worldwide agreement. However, consensus can be observed on a smaller scale within non-state organizations. For example, WTO sanctions on copyright enforcement managed to decrease the software piracy by 20 percent in the period between 1995 and 2000 (Drezner, 2007).

Russia became a part of WTO in 2012. Before that, this organization's sanctions were not applicable to the Russian web. Russia is not among the countries that signed the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA, signed in 2012), which is a multinational treat

regulating the standards for intellectual property and copyright on the internet. There has been no analogue to bills like Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act (PROTECT IP Act; PIPA) that were discussed in the United States in 2011. The discussion of those bills has been unresolved, because of prospected threat to the freedom of speech (Melvin 2012). These facts suggest that the nature of Russian case is different from global discussion, but not unprecedented in the field of the new media's relations with the government.

Theoretical Approaches to the Role of the New Media in Mobilization of Public Opinion

The researchers approached this topic from a number of perspectives. Anita Breuer gives an overview of the discussion between proponents and skeptics of the new media's role in mobilization of political protests (Breuer, 2012). The most notable ones are the following:

1. Psychological and attitudinal approaches;
2. Rational choice approaches;
3. Resource mobilization and social capital approaches;
4. Structural or network account of activism.

The first one, psychological and attitudinal type of approach, addresses the political activism as an outcome of grievance or deprivation. Moral outrage, anger, and even confusion are the emotions that may cause an individual to choose participation in political protests. Therefore, Breuer claims that authoritarian governments often apply a combination of censorship, intimidation, and persecution in order to suppress sensitive information on social and economic deficiencies of the given state. Hence, from the point of view of psychological and attitudinal approaches, the new media provides the tools to overcome this suppression and use sensitive content to assist the public opinion mobilization. This approach is applicable to Russia in a limited manner: since Russian regime before 2010 was hybrid

between authoritarian and democratic, it could not be expected to produce censorship discussed above. Moreover, one would have to prove the existence of suppression of public opinion. As I argue in the analysis part of my paper, this suppression is not perceived by Russians as an issue to overcome.

Rational choice proponents argue that a self-interested individual would has an overarching incentive to avoid participation in generating public good by protesting against the ruling government. For a rational person, the "free rider" position is more convenient, because the transaction costs of participation are unjustifiable if the results of the protest or demonstration will be accessible to everyone in any case. Breuer suggests that this type of approaches lacks appreciation for ethical principles, such as personal honor, patriotic duty, and the perception of positive effect of participation on projected utility. In other words, rational choice proponents overemphasize excessive abstention. In this regard, the new media's role is to ensure individuals that the magnitude of the protest will disable government's possible attempt to seize the protest without complying with the demands of the people. Breuer argues that this assumption goes along with the threshold model for participation in collective action, according to which the willingness to take risks depends on the perceived involvement of others. As the analysis of public attitudes towards the freedom of media will show, this theory fits the current situation in Russia.

Resource Mobilization Theory opposes the Rational Choice Theory by claiming that it is rational for open and affluent societies to conduct protests, because the existence of NGOs and other similar groups allows turning public frustration into political action. Such civil society groups may reduce transaction costs and enhance engagement in protests and demonstration. Breuer suggests that the production of denser communication infrastructure in authoritarian societies plays a role similar to what NGOs and other civil society groups, by

providing organizational opportunities for authoritarian states, where social capital is kept at the low level by the governmental suppression.

Structural or network account of activism is the approach that accounts for group affiliations and causes of collective action as "having their roots outside the individual and as being strongly influenced by structural proximity and network connections" (Breuer, 2012). This approach's is based upon the assumption that in order for any individual to mobilize, they first have to be approached by somebody from their existing network. Breuer argues that one of the most important factors is the number of memberships in multiple organizations, which results in interconnectedness of groups. In other words, if one and the same individual takes part in different organizations, the likelihood of fast spread of information and ability to mobilize increases. Therefore, Breuer cites a number of scholars who suggest heavy reliance of political activists on the internet to facilitate and manage several memberships across issues and organizational boundaries (Bennett, Breunig, Givens, 2008; della Porta, Mosca, 2005). Hence, the internet may be used to enhance awareness about collective action events. I will argue that the new media in Russia pursues the mobilization goals, and has similar assumptions as the proponents of network account of activism approach. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the new media is questionable. Therefore, I will analyze the precedents of mobilization attempts, in which the new media played a role.

General Directions of Discussion about the New Media in Politics

One may notice the drastic shifts in mainstream opinion of the literature devoted to political censorship on the web. In the 1990's, many proponents of the freedom of speech picked up the notion that the internet is going to become the platform for non-censored content. Nowadays, one may find a lot of skepticism regarding the freedom that the internet provides for new media. The criticisms include the view that the new media is easy to control and supervise, since every byte of generated information is stored in electronic databases and

protocols that are accessible to the government (Morozov, 2007). Nevertheless, the recent years' events, such as so-called Twitter Revolutions in Egypt, Moldova, Tunis, and Iran, can serve as empirical evidence that the internet may trigger major mobilizations of the public opinion.

Before getting into a discussion on whether the internet is or should be regulated with regard to public opinion mobilization, one has to understand identify the actual public affected by those regulations. Paul Herrnson argues that candidates who have younger and better-educated constituents do more campaigning online in the United States (Herrnson 2013). His research leads to a conclusion that internet campaigning helps the candidate communicate with supporters, reach out to undecided voters, recruit volunteers, and raise money online. Herrnson's findings may be associated with Samuel Best and Brian Krueger's work, "Analyzing the Representativeness of Internet Political Participation," where the authors claim that those "from higher socioeconomic backgrounds" possess more factors of active internet political participation. They conclude that the internet and civic skills correlate across the demographic categories. They also find that it is hard to determine whether the internet political participation reflects or distorts the overall population's public opinion.

One has to consider the enforceability and efficiency of the efforts taken by the government and non-state actors, to whom regulation of the internet was delegated. First of all, as the importance of regulation was established in the preceding sections of this research, one may find support for it in Drezner's citation of George Yeo, Singapore minister, who claimed that "censorship can no longer be 100 percent effective, but even if it is only 20 percent effective, we should not stop censoring" (Drezner 2007). Drezner points out that Singapore was far more successful than 20 percent, obliging the internet media register with the Singapore Broadcasting authority, which would allow efficient screening of the information that was allowed for people to see. As a result, the same censorship requirements

were implemented to the internet media as to regular broadcast media. This approach set the path for a number of East Asian countries, including China.

Ability to censor the content and information flow on the web

The beginning of the internet era gave a birth to a discussion whether the internet was going to become a tool for democratization. It was viewed as an ultimate platform for the freedom of speech to develop in the countries where it did not exist. Indeed, making policies in virtual environment created many obstacles for the governments to manipulate the freedom of speech, but did the governments find the way to respond to those obstacles?

In order to provide basis for this research, I will address the counterargument according to which the internet cannot be regulated in the same manner as traditional mass media. There is empirical evidence that the internet and new media may be controlled to the highest degree. For example, the Chinese government imposes strict regulation with regard to politically charged information flows. In March 2009, the government blocked YouTube. Other Google services were also blocked everywhere in China except for Hong Kong, the only location allowing free flow of information that is censored by Chinese laws. In September 2012, Pakistani government banned YouTube service on the territory of the country because of anti-Islamic videos. The service remained unavailable inside the country at the time when this research was written

The governments' attempts to regulate the online environment may also be explained from the point of overall organizational meaning of a state. Public policy makers do not only address the political issues: internet regulation areas also include trade, copyright, and labor issues. One may argue that as the technology progresses, the government has to get involved in online activities to pursue exactly the same organizational goals as they do in real life. If the trade on the territory of some country is regulated by the state with the purpose of serving and protecting the interests of the sellers and the customers, one may reasonably expect the

same state to implement similar set of rules on the internet trade that the state's citizens engage in. Similar argument works for labor issues: if the government imposes the income tax on regular positions, why would it not do so in case of internet labor, like IT services? One may find that the laws governing the e-commerce, labor regulations, and copyright laws in the real world are widely similar to those designed for the internet in the developed countries, while in the developing states they are less associated, often due to the technological burdens that the governments have to face in the online environment.

Internet Skeptics

As it was stated above, some researchers claim that the new media is already a subject to strong regulation (Morozov, 2007; Hindman, 2009). In developed countries, authorities have open access to the tools for both surveillance and for conducting counter-campaigns to outweigh opposition's efforts. In "New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen," Philip Howard suggests that the government not only uses the new media to support electoral campaigns, but also as an instrument of surveillance. He refers to the case of a senator that used data banks to gather information about the electorate in order to conduct properly marketed campaigns through the internet. The Database Manager is one of many software tools for archiving data that was launched in 1980's. At first, it only included phone numbers and addresses of the most politically active supporters of Democrats and Republicans. Eventually, it was turned into a political database, information from which was occasionally sold to candidates for senators' chairs. Today, this company, renamed into DataBank.com, possesses basic information about 150 million registered voters. This information includes detailed profiles (together with policy preferences of each individual) on approximately 40 percent of them. However, the market price of this data has fallen, mostly because of competition. This suggests that the tracking ability of the governments in the Western democracies allows them to gather information about the internet users, their preferences, and

other personal information. In my research, I assume that the Russian government also possesses such ability, or if not, may acquire it with relatively low costs.

Many other database companies can provide politically relevant information about the citizens. Astroturf-Lobby.org is the nonprofit group that not only holds a similar database, but also supports political action committees with data implementation, i.e., internet communication strategies. Some companies still manage to go further than Astroturf-Lobby.org and DataBase.com. Voting.com and GrassrootsActivist.org use spyware to install surveillance software on users' computers that crawls and gathers political information about users along with their contact data. Later that data is used to provide the public with tools for consuming political content. Based on existence of the above-mentioned tools, one may conclude that the government of the United States is in possession of rather developed technological tools to conduct surveillance and to use counter-measures in case if they have to seize public opinion activation through the new media. From this, one may conclude the fallacy of the argument that the governments are generally unable to control the flow of information on the internet. One may also assume that they are (at least) able to effectively supervise the flow of information on the internet.

Another important aspect that has to be discussed separately is the government's ability to use the social networks in order to control the new media's discourse. Evgeny Morozov is one of the most prominent skeptics of internet freedom. In two books, "The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom" (2012) and "To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism" (2013), he acknowledges the role of social networks in revolutionary movements, but suggests that too little attention has been paid to the efforts that the governments put into online environment. According to him, social media websites has been used to strengthen authoritarian power over the nations in China and Iran. Morozov claims that some friction in communication is necessary to cover for liberal democracies'

imperfections. Thus, he concludes that internet optimists' "solutionism" approach to the use of new media is utopic. More practical criticism addresses politicians' open cooperation with social networks. For example, in "How Democracy Slipped through the Net," Morozov points out at the fact that during Iranian protests in 2009 Jared Cohen, an official at the US state department, engaged in a conversation with Twitter. Because of this conversation, Twitter postponed the planned maintenance of the website, which would have otherwise interrupted and limited the protesters' connection with the rest of the world. Thus, Morozov suggests that the social networks proved to be used as a tool in foreign affairs.

However, not only the authorities' efforts limit the new media attempts to reach the public. The existing literature suggests that there are also technical limitations, such as low fraction of politically relevant traffic, link structure of the web, and invisibility of some websites due to lack of search engine optimization (Hindman, 2007). In addition to that, more often than not commercial websites focus on distribution of the content rather than its quality, because in the end it is traffic and not the quality of the content that allows monetization. The will to maximize the profits from online resources combined with inexpensiveness and easiness of creating them leads to overcrowding the market, which makes it harder for content producers to reach their audiences. Consequently, one may notice the appearance of "online social elites" or a small group of A-list bloggers that attract more traffic than the rest of the citizenry combined (Hindman, 2007).

Internet Optimists

The proponents of the role of the new media in mobilization of public opinion rely on recent empirical cases of such events widely known as "Twitter Revolutions." They include the protests and demonstrations in Moldova (2009), Iran (2009-2010), Tunis (2010-2011), and Egypt (2011). Following the Arab Spring events, the United Nations for the first time addressed the role of the new media and digital services in the freedom of expression. In July

2012, 47 member states agreed that the right to access the internet should be guaranteed and protected by all states. However, the main discussion is focused on the countries in which the precedents of mobilization attempts become sensational, such as Tunis, Egypt, and Iran. Because of low precedence rate of such occasions (as discussed in the analysis section), there is not much literature addressing the situation with social media in Russia.

The supporters of the new media do not argue that the mobilization efforts online may instigate protests by themselves. Nevertheless, the Western press argues that the social media may assist mobilization in terms of organization and communication (Papic/Noonan 2011). Moreover, governments often do not fully comprehend the potential networking capabilities of the new media. For example, according to Marko Papic and Sean Noonan, during the Iranian protests in 2009, the government shut down Facebook, but underestimated Twitter. As a result, the information flow around the protests spread around the world wide web very quickly. Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge the fact that communication is only one of the many determinants of successful anti-government movements. They compare it to business dependency on tech-savvy IT department, which does not give a competitive advantage by itself, but may benefit the company in a combination with other factors (Papic/Noonan 2011).

In her research on the role of new media organizing the protests that took place in Spain in May 2011, Dr. Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon suggests that the digital media was an important tool in both the Arab world and Western countries, including the Occupy movement (Gonzalez-Bailon 2011). This study showed that the behavior of over 87 thousand users of the social media may be grouped into two categories: recruitment and diffusion. While the early recruiters randomly seeded the information about the upcoming action plan, the "spreaders" are responsible for rapid and frequent diffusion of the information. As a result, the researcher concluded that the there are many factors that may play a role in making

a decision to back a cause, but most people are influenced by the amount of exposure to messages calling for action within a short time. The more frequently they receive those messages, the more likely they are to respond and join in (Gonzales-Bailon 2011). This connection suggests an important link between the social capital and mobilization potential that will be used in this research.

The Public Discourse of Russian Blogosphere

The study about the discourse of Russian blogosphere also reveals some important facts about the new media in Russia. The authors, Bruce Etling and Arina Alexanyan, argue that in Russia the internet environment is free of governmental control, despite the fact that it is impossible to provide solid evidence of the absence of control mechanisms. Independent bloggers prefer to cite and rely on other independent sources of information, rather than governmental resources. This shows that the politically active users do not see the official information as objective. One of the most important findings that this study provides for my research is that the Russian blogosphere is used as a platform for potential social and political mobilization, i.e. the bloggers often call for action from their users. Therefore, the authors suggest that it may take time, but eventually the government will attempt to exercise control over the blogosphere.

In 2010, this study tried to give possible reasons for the low level of governmental regulation over the information flow on the Russian internet. They suspected that it could be either low internet penetration, or high costs of implementation of censorship policies. In this paper, I will address this particular issue, and examine other possible grounds for the comparatively low level of censorship over the new media.

Chapter 2. Methodology

Academic studies on the media are divided into three equally important types: macroeconomic studies (cross-country comparisons), microeconomic analysis (involving only one country), and policy centric descriptive case studies. In this research, I will engage in at least two of the listed types, i.e. microeconomic, and policy centric descriptive case studies, focusing on the case of Russia, and the policies that the Russian government implements to regulate the media. Social and political scientists have been addressing the power relations between the state, the media, and the people. This research is also based on the measurement of relations between the media and the state, while the assessment of public opinion will help understanding the nature of these relations.

Dependent and Independent Variables

In order to shape the structure of this research, I will implement the research design based on the relationship between independent variables on the dependent variable. The dependent variable is the level of censorship over the new media in Russia. In order to understand, why this level is currently set at a particular level, I test the effects of the independent variables that include the regime dynamics and the government intent to censor the new media. Regime dynamics provide the historical background that helps understanding how the level of censorship over traditional media affects the regulation of the new media. In addition to that, regime dynamics includes the discussion of historical predisposition to state-controlled media among Russians. The government intent to censor the new media represents the level of motivation for the government to implement tighter regulatory policies over the new media. In order to measure it, I break it into the following parts: social capital, precedence of mobilization attempts with the help of the new media, government popularity and regime support. Together, these variables provide an opportunity to assess the prospected effectiveness of new media censorship.

The link between the independent and dependent variables is expressed in the following hypothesis:

The level of censorship over the new media is affected by the political and social circumstances composed of the regime dynamics, control over the traditional media, historical predisposition to state-owned media, government popularity, social capital, and precedence of mobilization attempts.

In order to test this hypothesis, I will analyze each of the independent variables and their relationship with the dependent variable. While exploring the independent variables, I will use the statistics provided by the two major statistical sources in Russia: All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (WCIOM) and Levada Center. Their surveys reflect the public opinion based on the samples of 1,600 to 2,000 respondents. Their samples consist of randomly selected adults from most regions in Russia. Another important source of information that I use to support my arguments is the European Media Systems Survey. The publications from 2010 and 2012 include the responses of Russian media experts, "people whose work requires extensive knowledge of the mass media landscape" (Popescu/Toka 2010).

Timeframe

The timeframe selected for this research is focused on the period from the collapse of the Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin's election as a president to the beginning of 2013, when this research was conducted. The historical overview also covers the relations between the Communist Party and the media. The democratization era of the 1990's is of fundamental importance, because it determines the relations between the traditional media and the state, which in turn affect the current relations between the government and the new media. Vladimir Putin won the elections in 2000, 2004, and 2012. The new media evolvement and development took place during the years of his presidency. The years between 2009 and 2013

are marked with drastic increases in the usage of the new media, along with the growth in the internet penetration rate in the entire country.

Concept Definition

Concept definition has a particular value for this research, since some terms have a narrower meaning in this research than they do in general. One may find the list of the concepts with their definitions in the following table:

Term/Concept	**Definition in the Context of This Research**
Public Opinion	an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community.[2] In a narrower sense, I only consider public opinion with regard to political and less often social issues.
Mobilization of Public Opinion	the encouragement of people to support something in an active way (for example, mobilize support for the strike);[3] achievement of acceptance of the propagandist's ideology.[4] In this research, this term is mostly accompanied by the words *ability* or *potential*. They are used to make a distinction between the actual fact of mobilization and the chance of it happening.
Social Capital	the network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation.[5]
New Media	as opposed to traditional media (TV, radio, print), mostly digital technologies characterized by being networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive. They include social networks (Twitter, Facebook), multimedia channels (YouTube), blogging platforms (MySpace, WordPress, LiveJournal), and official websites of online magazines, news agencies, etc.

[2] http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/482436/public-opinion
[3] http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/mobilize
[4] http://www.sagepub.com/jowett5estudy/cases/77821_c1.pdf
[5] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/social+capital

Chapter 3. Analysis

Chapter 3.1. Regime Dynamics

Regime dynamics is the fundamental factor that affects other independent variables in this research's hypothesis, such as social capital and control over traditional media. In order to understand the relations between new media and the government today, one has to investigate the history of relations between media in general and previous ruling authorities. In my research, the development of these relations is broken down in three chronological parts: the Soviet Union era, democratization in the 1990's, and President Putin's time. Each of these parts are characterized based on their specific political attitude towards the media, but some features that developed during the Soviet regime had a fundamental influence on the shape of the relations between the media and the government in contemporary Russia. More precisely, I will argue that Russia has a historical predisposition for state control over the media. Similarly, understanding the nature of those relations during the 1990's helps explain why President Putin took concrete steps in establishing vertical relations between the government and traditional media.

Media in USSR

It is a well-documented fact that all media in Soviet Russia was subject to regulation and state censorship. One party system does not allow for political competition. Therefore, one may expect close to no criticism of the government during the Soviet Union era, with rare exceptions at the end of the regime. The only television and radio channels that existed were state-owned, allowing the communist party to dictate what information people should or should not be exposed to. The USSR State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting (USSR Gosteleradio) was the governing organization, while the news were uniformly provided by the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS). Journalists and channel

administration were liable to the government for what they presented on air, and the punishment for disobedience was as severe as for any other crimes against the regime.

Similarly, printed press was a subject to governmental control. Dissemination of Soviet propaganda is one of the original purposes of the creation of the Soviet magazines and newspapers. At the end of Soviet era, all central editors in chief were members of the Central Committee. The Communist Party commanded editors' assignments through the Union of Journalists.

The most obvious disadvantages of such a system are the strong ability the government has to manipulate public opinion through exposure to selected material. However, despite the criticisms, one certain feature of this type of relationship between the government and the media is enhanced stability of public support for the regime. Statistical evidence of public support in the Soviet Union is hard to find, but the recent macro-level studies might help clarifying the effects of governmental control over the media. In a study on limits of press freedom and regime support, Norris and Inglehart used macro-level comparison to show that confidence in government is "higher in societies with restricted media environments" (Norris/Inglehart, 2008). In the same research, micro-level analysis indicated that in authoritarian regimes the more individuals are exposed to news media, the more likely they are to support their government. There are certainly more factors that may affect public support. Nevertheless, these findings indicate media's role in affecting attitudes towards the government.

Transformation of USSR Media into Russian Media

Just like in many other post-Soviet republics, Soviet central media was transformed into the national Russian television and radio channels. In television, First Programme was transformed into Channel One Russia, Second (All-Union Programme) is now known as Rossiya-1, and the Fourth Programme is currently referred to as NTV. In radio, similar

changes took place. TASS was renamed as ITAR-TASS (Information Telegraph Agency of Russia) and now provides the news for the two television channels with the largest audiences, Channel One Russia and Rossiya One. The most popular newspapers did not change names: Moscow Komsomolets and Komosomolskaya Pravda are good examples of Russian newspapers that kept "Communist Union of Youth" (Komsomol) in their title.

For most media, state-ownership was kept almost at the extent it was before. In fact, one of the first documents authorized by the first president of Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, was the presidential decree that verified Russian jurisdiction over USSR's central television system. During that time people already experienced Glasnost, the politics of complete government openness, that significantly decreased censorship and informational barriers. Privatization allowed interested individuals to buy shares of the broadcasting companies. However, the government kept the control over the share packages of channels with the largest audiences. This decision was based on the assumption, that the private sector was not yet ready to take responsibilities for such big companies as the national TV channels. For example, Channel One, as a successor of the First Programme, was in huge debt. Transmission costs were immense, because of geographical factors: 11 time zones with diverse spread of the population. The national character of the television also generated a great number of work positions. For example, over 10,000 people were on Channel One's payroll (Mendeleevsk 2012).

Rough Transition

At the beginning of the democratic transition, Russians did not know the media without strong governmental control. The state used censorship to maintain a certain stability of public opinion as well as keep public support for the regime. Gorbachev's Glasnost policy was designed in such a way that the Soviet people would feel the freedom to discuss political issues as they were, and not as the party suggested. In order to democratize the media, the

government was to let television, radio, and printed press develop on their own. However, a too rapid transition to free media would inevitably cause chaos for economic and structural reasons. Therefore, the government remained control over the main media sources, which inherited the organizational and structural features of the old system. Decades of Soviet rule made it hard for Russians to understand the concept of free media, which inevitably had an impact on its further development. More precisely, people got used to have state filters on what they see, hear, and read, which one may consider as a historical predisposition to controlled media that had to be surmounted by democratic values. For the freedom of speech to evolve in Russian broadcasting, new and free media had to appear. In the next section, I will discuss the main outcomes of the media democratization attempts.

Russian Media during Transition

In June 1991, the first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, was elected to lead the newly established democratic country while it transition from communism. Since freedom of speech is one of the most fundamental characteristics of democracy, Russian media became the target of drastic changes as well as other institutes. As it was discussed in the previous section, the relation between the state and media was still tight: national channels remained under major financial and formal control of the government. The first independent TV channel, NTV, was founded by a future media-magnate Vladimir Gusinsky in 1993 (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013). Independent radio broadcasting appeared even faster. The Echo of Moscow first aired in August 1990. In 1998, this radio became part of a larger group, Media-Most also founded by Gusinsky (Russia Profile 2011). Back in 1990 though, few could predict that the freedom of these two channels would not last. The state-owned Gazprom-Media was created in 1998 to take over Media-Most, which was accomplished by April 2001. What made this acquisition possible and what consequences it had on the development of censorship over the media in Russia?

Russian Media during Yeltsin's Presidency

Many refer to Yeltsin's rule as a time of unprecedented media freedom (RT Russiapedia 2012). Indeed, a number of private TV and radio channels were founded from 1992 to 2000. Yeltsin was open to political criticism, which made him a subject of many oppositional media attacks. The downside of this era of media freedom was the lack of control, which caused a shift of power to business oligarchs.

As Russia was democratizing, former-Soviet countries' public became familiar with the phenomenon of business oligarchs. The most successful businessmen gained tremendous wealth by catching the opportunities that the transitional period provided for them and therefore using the economic resources at their disposal. The fact that Yeltsin's 1996 re-election campaign was highly sponsored by oligarchs is well documented (Harding 2013). One of the key individuals in this campaign was Boris Berezovsky, who teamed up with several other oligarchs to use financial and media power to support the campaign of Yeltsin, whose public support was suffering from economic turmoil preceding the 1998 sovereign debt crisis and default. At that time, cooperation between the ruling government and the oligarchs made sense: no other candidate or party would allow the oligarchs to keep getting richer, while Yeltsin needed support of the oligarchs to conduct his electoral campaign.

Researchers view Yeltsin's success in the presidential elections of 1996 as evidence of media power over public opinion in Russia. In December 1995, a sociological survey showed that if the respondents had to vote for a president at the moment, Yeltsin would receive 5% of the votes against Zyuganov's (Communist) 13%, Lebed's 10%, and Yavlinsky's 9% (all these politicians actually took part in the elections) (Oslon 2006). Yeltsin's decision to run for office came as a surprise to many. His chosen strategy involved the creation of a unit, called Analytics Group and use of oligarch's financial resources. Analytics Group consisted of people that were not involved in politics before, but envisioned the elections as an

informational competition, with results estimated in votes. As a result, Yeltsin won the elections with 53.82% against Zyuganov's 40.31% in the second round. In 2006, the president of FOM, who was a part of the analytics group at the time, acknowledged the fact that the media cooperated with the analytics group in the formation of Yeltsin's campaign concepts (Oslon 2006). This group was in charge of finding out the issues that Russians were most bothered by, and, based on these public opinion surveys, shape the campaign's discourse. The Role of the oligarchs in elections was to provide media coverage of Yeltsin's campaign, and counter the efforts of KPRF's Zyuganov, who could not acquire connections with businessmen due to ideological reasons. As a result, national television was airing anti-communist documentaries throughout the campaign period (Depoy 1996). Berezovsky himself claimed years later that he "never saw mass media as business, but as a powerful instrument in a political struggle" (The Economist 2013). One may not argue that media accessibility through the oligarchs was the only factor that allowed Yeltsin to win in 1996, but researchers do acknowledge the crucial role played by the media.

Reestablishment of Control over Media

Russia experienced the most noticeable media boom and extensive freedom of speech during Yeltsin's presidency. Nevertheless, the election of 1996 showed that politicians realized the value of media in forming public opinion. The oligarchs took over the powerful fragments of media in Russia, which made Boris Yeltsin accountable for the victory to those who supported his campaign. In other words, the unwritten contract between Yeltsin and the oligarchs had future implications in perpetuating the distribution of political and economic power over the country's welfare. One may conclude that media freedom became a subject of manipulation and eventually abuse with the purpose to shift public opinion in favor of the government and the oligarchs that supported it.

Berezovsky played a similar role at the end of Yeltsin's second term, when Vladimir Putin was introduced to the public. The difference came about when Putin was actually elected: he took immediate and aggressive steps towards forcing the oligarchs out of politics. The motivation to do so arose from Putin's observation of the ties that oligarchs placed on Yeltsin and the government in general.

Media in Putin's Russia

As stated in the previous sections, the past of Russian media prepared the grounds for the current situation of Russian media freedom. However, the most drastic changes took place specifically after 2000, when President Putin and his government came to power. This is also the time, when the internet and new media started to evolve and thrive. Therefore, I would like to highlight the historical predispositions to governmental control over the media and the current reestablishment of state supervision over traditional media. I will argue that the realization of media's power (and consequent government intent to control it) extended in case of traditional media, but did not touch new media to the same extent.

Bringing in Control of the Media

Vladimir Putin became acting president of the Russian Federation on December 31, 1999. Three weeks after Putin's inauguration, one of the twelve most influential oligarchs, Vladimir Gusinsky, was arrested. This act was immediately perceived by the Western journalists as a sign of Putin's intolerance towards the popular independent media that was led by Gusinsky's company, Media-Most (Gidadhubli/Sampatkumar 2000). Prior to the arrest, Gusinsky's NTV openly criticized Putin's policies with regard to the Chechen war. As it was mentioned above, at this point Media-Most already owned the Echo of Moscow, the most popular and experienced independent radio channel. Another asset of Media-Most, popular newspaper Segodnya (Today) was a part of the package that Gazprom-Media

acquired as a result of the law-suit between the government and the oligarch. Gusinsky was arrested and released twice, after which he permanently moved abroad.

However, this was not the end of Putin's "war against oligarchs." The same year, an investigation was started against Boris Berezovsky. Prosecutors inspected the finances of Aeroflot, a previously national airline company privatized after the collapse of USSR, in which Berezovsky was engaged in money laundering. By the end of 2000, he moved to Britain, which gave him political asylum, while in Russia he was convicted of economic crimes in absentia. Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the owner of the Yukos oil company, did not escape the country. He has been imprisoned since October 2003 for financial manipulations. However, this is not the only similarity with Gusinsky and Berezovsky. Khodorkovsky also had political ambitions: Yukos sponsored political parties that ran for the State Duma elections in 2003. He openly blamed the government for corruption, and compared Russian democracy to the Singaporean model, according to which media is technically free, but in reality self-censored (Parfitt 2010). He also established several foundations that sponsored a forum for discussion on reform and democracy, student government simulations for young adults, and internet proficiency.

Not all the oligarchs have been disfavored though. For example, Alisher Usmanov, who acquired Khodorkovsky's newspaper Kommersant following the former's arrest, still does business in Russia. In December 2011, after the publication of an unflattering issue on Putin, Usmanov fired the editor and the head of the publishing company, which was perceived by both the domestic and foreign journalist world as an act of censorship from the owner (BBC News Europe 2011).

Meanwhile, taking control over media did not only take place on a large scale. The period between 1990 and 2010 is also marked with a number of well-known journalist killings. While I do not presume to show through this study the government's involvement in

criminal cases, the fact that power structures were connected to the unsolved deaths of over a hundred journalists deserves attention. The International Federation of Journalists and the Committee to Protect Journalists reports, Partial Justice and The Anatomy of Injustice, both claim that Russia is one of the deadliest places for journalists (CPJ and IFJ Reports 2009). The European Media Systems Survey showed that fewer media experts agree to the statement "journalists in Russia are motivated by an ethic of serving the public interest." The mean score for supporting this statement in 2010 was 3.91 with a standard deviation of 1.64 (Popescu/Toka/Gosselin/Pereira 2010).

Freedom of Speech Does Not Fit into War against Oligarchs

The so-called "war on oligarchs" undoubtedly affected the development of the free media in Russia. As one may see from the examples given above, Putin's government took steps to shut the most powerful mass media outlets of the possible economically powerful opposition. In addition to overarching control on the organizational level, Russian journalists experience terror, which places the integrity and ambitions of the reporters' investigations under noteworthy pressure. As a result, the statistics of European Media Systems Survey suggests that Russian media experts believe that the journalistic content is not free of government censorship on political topics. On a scale from zero to ten, the experts' mean score journalists' freedom in this regard is 1.12 with a standard deviation of 1.25 (Popescu/Toka/Gosselin/Pereira 2012).

The Current Situation

In this section, I would like to give a detailed description and comparison of the power relations between the government on the one hand and traditional and new media on the other. However, before that one needs to pinpoint what the current public opinion on this issue is, because it is the public that the media is reaching to.

As it was mentioned above, Russian public has historical predispositions towards state-controlled media sources. During USSR and the communist regime, media was as centralized as the economy for a few decades. Most people that entered the era of Russia's independence never experienced the freedom of speech before. When Yeltsin came to power, the media was exercising their independence without regulatory preparation, which brought its development to a chaotic condition. As early as the1996 presidential elections, moguls and oligarchs took a hold of the media and started using it for their own political and economic purposes. When Putin came to power, he realized that control over media had a potential of allowing oligarchs to impose pressure on the government. Therefore, Putin started a long-lasting campaign against the oligarchs. As a result, the government took over the most powerful media channels, like NTV and the Echo of Moscow.

The most important implication of the events of the late 1990's and early 2000's is that the public in Russia turned out to be supportive towards the imposed governmental censorship. For most people it meant the return to a Soviet style of media that could have lacked adequacy, but was delivering a sense of stability. The survey of Russian media experts in 2012 suggests that television channels are not the credible source of news. On a scale from zero to ten, the experts' mean score for TV news accuracy is 2.72 with a standard deviation of 1.4 (Popescu/Toka/Gosselin/Pereira 2012). This statistic goes along with the public understanding that the news broadcast is lacking adequacy. Recent social surveys disclose the public attitude towards the media issues in Russia.

Public Opinion Attitudes about Media Control

For the purpose of this paper, I looked at data provided by two well-known Russian survey companies. The All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (WCIOM) was established in 1987 as a governmental entity (accountable to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs). The second, Levada Center, used to be part of WCIOM, but following the collapse

of the Soviet Union turned into an independent, non-governmental polling and sociological research company. Both companies conducted surveys with approximately 1600 adult respondents. According to WCIOM, the following statistics were true for 2010:

- 49% of the respondents prefer the information produced by professional journalists, while 24% trust their family members and acquaintances;
- 70% trust the information they receive from TV, 50% trust the newspapers, and 44% trust the radio;
- 58% believe that media censorship should be increased due to the excess of violence, disinformation, and vulgar content (Fedorov 2010).

By comparison, Levada Center's survey discloses additional information on the attitude of Russian people towards the media:

- 63% of the respondents believe there is political censorship over TV, and 24% do not think so;
- 59% believe there is a need for political censorship, while 28% do not think it is necessary; (Levada Center Report 2010);
- 47% trust the information received from the mass media in a significant manner, while 43% trust the mass media selectively;
- 45% often have a feeling that the information they receive is incomplete or falsified, while 43% rarely have such suspicions;
- 19% of the respondents believe that mass media is expressing the information about domestic political figures objectively, while 51% think it is biased;
- From 2006 to 2012 the number of respondents who think that media is free reduced from 12 to 8%, while the number of those convinced that media is governmentally controlled changed from 36 to 37%;
- 24% of the respondents claim that the control over the media should increase, while 16% think it should decrease. 44% believe it should remain at the current level. (Levada Center Report 2012).

As one may see, the numbers in the surveys do not always match. For example, According to Levada Center, 24% of the respondents were prone to the increase of governmental control, while state-owned WCIOM indicated that 58% expressed their desire

for more control over the media. Such a discrepancy maybe explained from the methodological point of view: WCIOM did not provide "remain at the current level" as an option. Nevertheless, generally both agencies seem to agree that the relative majority of Russians expressed their trust in media, especially television. Absolute majority seeks for governmental censorship. The most interesting finding is the following: Levada Center indicates that over 88% of the respondents suspect that the information they receive is not always adequate, but biased. Moreover, 45 of those 88% have such suspicions frequently. Yet, according to both surveys, the share of those who think that the level of it over the media should increase is larger than the share of the respondents who are against it.

The implication of this finding is of particular importance. The numbers presented above indicate that Russians agree to give up media freedom, even at the price of adequacy and completeness of the information they receive. Public opinion suggests that the most controlled media in Russia is also the most trusted and favored by the people. The motivations behind this attitude may include the historical predisposition (as discussed above), but not only. In the subsequent section, I will describe the notions of the regime support and government popularity in hybrid and authoritarian regimes, which may also be the reasons for the public's attitude towards media freedom.

Current Control over the Traditional Media

Russian media experts that were surveyed in 2012 believe that media in Russia is generally not "serving as a 'watchdog' scrutinizing the actions of government on behalf of citizens". The mean score they gave for it is 2.62 on the scale from zero to ten (Popescu/Toka/Gosselin/Pereira 2012). By the second term of Vladimir Putin, national media remained state-owned, while the most influential private traditional media went under government control through the state-owned Gazprom-Media. Another asset of the government is the Federal State Unitary Enterprise (VGTRK), which has owned the major

radio stations, namely Radio Mayak and Radio Russia, even before the collapse of the USSR. The table below presents the information about the potential audience coverage (Reach in percentage of population for TV and radio and circulation in thousand copies for the printed press), ownership, and the level of governmental control (in percentages of total shares). The last parameter is missing for the printed press, because there is no direct connection to the government or state-owned companies (with the exception for Rossiyskaya Gazeta). Potential governmental control may only be measured using the concept of "self-censorship" and its evidence. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that, according to European Media Systems Survey from 2010, Russian media experts often agree to the statement "politicians, business people and interest groups influence what the news media report and how by pressurizing and bribing individual journalists." The mean score for agreeing to this statement was 6.82 on the scale from zero to ten (Popescu/Toka/Gosselin/Pereira 2010).

Table 1. List of the Top-Reach Traditional Media, Owners, and level Government Control

Type/Name	**Reach**	**Owner**	**Gov. Control/Shares (%)**
Television	**74%**		
Channel One	98.8%	Government	75
Russia-1	98.5%	Federal State Unitary Enterprise (VGTRK)	100
STS	95.1%	Modern Times Group	0
NTV	92%	Gazprom-Media	Control Package
TNT	72.5%	Gazprom-Media	Control Package
Radio	**60%**		
Radio Russia	96.9%	VGTRK	100
Radio Mayak	92.4%	VGTRK	100
The Echo of Moscow	32%	Gazprom-Media	66
Printed Press	**80%**		
Komsomolskaya Pravda	655 (circulation, in thousands)	Media Partner	
Moskovskij Komsomolets	700	Pavel Gusev	
Kommersant	125	Alisher Usmanov	
Izvestiya	51	National Media Group	
Rossiyskaya Gazeta	185	Government	

Vedomosti	75	PromSvyazKapital	
Argumenty i Fakty	2997	PromSvyazKapital	

The companies in the table above are the ones with the largest coverage. As one may see from the Television section, the only channel that is not under evident direct control of the government is STS, the entertainment channel that does not broadcast news programs. The rest of broadcasting media is either state-owned or under government control through the control of the shares package.

Overview of the Current Control over the Traditional Media

Analysis of the current government control over traditional media suggests the following conclusions: (1) public opinion goes well in favor of state supervision and censorship, despite a decrease in the level of adequacy and completeness, that coincides with it; and (2) the most popular broadcasting media outlets (both TV and print) are heavily controlled by the government. These two conclusions have a direct impact on the dependent variable, i.e. level of censorship over new media. Both of them suggest that the most influential and trusted media is already under government control. Moreover, as the public opinion polls together with the logic of historical predisposition suggest, the relation between the level of control and the level of censorship goes both ways. In other words, not only does the government want to censor the media that people trust, but also people prefer to trust the media that the state controls.

Chapter 3.2. Government Intent to Censor the New Media

Why do new government policies evolve? I assume that the government starts processing new policies when the need for them arises to a high enough level and within the constraints put by the political system and society. In case of political censorship policies, one possible reason for implementing a higher level of government control is the perception of threat to the regime. This incentive is often discussed when talking about authoritarian regimes. Examples of harsh censorship policies that protect the regime in the online environment are well-known: China, Iran, Syria, Vietnam, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Turkmenistan and other states are classified as the countries with pervasive political censorship (OpenNet Initiative 2012). In Cuba, the citizens have to acquire a governmental permit to buy a modem (CIA World Factbook 2011). The Chinese government employs the "Great Firewall of China" to prevent the domestic users from landing on disfavored websites and keyword censorship on the posts of Chinese bloggers (King/Pan 2013). Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria engaged in blocking social networks or shutting down internet providers during the recent political crises (Breuer 2012).

Despite the high level of burdens that the government creates for traditional media, the new media in Russia exercises relative freedom: in 2012, the OpenNet Initiative indicated "selective" censorship over political issues on the internet. The survey statistics conducted in 2012, suggest that media experts believe that the internet has increased political polarization. On the scale from zero to ten, the mean score they gave for this variable is 7.2 with a standard deviation of 2.1 (Popescu/Toka/Gosselin/Pereira 2012). If one assumes that the government has the same intentions in censoring the new media as the traditional media, why would the state exercise lower level of censorship over it?

In the previous sections I have already pointed at the ability of the government to control traditional media, its popularity, and level of trust that it exercises. The survey

conducted in 2010 shows that there are more Russian media experts, who believe that the new media in Russia may not yet be considered as a competitor of traditional media. The mean score of support to this statement on the scale from zero to ten is 5.91 (Popescu/Toka/Gosselin/Pereira 2010). Traditional media censorship that was derived from the regime dynamics is a tool of public opinion manipulation. However, the fact that it is controlled by the government does not give a full idea about why the government does not censor t new media. The governments of all countries listed above exercise at least pervasive political censorship over both traditional and new media. In the following sections, I will argue that the government's intent to censor the internet is also driven by the following factors: (1) social capital, (2) government popularity and regime support, and (3) precedence of mobilization attempts.

Social Capital

Resource Mobilization theorists consider social capital as one of the most influential variables of the mobilization potential (Breuer, 2012). Robert Putnam suggested that social capital is not likely to develop in Russia. However, in 2000, Christopher Marsh predicted that social capital is the factor that may lead Russia to sustain democratic values during transition. Nevertheless, Russia dropped down the Democracy Index all the way to authoritarianism.

Related study on the censorship over the new media in China provides possible answers to questions that arise in this regard. Gary King and Jennifer Pan argue that China allows government criticism, but silences calls for collective action. Their analysis of censorship policies and politically relevant content shows that the "state critique" theory, which assumes that "the goal of Chinese government is to suppress dissent" in general, is wrong (King/Pan/Roberts 2013). On the other hand, the theory of "collective action potential" is correct in assuming that the government intent is to censor the posts that include a call for

action. Therefore, one may conclude that even in the countries with stronger filtering of political content (which China is an example of, according to OpenNet Initiative 2013 report), the fact that the government is criticized by the means of the new media does not yet imply that the state has to censor it. However, since the collective action is often affected by the social capital (Putnam 1993, Uslaner 1995, Marsh 2000), one may suppose that censorship over the media may not always be substantial, but selective in countries with low social capital.

As Putnam suggests, civic engagement and horizontal networks are critical factors for the development of social capital. According to Anirudh Krishna, social capital can be measured by estimating the following components on which it is based: sense of belonging, networks, diversity, perception of citizen power, participation, reciprocity, trust and safety, and values and norms. While some of these variables are not easy to measure, it seems reasonable to look at perceptions by means of social surveys. According to the Levada Center' statistics from 2012, 52 percent of the respondents do not have an interest in current political development and public policy. Moreover, 77 percent of respondents are not ready to participate in politics more than they already do and almost half of them indicated that that they are satisfied with the level of political participation available to them, compared to the 32 percent that are not.

The numbers listed above suggest that Russia is different from countries with stronger civic communities characterized by "active participation in public affairs, vigorous associational life, horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation, and mutual trust" (Putnam, 1993). Marsh suggested that under Putnam's definition of civic community, Russia's social capital has low ability to enhance democratic development.

Another study was conducted in 2008 by Anneli Kaasa and Eve Parts, in which they divided European countries in three groups and measured their social capital based on the

following variables: formal and informal networks, general and institutional trust, and norms. In this research, Russia was a part of the Eastern European countries group along with Belarus, Ukraine, and Bulgaria. According to the results of this study, this group of countries showed negative factor scores for all dimensions of social capital except for informal networks, for which the score was positive, but still at the very low level compared to Western European states.

Implications

Social scientists agree that social capital is strongly connected to collective action potential (Putnam 1993, Uslaner 1995, Marsh 2000). Mobilization of public opinion and such occurrences as protests against the regime (or its policies) are naturally dependent on collective action and social capital. Therefore, evidence of low social capital negatively affects mobilization potential in Russia, hence, not producing any positive influence on government intent to tighten up control over the new media. However, one may still argue that collective action in Russia has empirical evidence. In the following section, I will present the discussion of collective action attempts and the role of the new media in empirical cases of mobilization of public opinion.

Precedence of Mobilization Attempts and the Role of New Media

In order for the government to take a public policy action, the evidence of reasonability is required in most cases. Empirical evidence increases the chances of legitimizing the issue on the government's agenda. If the purpose of political censorship over Russian new media is to avoid the mobilization of public opinion against the ruling government, one may have to find evidence of such mobilization to create an incentive for the government to consider an increase in regulation over this type of media. In this section, I argue that there has been no precedent of successful mobilization attempts, and therefore, the government is not motivated to implement more censorship over new media.

First Uses of the New Media

Though the situation became much more dynamic since the 2011 parliamentary elections, one has to consider the fact that very few demonstrations and protests were massive since the expansion of the internet. The most noticeable ones included the Dissenters' March (December 2006 - May 2007) and the Red Square Demonstration (August 2008). During the first one that took place in some of the largest Russian cities, the protesters had general democratic demands: fair elections, end of corruption, reforms of judiciary, etc. Despite the relative success of demonstrations, the role of new media in forging them is not mentioned in any of the available sources. The Red Square Demonstration that was conducted as an act of solidarity with the victims of the Russian-Georgian conflict also does not provide any account for the use of new media, apart from being documented post-factum.

Probably the first major case of new media playing a role in organizing protests is associated with a series of opposition mobilization attempts that started in October 2010. The so-called "Putin Must Go" movement led by the activists and politicians of various ideological orientations demanded Putin, the Prime Minister at that time, to resign. This campaign aimed at collecting signatures for the petition. In March 2010, the movement launched the website, Putinavotstavku.org (translated as "Putin to resign"), which gave the electronic announcements of the upcoming protests and reports on the number of signatures that activists collected. One may not claim that the campaign completely failed, because the movement managed to gather some protesters in Moscow: about 1,000 attendants in October 2010, 1,500-2,500 in December 2010, and 400-600 people in February 2011. However, the organizers failed to collect the millions of signatures they predicted they would in the beginning. By June 2013, the total number of signatures (e-signatures and physical signatures combined) was 147,519. For a country like Russia, with population of over 140 million, such results acquired notoriety for the movement, but did not produce significant effects.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny the fact that this campaign showed that new media has implications for the opposition and may provide certain assistance in their attempts to mobilize public opinion.

New Media and Recent Protests

The sequence of protests between December 2011 and 2013 deserves a more detailed discussion, because the social networks and new media played an important role in the organization and infrastructure of the protests. In the written press, the protest on Bolotnaya square was often referred to as a product of internet mobilization (Razumovskaya 2012, AsiaReport 2011, Kichanova 2012). One of the opposition's leaders, Alexey Navalny, is a figure most noticeable for his active use of new media. His writings and critiques addressing the political issues appear on such popular platforms as LiveJournal, Facebook, Twitter, WordPress, internet magazines like Snob.ru, and even Gazprom-Media's Echo of Moscow website.

In their discussion about the protest on Bolotnaya Square in December 2011, both Levada Center and Vera Kichanova address the popular opinion that the people "walked out because of Facebook." This is probably the most notable case of assistance from social networks to conducting a large scale protest. However, Levada and Kichanova give several reasons for disregarding the roles that were attributed to new media in this case. First of all, social networks played a role only because of the background of mass mobilization. Levada's surveys before, during, and after the protest indicated that most people who attended the protests found out about them via traditional media. Kichanova argues that most of the people that showed up were not the ones who supported it online judging by the discrepancy between the age of new media audience and actual attendants. She claims that the role of new media in those protests was not in mobilizing public opinion against the results of the elections, but in the formation of interpretations of the elections' outcome. It is worth

mentioning that the government did attempt to take control over the spread of aggressively spirited public pages on Vkontakte, the most popular social network in Russia, that called the protesters to "trash the streets, [and] organize a revolution" (Razumovskaya 2011). The request to the administration of the website was denied with no consequences. Moreover, the spokesman of Vkontakte, Vladislav Tsyplukhin, claimed that the Security Services "is not exercising any pressure on the management of VKontakte."

Another recent example of new media involvement in anti-government affairs is known as the case of Pussy Riot. This group of three anti-Putinists managed to raise awareness around the world, which provided international support to the movement. There is an opinion that social media served as a tool to maximize the impact of their actions (Crowe 2012). The members of the band that sang anti-Putin rock songs in the main Cathedral of Moscow in February 2012 are imprisoned, but hardly any action was taken to prevent the news about their fate to spread via new media. This case had significant political repercussions for the Russian government, especially from the international arena. However, these events are too recent and thus cannot be fully and completely analyzed nor any final conclusions can be drawn yet on whether the government took any preventative policy action to avoid such occasions in the future. Currently, the footage of the event that caused the imprisonment is available on YouTube, which implies that any website or blog can embed the video in their content.[6]

Implications

The role of new media in organization of protests and mobilization of the public opinion in Russia has started less than a decade ago. The examples presented above suggest that the level of precedence of protests mobilized in the online environment is low, which may negatively affect the need for political supervision. Nevertheless, the situation may

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbqBido-JjM

change with time: if the protests of 2011-2013 and Pussy Riot case will raise awareness of the new media's capability to improve organization and infrastructure of mobilization, the government may consider taking measures to restrict the flow of information via new media. As for 2013, the level of precedence has not been high enough for government to take noticeable action, i.e. increase the level of censorship over the new media.

Government Popularity and Regime Support

This section discusses whether there is a need for censorship and regulation of this kind over new media with regard to the ruling government's popularity. Political censorship over the sensitive topics may be used to avoid a shift in public opinion towards favoring anti-governmental and opposition forces. Therefore, one may assume that the popularity of the ruling government is related to the level of political censorship. In Russia's case, this relationship goes as follows: the more popular are President Putin and his government, the less political censorship one may expect.

During the last presidential elections (2012), Putin won with 63.60 percent of the votes. The party that he represented, United Russia, won 49.32 percent of the votes in the legislative elections in December of the previous year. A discussion over the legitimacy of the results due to falsification, as evidence gathered by the opposition shows, cannot be entirely neglected. However, it appears unrealistic to subtract the number of fake votes from the number of real ones to make a reasonable judgment. Therefore, social survey statistics were chosen to represent the main argument in this section.

According to the WCIOM survey, 70 to 75 percent favor the work of the president and the prime minister, while the government's discourse is approved by 45-50 percent of the population. Such approval rate is comparable to that in Western democracies. According to the data from the Levada Center, in April 2013, Putin's approval rate hit an all-time low with a positive difference of 26% between those that approve and those who do not (Levada Center 2013). Despite the fact that his approval ratings have been consistently declining from 72% in 2008, they still remains comparatively high. By contrast, Barack Obama's approval in the United States dropped down to -1% in May 2013. This means that there are more people who disapprove his work, than those who approve it. This comparison does not imply

anything except general understanding of how the index of approval rating varies between the classic democratic state and Russia.

Why does the current Russian President have such an approval rating and despite a dramatic decline over the past four years, how come it stays positive? Forbes Magazine's Mark Adomanis and University of California's Daniel Treisman find the reason in economic circumstances. Mark Adomanis names a number of reasons why illiberal and semi-democratic states may have high approval rates. They include exploitation of nationalist feelings, exaggeration of external threats, and manipulation of the media. While all of them are effectively used in Russia, Treisman also concludes that both Yeltsin's and Putin's ratings are correlated with the economic indicators and people's perceptions of economic performance. While Yeltsin's last term was significantly affected by the sovereign debt crisis and the default of 1998, Putin started his career as a president at the time of economic recovery. The dynamics of Putin's approval rate are represented in the following graph.

Chart 1. Vladimir Putin's Approval Rating (2000-2013) (Forbes Magazine, February 2013)

Treisman argues that the Russian public blamed the authorities for a number of victims of the terrorist acts at the Nord-Ost musical theatre (2002) and the Beslan school hostage crisis, which is the reason for approval rating decline in that period. Nevertheless, from 2000 to 2008, Russia's economy experienced stable growth in real wages, pensions, and

a decrease in unemployment rates. This is why Adomanis claims the economic circumstances are in fact positively affecting Putin's approval ratings. As one may notice, the sharp decline took place in 2008, when the economic crisis hit. Despite this decline, the Russian President still maintains a level of support higher than in many western democracies (Treisman 2011).

Implications

One of the most interesting and controversial facts discussed by Russian statisticians is that respondents of surveys complain less about the lack of freedom of speech than about the necessity to decrease the level of censorship. As it was mentioned before, WCIOM experts suggest that 58 percent of the respondents believe that the government control over the media should increase, due to the excess of violence, disinformation, and vulgar content (Fedorov 2010). This controversy goes in line with the finding that from 2006 to 2012 most Russians (about 60 percent) think that the ruling government should prioritize the strengthening of their power over increasing the welfare of the country. Therefore, one may assume that in Russia the president and the government are popular enough and will remain unresponsive to a certain level of criticism. Ceteris paribus, the level of government popularity may inversely affect the level of censorship over new media.

Conclusions

The Prospected Effectiveness of New Media Censorship and Government Intent

There are many factors that affect the level of censorship, even when it is narrowed down to the new media. In this research, I discussed many of them, including the regime dynamics, censorship over the traditional media, historical predispositions to controlled media, social capital, precedence of mobilization attempts, and government popularity. This research was designed to measure those factors in order to provide better understanding of why the government censorship over the new media in Russia is set at the specific level. After analyzing those independent variables, I found out that the circumstances that they create together are not requiring the policy makers to tighten the control over the new media. The only outstanding variable is the precedence of mobilization attempts. It turns out that there are occasions in which the new media plays a role in mobilization of public opinion. This role is similar to the one it played in cases of Egypt, Iran, and Tunis: the new media eases the communication, providing the activists with more effective tools for organization and infrastructure. Moreover, the rate of occasions, in which the new media plays that role, increased noticeably since 2009.

The rest of the factors showed that the government does not need to censor the new media. While the control over the traditional media is at a high level, and people trust the television, radio, and printed press, the new media does not require such strong supervision. The reach of the internet is also twice lower than the potential audience of the TV or radio. Historical predisposition to state-owned media suggests that people are more likely to trust the media that is controlled by the government, and less likely to rely on the information from the digital sources. One of the surprising findings is that despite people's suspicion that the government negatively affects the objectivity of the news broadcast, they still believe that there should be more censorship over the media in general.

The potential role of the new media in mobilization of the public opinion turned out rather low. In this research, I discussed the social capital as a factor that may affect the chances of successful mobilization. Since the social capital in Russia according to the existing literature turned out low, I conclude that this factor does not increase the need to censor the new media. Moreover, the government popularity is comparatively high in Russia, even despite the recent declines in approval rates of Putin's work. Since the number of those who approve exceeds the number of those who do not, the government may count on certain counter-measures that proponents of the ruling party may take, as it happened during the meetings in support of Putin and the United Russia in 2012. Therefore, it was not surprising to find out that the precedence of mobilization attempts via the new media was low until 2011. From the discussion of those two factors, one may also conclude that the government's intent to censor the new media was not high enough to implement stricter policies over the freedom of speech on the web.

Nevertheless, as it was mentioned above, the rate of incidents (in which the public backs the cause of the protest and takes action in a form of protest) increases, while the government popularity decreases. Hence, one may not argue that the situation will stay the same in the long run. It is also worth admitting, that there is a possibility for other factors to influence the level of censorship over the new media. They may include the government's ability to supervise and track down the sources of anti-governmental posts, and take effective actions to prevent those posts from spreading. However, such claims require a separate examination.

As it was mentioned before, the dynamics of the Russian regime are different from both democratic and authoritarian countries. In Russia, the level of censorship over the new media does not match either systems of freedom of speech promotion, or complete control over it. Finally, this paper concludes that the regime dynamics, the control over traditional

media, historical predispositions to state-owned media, government's popularity, social capital, and low precedence of attempts of mobilization do affect the level of government's censorship over the new media in Russia.

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