

Editorial Comment

ISSUE 2. FROM COMRADES TO CLASSMATES: SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE RUSSIAN INTERNET

The second issue of the journal explores social, cultural, political, psychoanalytical, and philosophical ramifications of blogging and social networking in the Russian Federation.

It emerges that social media are now the main form of social organization in contemporary Russia. At the beginning of 2009, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation had approximately 150,000 members, while there were over 20 million users of Odnoklassniki.ru, a social networking site for former “classmates.” Russia’s dominant political party, “United Russia,” commands some 2 million members; however, this pales in comparison to the 18 million active members of the popular networking platform Vkontakte.ru. While political activity in party organizations is certainly different from the spontaneous, informal, and often apolitical participation in social networks on the web, these comparisons shed light on the political and cultural potential of informal associations online.

One of the main aims of the issue is to examine the structure, taxonomy, function, and significance of social networks on the Russian Internet. The contributors address a number of issues, including the role these new web-based forms of socializing play in contemporary Russia, particularly given the paradoxical stereotypes of Russian society as collectivistic on the one hand, and amorphous and apathetic on the other. The authors aim to investigate whether social networking in Russia represents a cultural form specific to post-Soviet Russia, or whether it is only an unreconstructed and uncritical adaptation of “Western” net practices. Finally, as a separate issue, the contributors determine the role of social networks in maintaining Russia’s regional integrity by binding together the widely dispersed Russian-speaking diaspora.

The issue consists of seven scholarly contributions (2.1-2.7) and a review section (2.8). The issue opens with two articles (2.1 Alexanyan and 2.2 MacLeod) that provide statistical and theoretical overviews of Russian blogosphere and social media. While the first utilizes a comparative approach, situating different forms of networking on Runet against each other, and comparing their usage with similar platforms across the globe, the second focuses on LiveJournal as one of the most popular spaces and instruments of blogging in Russian and assesses its political potential. The issue continues with a theoretical discussion of psychoanalytical concerns pertaining to blogging and social media (2.3 Mikheeva). The following two submissions (2.4 Suleymanova and 2.5 Katsbert) assess the ethno-cultural dimension of social media, investigating Tatar groups in Russian social media and the political use of social media in Ukraine, respectively. These articles continue the two distinct strands of the is-

sue, i.e., the problem of interpretation of social media in the political context and the use of social media for constructing social and cultural identities, manifested through the politics of language, music, and other forms of belonging. The remaining two submissions interrogate Russian social media in relation to the larger cultural context. Mjør (2.6) analyses the tradition of free knowledge and information sharing as Russian cultural constants while tracing their pertinence through an investigation of free online libraries. He contests the notions of Russian literary canon in relation to online libraries and communities. Golynko-Volfson (2.7) interrogates the cultural significance of social networks in a society that only occasionally displays a substantial degree of connectedness. He revisits theories of social media, and analyses mechanisms of national identification utilized in a society that lacks a sense of national unity.

In the review section, the editors of *Digital Icons* provide reviews of three books, namely, *Figurations of Violence and Belonging: Queerness, Migranhood and Nationalism and Cyberspace and Beyond* by Adi Kuntsman; *The Media in Russia* by Anna Arutunyan, and *YouTube Reader*, edited by Patrick Vonderau and Pelle Snickars. The choice of these publications for review was determined by the following considerations; a) a focus on the Internet and social media in recent research on the wider field of Russian media; b) social and cultural meanings that Russian-speaking social networks convey, as well as their role in building political and cultural awareness among Netizens; and c) the correlation between Russian social media, including platforms for distribution of audio-visual content, and the global system of networks.

~ VLAD STRUKOV