



Forget Memory: Aleksei Naval'nyi's *LiveJournal* and the Memory Discourse of the Protest Movement (2011-2012)

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Abstract: The article explores the online memory discourse of the Russian protest movement of 2011-2012 through an investigation of the *LiveJournal* blog of Aleksei Naval'nyi. Based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the article demonstrates that Naval'nyi refrains from employing memory models in his blog entries and responses to comments. In contrast to Naval'nyi's present-oriented agenda, numerous comments on his blog have a pronounced focus on memory. In this essay, we explore which memories are introduced, with what aim and how the users interact. Furthermore, the article discusses the possible involvement of bots and paid users.

Keywords: Naval'nyi, protest, cultural memory, memory models, *LiveJournal*, social media, internet, bots, Russia.

When, in September 2011, Vladimir Putin nominated himself as the presidential candidate of the United Russia Party (Edinaia Rossiia), no one could have foreseen the political consequences of this reshuffle.¹ The unscrupulous handover of power, accompanied by systematic and widespread election fraud in the parliamentary elections of December 2011, led to a wave of mass protests. Aleksei Naval'nyi (born 1976), a trained lawyer, anti-corruption activist and popular blogger, emerged as an influential leader of the protest movement. He succeeded in mobilizing and consolidating the protest-minded Muscovites, inspiring thousands of volunteers nationwide to join his campaign, and he achieved notable results in the Moscow mayoral elections in September 2013. According to the official results announced by the Central election committee, he received 27.24 percent of votes cast (9 September 2013).

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Social media and the blogosphere have played a crucial role in organizing and mobilizing the protest movement (Schmidt 2012: 5). Journalists and scholars alike have rushed to comment on the link between the mass outpour of protest and the online media that spread videos and eyewitness reports about the electoral fraud. Scholars (Lonkila 2012) acknowledge the importance of social media for the Russian protest movement of 2011-2012 and discuss the role of online media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, in the protest movement (Radchenko et al 2012; Nikiporets-Takigawa 2013b). Indeed, the ‘Winter of discontent’ has ‘shifted the role of the internet – in the eyes of the public and its leaders – from a marginal arena for malcontents into an important source of political information and aggregation’ (Oates 2013: 186). However, the societal impact of digital communication is not limited to its facilitating role in political mobilization. The Internet, ‘[w]ith its speed, accessibility and accommodation of anonymity’ (Rutten 2010: 171), has ‘an undeniable impact on social organisation and the social imaginary that goes beyond struggles for civil rights and political freedom: digital media is fundamentally changing the way that societies are dealing with their history and cultural memory’ (Uffelman 2013: 125).

The present article seeks to increase insight into this important aspect of the Russian protest movement, namely its online *memory* discourse. Due to the very conversational and interactive nature of Web 2.0, we argue that digitally mediated memories demonstrate a multitude of forms and discourses. In addition to acknowledging this diversity, it is essential to differentiate between memory-related narratives and those online practices that refer to historical facts but do not amount to any commemorative practices that interest us here. The defining characteristic of memory-related content is that, through historical association or even historical analogy, an event or a figure from the past is used as an interpretative frame to describe, define and evaluate the present and the future. It is this implicit aim to comment on present-day circumstances, events and future developments through the prism of the past that sets memory models apart from casual references to historical events and persons, as well as from the contributions of most online amateur historians. As has become clear from our analysis, it is impossible to exclude non-memory-related content from quantitative searches and thereby gain insights into the actual memory discourse, without performing a qualitative assessment.

Several publications have already suggested that memory has played an important role in the online discourse surrounding the protest movement (Nikiporets-Takigawa 2012; Fedor & Nikiporets-Takigawa 2012a; 2012b). Indeed, online media that mobilize the participants are filled with memory material. Thematically, these references range from the Decembrists to 1917, Stalin to 1991, the Orange Revolution and the Arab Spring. It is remarkable in this respect that Aleksei Naval’nyi explicitly refrains from employing historical parallels. In an interview with Boris Akunin (Grigorii Chkhartishvili), Naval’nyi distanced himself from the use of history in the pursuit of political change:

Gitler i Stalin – dva glavnykh palacha russkogo naroda. Stalin kaznil, moril golodom i muchil moikh sootchestvennikov, lichno dlia menia zdes’ vse iasno. Odnako ia protiv togo, chtoby eto bylo “vechnym” voprosom i ne vizhu nikakogo smysla vo vsei etoi “destalinizatsii” i t.d. Ne ponimaiu, chto eto oznachaet v formate gosudarstvennoi politiki. [...] Nuzhno samostoiatel’no otvechat’ na vyzovy vremeni, a ne zhit’ beskonechnymi po-

liticheskimi alliuziiami. "Vopros Stalina" – eto vopros istoricheskoi nauki, a ne tekushchei politiki. [Hitler and Stalin are two of the main hangmen of the Russian people. Stalin had my fellow-countrymen executed, starved to death and tortured, this is all very clear to me personally. However, I am against considering it an "eternal" question and I do not see the sense of all this "destalinization" and so on. I don't understand what this means within the context of state politics. [...] We have to answer the challenges of time independently, instead of re-living endless political allusions. The "Stalin question" is a question for historical sciences, not present-day politics]. (Naval'nyi, quoted in Akunin 2012)²

Naval'nyi's *LiveJournal* blog (<http://navalny.livejournal.com/>) provides interesting insights into the online memory discourse and its connection to the protest movement. The citation index of Medialogia indicates that, in 2012, Naval'nyi's blog was the most frequently cited in Russian mainstream media (2013). According to user ratings on *LiveJournal*, Naval'nyi is also the most popular blogger active on the Russian segment of this media platform (12.09.2013). The enormous number of comments that Naval'nyi receives on each blog entry,³ affirms that his blog has become an important platform for political discussion. While the blog cannot be taken as representative of the protest movement as a whole, and acknowledging that a multitude of media and actors actively contributed to the debate, we consider this particular online platform one of the most influential. The entries that Naval'nyi posts on his *LiveJournal* blog appear to support his claim that he wishes to set a present-oriented political agenda, aimed at discussing actual political problems, rather than dwelling on the past. Using quantitative analysis, in this paper we test the hypothesis that Naval'nyi refrains from using memory models on his blog.

As the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, the users who populate Naval'nyi's blog actually *do* use memory models and therefore challenge the blogger's present and future-oriented online strategy. We take this discrepancy between the blog entries by Aleksei Naval'nyi and the comment threads as the starting point of discussion. While Naval'nyi's blog entries are worth studying in and of themselves, our main interest lies in the function of his blog as a platform for historically-engaged political discussion. Our goal is to analyse, by qualitative methods, at what point commenters introduce history, which memory models they employ, how these models relate to the original blog entry and how the introduction of memory influences the dynamics between users. By zooming-in on the discursive dynamics of a random sample of comment threads and analysing online content related to memory, we seek to gain insight into the role that memory has played within the broader context of the Russian protest movement and its online memory discourse.

² Unless stated otherwise, all translations are by the authors.

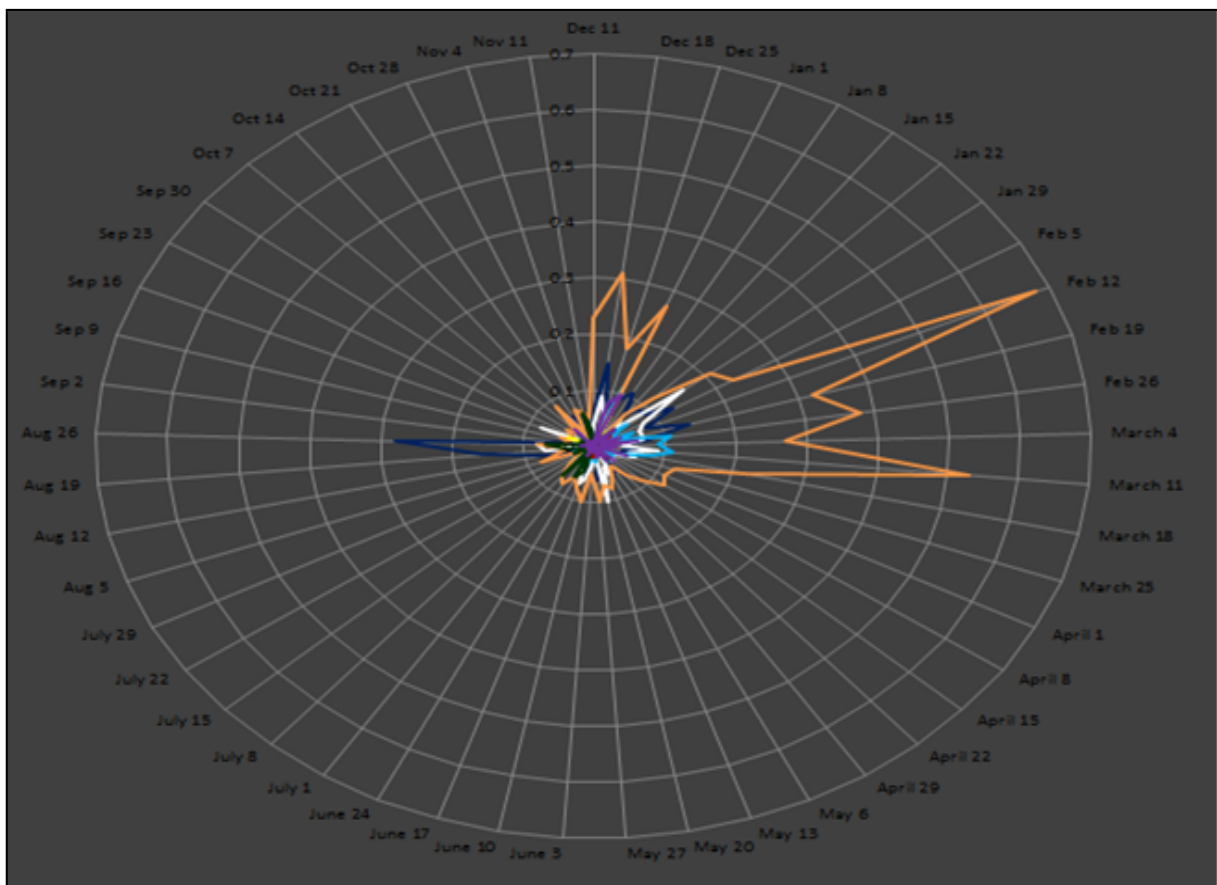
³ For instance, in the period of December 2011 until May 2012 he received 219,752 comments on 172 blog entries.

Methodology

To analyse Aleksei Naval'nyi's use of memory on his *LiveJournal* blog, we perform quantitative analysis using *Yandex Search for Blogs* by formulating a list of keywords that refer to historical events and political figures that have been regularly associated, both positively and negatively, with the protest movement. The parliamentary elections on 4 December 2011 are taken as the start of the protest movement. Our study covers a period of 18 months, from 4 December 2011 until 4 May 2013.

The analysis of the comments consists of two phases. The first phase again employs *Yandex Search for Blogs* to trace the frequency of the set of keywords from 4 December 2011 until 31 March 2012 on a weekly basis. As Figure 1 demonstrates, memory activity was at its peak in this period.

Figure 1. Frequency of references to historical events in the Russian blogosphere from 11 December 2011 until 11 November 2012.

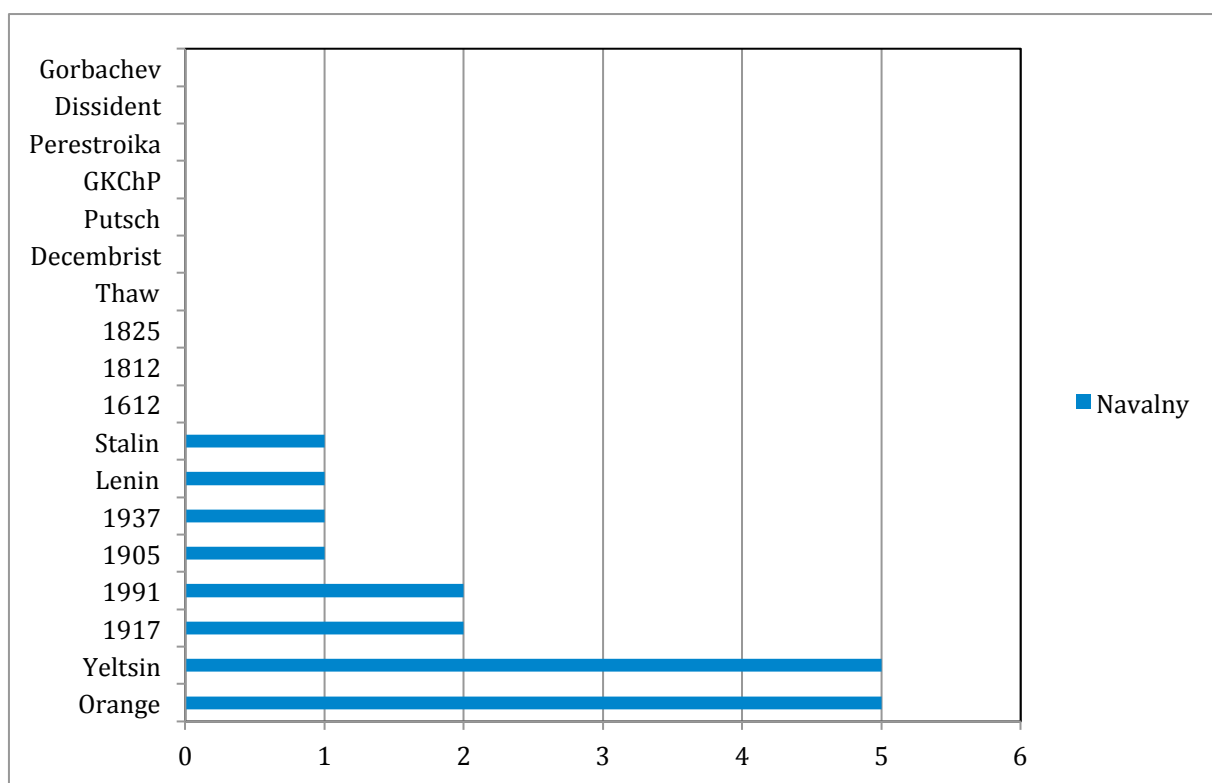


Source: Nikiporets-Takigawa (2013a)

The second stage of our research consists of discourse analysis of a random sample taken from comment threads containing one or more keywords. The qualitative analysis is aimed to identify at what point of the discussion memory models are introduced, which memories are employed, with what purpose and how other users respond.

Before continuing with the results of the analysis, a few comments on the typical dynamics of *LiveJournal* and comment threads are in order. Due to the structure of *LiveJournal* users are likely to read only the first few comments. As time progresses and users continue to add comments, older comments are moved back. This can possibly limit the length of discussions. This also makes it both difficult and less relevant to consider the total corpus of comments on an entry as a whole. Rather, they should be seen as blocks of comments that are not necessarily interrelated. Actual threads of comments, on the other hand, are created by users who have responded to a comment, rather than to the blog entry, and should therefore be viewed integrally.

Figure 2. Total number of mentions of the memory keywords in blog entries and Naval'nyi's responses on comments from 4 December 2011 until 4 May 2013. Source of data: *Yandex Search for Blogs*. Data collected on 22 August 2013.



Source: Hanna Stähle, Mariëlle Wijermars

Interactivity is one of the main features of *LiveJournal* blogs. It is possible to respond to the blog entry itself, as well as to the comments of other users. This technical feature supports the appearance of parallel discourses in the comment threads that often lack a direct connection to the blog entry. The first comment tends to be an actual response to the blog entry, although there are exceptions. Subsequent responses to the comments can spontaneously introduce other topics. It is possible for a single comment thread to take place on multiple levels and involve complex interaction among several users; dialogues are very popular but trialogues and polilogues occur quite often as well. The complex and multi-layered structure

of comment threads reinforces the fragmentary nature that appears to characterize expressions of memory in interactive online media; where ‘[d]iscussions of historical events are scattered’ and ‘[t]here are many beginnings and sudden endings in the conversations’ about the past (Zvereva 2011: 4).

Aleksei Naval’nyi and memory

To investigate the hypothesis that Naval’nyi refrains from using memory models in his blog entries and in his responses to comments, we have used *Yandex Search for Blogs*. Taking the parliamentary elections on 4 December 2011 as the start of the protest movement, we covered Naval’nyi’s blog entries and responses over a period of eighteen months. As Figure 2 indicates, the blogger indeed refers to past events sparingly. In a total of 1083 blog entries and responses (556 entries and 527 comments), Lenin, Stalin and the years 1905 and 1937 are mentioned once, 1917 and 1991 twice and Yeltsin and ‘orange’ both appear five times (see Figure 2).

If we take a closer look at the blog entries and responses in which the protest leader refers to the past, the majority of them are not memory related. For example, the following is a quotation from an English text Naval’nyi reposted:

The individual whose interests are involved on the other side of the material transactions that took place with Mr Tchigirinski and his companies is Mr Anatoly Kruglov. ***Between 1991 and 1998, Mr Kruglov was head of the Russian Federation’s State Customs Committee, and his family was involved in the ownership of a number of Russian customs terminals (which were privately owned, subject to state supervision).*** (Quoted in *navalny* 06.12.2012, bold and italics in the original)

Similar comments on (post-Soviet) history that should be seen as historical rather than memory-related concern Yeltsin. The following response by the blogger to a comment is a good example.

Neuzheli Varlamov na polnom ser’eze dumal, chto prosto tak, za krasivyi pricheson, stanet merom? [Did Varlamov seriously think he would become the mayor just because of his stylish haircut]. (*cadu3m* 03.05.2013)

Nu Putin prezidentom stal i bez pricheson. Ugovorili El’tsina i vse. [Well, Putin became president even without any “haircut”. They just convinced Yeltsin, that is all]. (*navalny* 03.05.2012)

Those historical references which are employed as memory models frequently turn out to be texts from other authors that the blogger has (re)posted and often are aimed at negatively portraying the protest movement. Consider, for instance, the following two fragments taken from a text by Ruslan Ustrakhanov that Naval’nyi posted on his blog.

“Ucheba” – ob’iasnenie dlia naivnykh. Kakoi mozhet byt’ ona v neskol’ko mesiatsev. *Dlia Naval’nogo poezdka v Soedinennye Shtaty – eto otriad posviashcheniia v klub “elitnykh” vragov Rossii*. Ego opekunom vystupaet Natsional’nyi demokraticeskii Institut SShA (‘NDI’). [...]. ‘NDI’ – odin iz organizatorov i finansistov “oranzhevykh revoliutsii”. Tol’ko na Ukraine im bylo potracheno 2 mln. dollarov gorlopanam na Maidane v 2004-m [Only the naive will believe he’s been studying. What kind of studies can you do in just a few months. *For Navalny, the trip to the USA was a ceremony of initiation into the club of elite enemies of Russia*. It is controlled by the National Democratic Institute of the USA (‘NDI’). [...]. “NDI” was one of the organizers and financiers of the ‘Orange Revolutions’. In 2004, in Ukraine alone, they spent 2 million U.S. dollars on the screamers on Maidan [square]]. (Ruslan Ustrakhanov, quoted in Naval’nyi 20.08.2012, emphasis in the original)

Krushenie Rossiiskoi imperii v 1917 godu – rezul’tat podryvnoi deiatel’nosti Zapada, vnutrennego predatel’sstva i liberalizma vlasti. Te zhe prichiny priveli k raspadu Velikoi strany – Sovetskogo Soiuz. Reshitel’nost’ gosudarstva v zashchite svoei bezopasnosti i tselostnosti. Eto garantiia nepovtoreniia krupneishikh geopoliticheskikh katastrof XX-go veka. [The collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 was the result of the undermining activities of the West[ern countries], domestic betrayal and the liberalism of the authorities. The exact same causes led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Decisiveness of the state in defence of its security and integrity. That is the only guarantee against the repetition of the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century]. (Ruslan Ustrakhanov, quoted in Naval’nyi 20.08.2012)

From the discussion above we conclude that Naval’nyi uses historical references to key events in Russian history very sparingly: there are, in fact, only two such references. Furthermore, on the occasions that the blogger *does* refer to history, it is in a factual, historical way that does not function as a memory model. The occasions where historical references can be interpreted as memory models can be attributed to other authors whose texts Naval’nyi reposts to show the way in which he and the protest movement are portrayed.

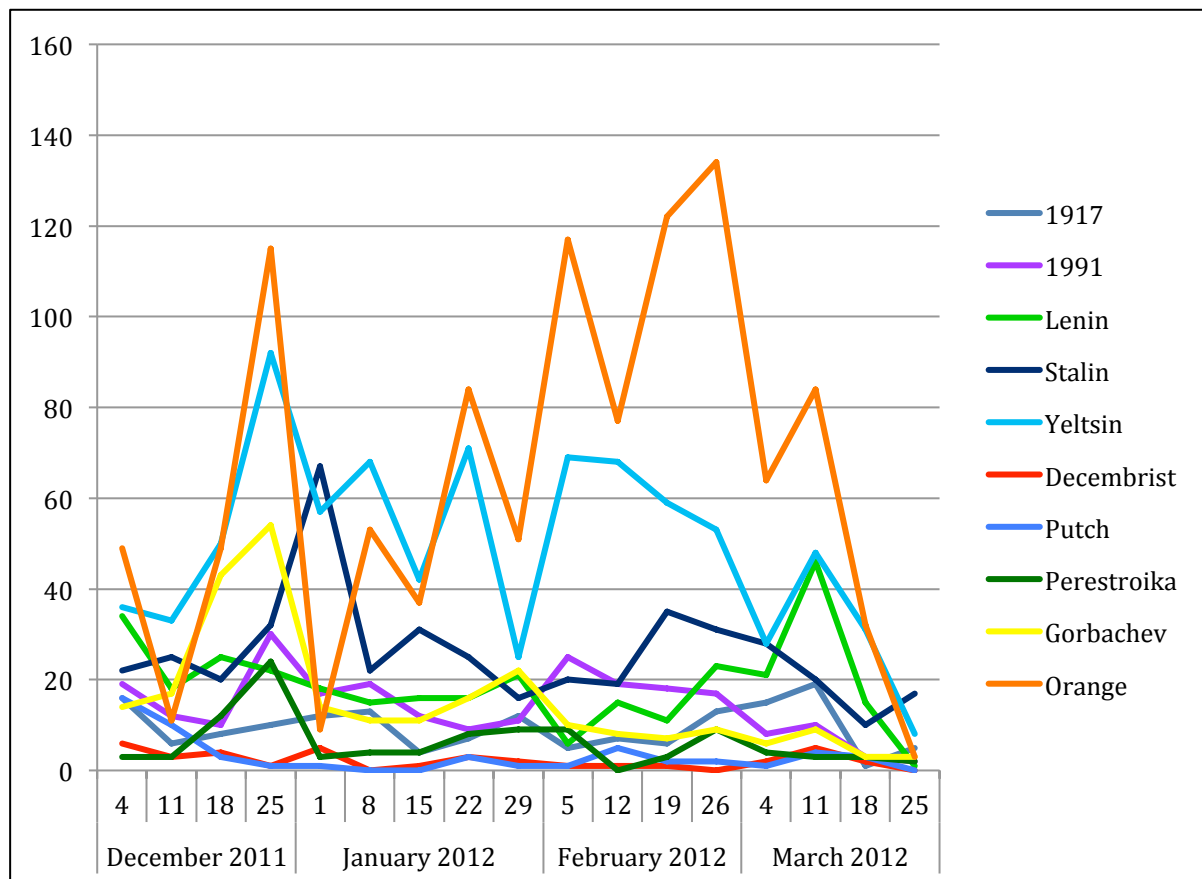
Comment threads on Naval’nyi’s *LiveJournal*

First phase: quantitative analysis

To analyse how frequently users employ cultural memory in the comments, we turn again to the *Yandex Search for Blogs*. The time frame for the comment search is limited to 4 December 2011 – 31 March 2012, the period in which, according to Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa, the memory activity in the blogosphere was most intense (Nikiporets-Takigawa 2013a). Figure 3 shows the developments of the ten most frequent memory keywords. Of the keywords that were excluded from the graph for clarity purposes, “1825” and “оттепель” [Thaw] were mentioned <10 times; “1612”, “1812”, “1905” < 20 times; “1937” and “ГКЧП” [GKChP]⁴ <30 times; and “диссидент” [dissident] only 31 times.

⁴ State of Emergency Committee.

Figure 3. Frequency of memory keywords from 4 December, 2011 until 31 March 2012. Source of data: *Yandex Search for Blogs*. Data collected on 3 September 2013.



Source: Hanna Stähle, Mariëlle Wijermars

As Figure 3 shows, the memory of the Orange Revolution (“оранжевая” [orange])⁵ was most frequently used within the selected time frame, followed by “Ельцин” [Yeltsin] and, less frequently, “Сталин” [Stalin]. Other memory models associated with the end of the Soviet Union (“1991”, “путч” [putsch], “перестройка” [perestroika], “Горбачёв” [Gorbachev]) are much less frequently mentioned than “Ельцин” [Yeltsin]. Memories connected to the October Revolution (“1917”, “Ленин” [Lenin]) are less frequent than the references to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine or the figure of Yeltsin. References to the Decembrists (“декабрист”) show a peak at the beginning of December but ebb away afterwards. As the analysis of Naval’nyi’s blog entries and responses has shown, quantitative data on the frequency of historical references is likely to contain “noise”, references which, in fact, do not express a historical parallel or memory.

⁵ The query ‘orange’ does not differentiate between actual references to the Orange Revolution and other, non-political uses of the word. While the specific context of the *LiveJournal* blog leads one to expect that the majority of occurrences are likely to be political in nature, rather than a casual denotation of colour, this possibility cannot be ruled out at this point.

Second phase: qualitative analysis

Our findings demonstrate that historical references are less likely to be introduced in comments to the blog entries than in comments responding to previous comments. In the case that a comment on a blog entry contains a historical reference, it tends to either focus on current political and contextual issues or involve a more personal statement. The ways in which historical references are introduced in comments responding to previous comments differ more widely. Extensive discussions of history tend to be rare. Its usage remains present-oriented and most of the occurrences could be described as a meme, insult, or rhetorical weapon. Users “play the memory card” to make a point, to insult other users, or to support their claims. The meme-like use of memory models is found more frequently in malignant comments, whose main goal is to assault the author of the original comment. Attempts to interpret the contemporary meaning of historical events rarely take place in the actual comment exchanges; they are more likely to be contained in larger comments that are structurally similar to a blog entry. Here, historical events are described at some length, although a single interpretation is almost universally followed throughout the comment. In such cases, a memory is explicitly linked to the present and often relates directly to the topic of Naval'nyi's blog entry as well. This pattern can be illustrated by the following comment written by ‘timofeev_vyach’. The user responds to Naval'nyi's call for an effective information and communication campaign throughout the country. He proposes to improve the management and to found an official newspaper (timofeev_vyach 16.03.2012). To stress his point, ‘timofeev_vyach’ recalls Lenin: ‘U Lenina byla partiia-organizatsiia. A zachem ona emu, zhil by bez organizatsii: iz Shushenskogo vel by blog. Nichego by togda ne vyshlo.’ [‘Lenin had a well-organised party. What did he need it for? If he had not had an organization, only a blog would have come out of Shushenskoe.’⁶ Nothing would have come of it.’] (ibid.). The comment evoked supportive responses from several users but none of them referred to a historical event or figure.

The frequency of references to Lenin is relatively constant throughout the first four months of the protest movement, with small peaks in the first week of December 2011 and the second week of March 2012. At the time of the first protest rallies, the combined memories of Lenin and 1917 appear to have served as a special kind of measuring bar by which to evaluate the success or failure of the protest movement. In this context, Naval'nyi is often compared to Lenin⁷, including detailed references to public speeches and political leadership qualities. Contrary to his present-oriented agenda, Naval'nyi becomes an *object* of precisely the kind of historical comparisons to which he explicitly refuses to resort. In these comments, both supporters and opponents of the protest leader structure their opinions about his performance around positive and negative associations with Lenin, as the examples below illustrate:

⁶ Name of the village where V.I. Lenin spent several years in exile.

⁷ The use of memories related to Stalin appears to be of a different nature. Discussions on Stalin are less polarized and can be markedly nostalgic and patriotic. While the prevalence of mentions of Stalin demonstrates the strength of this cultural reference, the majority of these references actually lack connection with the contemporary issues at stake in the discussion. These can be better described as noise. Stalin appears to have become a byword for all things odious, an insult that puts an end to any discussion.

Naval'nyi – Lenin segodnia! [...]. Obrazets politika novogo pokoleniia, ran'she v Rossii tak tol'ko Vladimir Il'ich umel: nametil sebe tsel', deklariroval ee, propisal taktiku dostizheniia tseli, dobilsia realizatsii postavlennoi zadachi, podvel itogi, razobral oshibki taktiki. Nametil novye tseli. Naval'nogo v prezidenty! [Naval'nyi is the Lenin of today! [...]. He is an example of a new generation politician, in Russia only Vladimir Il'ich used to be like him: he set a goal, proclaimed it, outlined tactics for reaching the goal, achieved the realization of the assigned task, summarised the results, analysed mistakes in tactics. [Then] he set new goals. Naval'nyi for president!] (anest_doc 05.12.2011)

Vystupil kruto. Ia v audiozapisi na mitinge v Pitere slushal, ochen' bylo pokhozhe na zapis' istoricheskoi rechi Lenina. Eto oshchushchenie eshche bol'she zakrepilos' slovami "Vsia vlast' narodu!". Miting prosto zataiv dykhanie slushal, a v kontse vzorvalsia. Nuzhno bylo videt' litsa mentov, kotorye do etogo byli neprobivaemymi – oni poniali, chto chto-to proizoshlo. [He gave a great speech. I listened to a recording of it at the rally in St Petersburg, it was very similar to the tape of the historical speech of Lenin. This feeling was strengthened even more by the words "All power to the people!" The rally listened, holding its breath, and then finally exploded. You should have seen the faces of the policemen, who had acted impenetrable up to that point – they understood that something [significant] had happened]. (denisbystrov 25.12.2011)

Da ne vyidet u nikh nichego. Naval'nomu daleko do Trotskogo, Lenina... Dazhe na besnovatogo fiurera ne tianet. Otvlekaet liudei ot deistvitel'no vazhnykh del. [Their actions will come to nothing. Naval'nyi is far from being like Trotskii, Lenin... He would not even make a possessed Führer. He distracts people from what is really important]. (lavr_beria 30.12.2011)

By March 2012, positive comparisons of Naval'nyi with Lenin almost entirely disappear from the comments. The focus shifts towards interpreting the results of the protest rallies and reviewing what mistakes have been made. References to Lenin's revolutionary plan are now used to give Naval'nyi and other leading figures of the protest movement the advice to do their "homework": 'O! Aleksei, nakonets, prochel Lenina:) (o tom, chto dlia uspekha revoliutsii pervym delom nado brat' pochtu i telegraf, a potom uzhe iz Avrory palit')' ['Oh! Aleksei has finally read Lenin:] (the part that says that to make a revolution succeed, you first have to seize the post and the telegraph and only then start shooting from the Aurora).'] (razumovskaya_n 13.03.2012)

If we take the reviewed period as a whole, two major uses of the image of Lenin emerge: He is either seen as an example of a great revolutionary, an efficient (if opportunistic) leader; or, as a foreign-sponsored villain who instigated revolutionary turmoil and, by extension, can be held responsible for the period of Soviet rule. As an "evil agent" of German/American/Jewish puppet masters, Lenin is part and parcel of the anti-Russian conspiracy; he is the German provocateur:

Naverno, vse v svoe vremia slyshali, chto zavarushka 1917 goda i to, chto ei predshestvovalo, delalos' s OCHEN' khoroshei finansovoi pomoshch'iu. I kak raz togda imenno "zagranitsa" aktivno pomogala Leninu i kompanii (v knizhkakh chitala, lol). [Everyone has probably heard that the turmoil of 1917 and the events which preceded it

were made possible by VERY good financial assistance. And back then, it was precisely the “foreign countries” who were actively helping Lenin and his supporters (or so I read in some books, lol)]. (alena_antonova 02.02.2012)

The historical details of Lenin's activities, as well as his texts, are well known to many commenters who provide links to and quotations from his works. However knowledgeable the arguments may be, this use of Lenin entails little discussion and the total length of such comment threads rarely exceeds 1-3 comments. The following example is a comment on a blog entry and was not followed by a discussion afterwards: ‘Lidera real’nogo net, naselenie k peremenam ne gotovo. Chitajte klassiku: V.I. Lenina – net slozhivsheisia revoliutsionnoi situatsii.’ [‘There is no real leader, the population is not ready for change. Read the classics: V.I. Lenin – there is no revolutionary situation.’] (ramzes2002 04.12.2011)

In the course of our analysis, we identified the tendency of memory models to form close associations. The Lenin-1917 constellation is a part of the broader discussion about revolutions of the past and the lessons that are to be drawn from them in relation to the events of the Russian protest. In this discourse on revolution, Lenin and 1917 are the most frequently recurring terms. This suggests that the particular historical parallel is used as a memory model, a tool for thinking about the development of the protest movement. The broader and more symbolic use of 1917 is concerned with the question of whether and how the first months of protests can be compared to other historical moments when popular unrest threatened the authority of those in power. This discourse draws examples from both historical and contemporary events, such as the Decembrist uprising (which appears mainly in December 2011), the combination of years 1612/1812/2012, the French revolution, 1905, the February Revolution (as with the Decembrists, this memory peaked in the eponymous month), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Arab Spring. Apart from the Orange Revolution, which is discussed in more detail below, parallels with the revolutions of 1917 are most frequent. Most users' interpretations of the historical events can be traced to Soviet history textbooks:

Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 2012 ili fars cherez 95 let? Konechno nyneshniaia oppozitsiia v dekabre byla osharashena neozhidannym massovym protestom, kak i lenin, uznavshii v fevrale 1917 o revoliutsii iz zagranichnykh gazet. No cherez polgoda il'ich uzhe ne rasterialsia, a nyneshniaia oppozitsiia ne podgotovila na miting 4 fevralia dazhe manifest o sozdanii obshcherossiiskogo antikorrupsionnogo dvizheniia. Pora uzhe nazvat' istinnye tseli i zadachi oppozitsii. Prostoe vykrikivanie lozungov sil'no razocharuet massy. [The February revolution, 2012, or a farce 95 years later? Of course, the current opposition was surprised by the unforeseen mass protest in December, as was Lenin, who found out about the revolution from foreign newspapers in February 1917. But after a mere six months Il'ich [Lenin] did not lose his head, while the current opposition did not even prepare a manifest about the creation of an all-Russian anti-corruption movement for the rally on February 4. It is time to set real goals and tasks for the opposition. The [protest] masses will get very tired of the mere shouting of slogans]. (vrazumov 02.02.2012)

The remembrance of Yeltsin involves various associations with Russia's recent political history and recollections of users' personal experiences, both positive and negative. In this (post-)Soviet memory constellation, the memories of 1917, 1991 and Yeltsin interweave and

are used to make a point about the present, but moreover to contest the meaning of the Soviet experience and the Yeltsin years. In general, the memory of Yeltsin is employed in two distinct ways. On the one hand, his name is brought into connection with a range of historical events, such as perestroika, the August coup of 1991, the collapse of the USSR and the late 1990s. On the other hand, Yeltsin can be used as a rhetorical device of personification, such as in the following example: ‘[...] ia khochu SAM izbirat’ sebe prezidenta i predstavitelia v dume, a ne chto by eto delal kakoi to tam putin, el’tsin i prochie.’ [‘I want to choose FOR MYSELF who will be the president and the representative for the Duma and not have this decided by a Putin, Yeltsin or anybody else.’] (pharer 27.12.2011).

Negative remembrances of the 1990s prevail in the comment threads. Terms that are often associated with the events of 1991 are bloodshed, disease, catastrophe, disintegration of the USSR and other designations of general disorder. These emotionally charged references appear to reflect betrayed hopes and deep traumas connected to the events of the late 1980s and 1990s. To illustrate this, consider the following comment by user ‘vlad_pulov’. Within the context of discussing the development of the protest movement, this user recalls the events of 1991 and describes them as chaos: ‘Prizvyv k sverzheniiu vlasti izbrannoi narodom – eto provotsirovanie khaosa. [...] Tolpa nichego reshat’ ne budet, my eto uzhe prokhodili v 1991-om.’ [‘Appeals to overthrow the power elected by the people are a provocation of chaos. [...] The crowd is not going to resolve anything, we already went through this in 1991.’] (vlad_pulov 27.12.2011). As the examples above clearly show, recollections about the 1990s quite frequently do not contain detailed information. While the goal of these commenters evidently is to appeal to other users and create an emotional connection about a shared experience, they appear to assume that their experiences coincide to such an extent that brief, abstract statements are sufficient to achieve this.

With regard to the social network website *Vkontakte*, Vera Zvereva argues that “in [the] memory-related communities one can often find more form than content” and “*rhetorical signs of argumentation can mask [the] absence*” of *actual* argumentation (Zvereva 2011: 5. Emphasis added). While brevity can indeed signal a lack of content, it can at times also indicate the relevance of the utterance and the productivity of the memory model that underlies it; a reference that gains argumentative power through its ability to draw in content that is situated *outside* of the message. In many cases, a reference to Yeltsin is not connected to a particular event but, rather, is used as a figure of speech, as shorthand for the political instability and societal hardships of the 1990s. This is the case, for instance, in the following example: ‘Zhit’ stalo luchshe pri Putine, Naval’nyi=El’tsin’ [‘Life has improved under Putin, Naval’nyi = Yeltsin.’] (intermani 8.02.2012). This comment received one response written by ‘lesnoy_volk’ that relates to both Putin and Yeltsin: ‘Logicheskaiia oshibka. “Pri Putine” ne znachit “blagodaria Putinu”. Bolee-menee snosnoe suchestvovanie v krupnykh i chastichno srednikh gorodakh – za schet takikh tsen na neft’, o kotorykh p’ianyi El’tsin ne mog dazhe mechat’.’ [‘It’s a logical mistake. “Under Putin” does not mean “thanks to Putin”. More or less bearable existence in big cities and part of the medium-sized cities came about because of oil prices a drunk Yeltsin could never have dreamed of.’] (lesnoy_volk 8.02.2012). While in the first comment the name of Yeltsin is used as a figure of speech, the mentioning of Yeltsin in the last comment questions the implied attribution of complete po-

litical control over the development of Russian society. By disconnecting the politician from the state of affairs, he also effectively refutes the symbolic function of Yeltsin's name.

In the state-endorsed political discourse the general disorder of the 1990s is frequently contrasted to the 2000s to indicate the stability and prosperity brought about by the Putin regime. The comparison of Yeltsin with Putin aiming to legitimize the latter's politics appears to be a widely used pattern of communication, in particular in anti-protest comments. Moreover, based on the close reading of our sample of comment threads, it has become clear that several statements should most likely be linked to activist pro-Kremlin users or even paid users. As was illustrated above, the negative memory discourse about the 1990s is shared by the majority of *LiveJournal* users on this particular blog. Such politically motivated comments can influence the balance of a discussion. The comment below exemplifies this kind of entry:

Strana "zabolela" v kontse 80-kh i eta "bolezni" konkretno "podkosila" nashu Rodinu v 1991 godu i chut' ne privela k letal'nogmu iskhodu k 2000 godu, a kogda ona nachala seichas ponemnogu vyzdoravlivat', a v nekotorykh sektorakh dazhe i vyzdorovala – vse te, kto etu stranu k etoi "bolezni" i privel, podniali paniku. [The country became "sick" in the late 80s and this "disease" knocked our motherland down in 1991 and nearly led to a fatal outcome in 2000. And when she gradually started to recover – and in some sectors has even recovered completely – the people who led this country to this "disease" raised panic]. (kaletin-ilya 26.12.2011)

Paid users and bots

Paid users usually write long personal messages and interact with other blog commenters by responding to their questions or adding facts. Moreover, paid users often take on a certain recognizable identity and act as, for example, an experienced teacher or a preoccupied mother who is taking care of her son who supports Naval'nyi. As a result of close reading, certain patterns of users start to emerge, such as the user with the username of 'Anton Uvarov', who portrays himself as a soldier and a patriot. Within a short period of time, Uvarov placed several comments that speak very negatively about Yeltsin and the 1990s and adhere to the pattern indicated earlier:

Tol'ko bratan poimi. Naval'nyi 2011 eto El'tsin 1991. Tot tozhe shturmoval... A kak zhi-los' v 90e nadeius' pomnish'... Ne popadis' na etu udochku... [Please, bro, understand. Naval'nyi of 2011 is Yeltsin of 1991. The latter also carried out an assault... I hope you remember how we lived in the 90s... Don't fall for this bait]. (Anton Uvarov 29.12.2011)

El'tsin tozhe v 93 godu prizyval idti na belyi dom. Teper' naval'nyi cherez 20 let prizyvaet idti na kreml'. Pomnish' kak pri El'tsine zhiilos'? [In '93 Yeltsin also called for an attack on the White House. Now, 20 years later, Naval'nyi is calling for an attack on the Kremlin. Do you remember how we lived under Yeltsin's rule?] (Anton Uvarov 28.12.2011)

‘Anton Uvarov’'s comments are typical of anti-protest-movement activities on the blog site of the protest leader, where it remains impossible to determine with any certainty whether these online activities are funded by government-supportive groups or simply personally motivated.

The meaning and contemporary relevance of the Soviet period are less contested than the Yeltsin heritage or the Putin present. The protest strategy is to attempt to see both Putin and Yeltsin as a continuation of a series of illegitimate regimes. The anti-protest comments, on the other hand, are more likely to connect Yeltsin with the Soviet past or simply portray the years he was in power as a nightmare. By stressing the negative aspects of life in Russia in the 1990s, they attempt to construct a clean break between the Yeltsin years and Putin's time in office.

Gore russkikh v tom, chto kogda vsekh zakhvatili vrasplokh “putchisty” v 1991-om, edinstvennye, kto ne byli zakhvacheny vrasplokh, kak potom okazalos’, byli amerikanskiye spetssluzhby. I oni bystrenko otpravili v Mosvku komandu so svoimi “spetsami” i bystrenko zarabotali s komandoi El'tsina-Chubaisa, chtoby vse organizovat' NA SVOI LAD – na pol'zu “elity” (sokrytoi ili polusokrytoi) SShA i VO VRED RUSSKOMU CHELOVEKU I ROSSIISKOI GOSUDARSTVENNOSTI. [...] Mezhdru prochim, Vy naverno uzhe zametili, chto v SShA ne ochen' khorosho ustroeno raspredelenie sil i administratsiia aktivov strany, t.e. v uscherb narodu. I imenno iz SShA v Rossiiu “napravili sovetchikov” [...]. Kak i togda, v 1917-om, otkuda poiavilos' vdrug vsem golovu vskruzhivshee poniatie ‘Sovety’? Tozhe – so storony, a ne ot pochvy... [The problem of the Russians is when everyone was taken unaware by the putschists in 1991, the only ones who weren't surprised, as it turned out later, were the American security services. And they quickly sent their “specialists” to Moscow [...] and quickly started working with the Yeltsin-Chubais-team in order to organize everything IN THEIR OWN WAY – to the benefit of the “elite” (concealed or half-concealed) of the USA and TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE AND RUSSIAN STATEHOOD. [...]. By the way, you may have already noticed, that the distribution of power and the administration of active assets are poorly arranged in the USA, i.e. at the expense of the people. But still It was the USA who “sent their sovetchiki [advisors]” [...]. Just like it happened in 1917 when the term “Soviets” suddenly infatuated everybody. This too did not come from the inside but from the outside...]. (Maria Ashot 08.02.2012)

In the comments posted on Naval'nyi's *LiveJournal* page many thousands of references to the Orange Revolution can be found. The quantitative part of the research indicated that usage of the term ‘orange’ was the most numerous within our selection of keywords, amounting to just over a thousand mentions within the selected four-month time period. This is consistent with the research results of Fedor and Nikiporets-Takigawa (2012a: 8), who found that ‘orange’ was one of the ‘dominant colours in the media coverage of the protests’ (ibid).

An in-depth analysis of bottom-up discussions and user interactions related to the Orange Revolution reveals substantial differences in the usage of digitally mediated memory practices. The comments range from detached observations to emotional remembrances of those who witnessed the mass protest rallies in Ukraine in 2004. More importantly, the term ‘orange’ is frequently found in the context of accusations, insults or hate speeches. The follow-

ing two comments illustrate how a reference to the Orange Revolution can serve as a framework for interpreting the protest movement and is used to discuss events and figures in the present, such as elections, protest rallies or political leaders, and to speculate on future developments in Russia.

[...] esli my vyidem i ne budem ukhodit' kak v svoe vremia na Maidane vlast' srazu predstavit eto kak oranzhevuiu revoliutsiiu v glazakh obshchestva i samoe strashnoe, chto one emu poverit i sootvestvenno otritsatel'no k etomu nachnet odnosit'sia [...]. [If we take to the streets and refuse to leave like [it happened] on Maidan [square], the authorities will immediately present it as an Orange Revolution in the eyes of the public and what's worse, society will believe them and correspondingly start to feel negatively about it]. (gradusof 27.12.2011)

Naval'nyi – real'nyi lider. Vozmozhno on sam k etomu ne gotov. [...] no k etomu vse idet. “Zvezdnoi bolezniiu” on vrode uzhe perebolel. “Oranzhevaia revoliutsiia” – ona narodu ne nuzhna. [Naval'nyi is a real leader. It is possible that he is not ready for this yet. [...] but everything leads to it. It seems he has already overcome his “superiority complex”. The people have no need for an “Orange Revolution”]. (electrosvyaz 29.12.2011)

The associations with the Orange Revolution that users express are generally negative, which might explain why Naval'nyi wishes to steer clear of associating himself with memory models and especially this one. There appears to be a consensus among users – both those who associate themselves with the protest movement and those who are critical of the protest rallies – that the Orange Revolution represents a dangerous political scenario that should not be repeated in Russia. The user ‘radiator_asus’, for example, – who obviously was considering taking part in the protest rallies in December 2011 – points out his willingness to support the party in power in case of a development comparable to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine:

Ia protiv razvitiia sobytii v stile oranzhevyykh revoliutsii i td, vse znaiut kto togda prikhodit k vlasti! Ia o tom chto esli miting budet krichat' idei tipa “putena v util’”, “sverzhenie vlasti” i td i tp, to ia obiazatel'no vystupliu na storone vlasti. [I am against a development of events comparable to the Orange Revolution and so on. Everyone knows who would come to power in that case! I mean that if they start yelling slogans at the protest rallies like ‘out with Putin’, ‘overthrow of power’ etcetera, I will be on the side of the party in power]. (radiator_asus 09.12.2011)

The interpretation of the Orange Revolution as a seizure of power followed by injustice and corruption appears to be a commonly held image among the users commenting on Naval'nyi's *LiveJournal* blog. Moreover, this negative reading has been successfully transferred from the 2004 events in Ukraine to the current political situation in Russia. As the user ‘lozhkamyoda_73’ comments, the main goal of the ‘orange’ demonstrations in Russia is to depose Putin and to disrupt the political order:

Oranzhevye nuzhny tol'ko chtoby svergnut' Putina i dezorganizovat' vlast', kotoruiu potom u oranzhevyykh uvedut iz pod nosa, kak Lenin obvel Kerenskogo vokrug pal'tsa. [The

only purpose of the orange [demonstrations] is to overthrow Putin and destabilize the ruling power, [but] afterwards, state control will be taken from under the nose of the orange [protest leaders], just as Lenin had Kerenskii wrapped around his little finger]. (lozhkamyoda_73 12.03.2012)

The 2004 protests in Ukraine are often related to the political and financial support of the American State Department and other (Western) countries and/or foreign institutions. In this way, the user 'lie1981' puts a sign of equality between the Orange Revolution and a revolution orchestrated from abroad: 'zhzhot kak vseгда. i proboltalsia taki. esli budet ne tak, budet oranzhevaia revoliutsiia, t.e. revoliutsiia delannaia iz za rubezha' ['He rules, as always. But he still let the cat out of the bag. If it doesn't go like this – there will be an Orange Revolution, a revolution orchestrated from abroad.'] (lie1981 28.01.2011).

References to the Orange Revolution tend to delegitimize the protest movement as a whole. This negative connotation corresponds with the official memory discourse on the Orange Revolution and demonstrates how deeply defamed and discredited the events that took place in Ukraine in 2004 are in Russian society. In this respect, it is not surprising that in numerous comments the Orange Revolution is linked to the events of 1991; those events are associated with negative and traumatic experiences and continue to shape the collective memory in Russia. The following comment by the user 'yurayu' illustrates this point:

Zadumaites' nad tem, chto bylo v 1991 godu. togda ne desiatki tysiach – sotni tysiach chelovek na mitingi sobiralis'. Za vse khoroshee protiv vsego plokhogo. I chem delo konchilos'? Razvalom strany pochemu-to. I seichas Vashi oranzhevye vozhd'i Vas vedut tuda zhe – k razvalu strany. [Think about what happened in 1991. Not tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands of people gathered at demonstrations. In favour of everything that is good and against everything that is bad. And how did it all end? For some reason, with the collapse of the country. And now your orange leaders are leading you in the very same direction – towards the collapse of the country]. (yurayu 29.01.2012).

Incidentally, the revolutionary events of 1991 are not only compared with the Orange Revolution but even described as being 'orange': 'Nuzhno provodit' antioranzhevye mitingi, v tom smysle, chto seichas i est' vlast' prishedshaia v rezul'tate oranzhevoi revoliutsii 91-go.' ['We have to organize anti-orange rallies in the sense that the current political elite came into power as a result of the Orange Revolution of 1991.'] (dmitrin10 15.03.2012). Within the semantic set associated with the term 'orange', 1991 most frequently appeared in the comment threads on this blog site.

The negative and highly politicized memory of the Orange Revolution shared by a majority of users on Naval'nyi's blog site, whether they belong to the protest movement or not, may explain the widespread usage of the term 'orange' to attack and insult others. The large number of comments we indicated through the quantitative analysis often do not contain actual memory models. The fact that 'orange' refers to events in recent history means that the historical and memory dimensions can overlap (cf. Aleida and Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory) and that the difference is less clear-cut. For instance, in the following example 'orange' is used as an insult, yet it contributes to the es-

establishment of two politically opposed groups: 'Perestroika-2 v deistvii. K chemu privela pervaiia perestroika? K razvalu SSSR. K chemu privedet vtoraia? K razvalu Rossii. Shel by ty nakhui, oranzhevyi mudak.' ['Perestroika-2 in action. Where did the first perestroika lead us? To the collapse of the USSR. Where will the second one lead us? To the breakup of Russia. Fuck you, orange creep.'] (dvostochnik 29.12.2011). We suspect that part of the hate speech and the insulting comments that use the term 'orange' can be traced to bots. Their automatically-generated contributions may have significantly influenced the peaks in the frequency of the word 'orange' indicated in Figure 3 above. As such comments are quite short and do not evoke any multi-level discussions typical for this blog site, the activity of paid bloggers is less probable within the context of the Orange Revolution. We can identify several abusive and aggressive comments containing the term 'orange' written by just one user/bot, using different formulations at different times. For example, the user who goes by the name 'kriwobokow' has contributed numerous provocative and insulting comments using the term 'orange':

Mrazi oranzhevye. Kak zhe vy dostali vsekh, svoim beshenym laem na Rossiuu so svoim pustomelei Nasral'nym. [Orange scum. Everybody is so fed up with you and your crazy barking at Russia with your twaddler Naval'nyi]. (kriwobokow 25.12.2011)

Vladimira Vladimirovicha [Putina] s novym godom!!! Vladimir Vladimirovich zhelaui vam uporstva i sil dlia konsolidatsii Rossii protiv obshchego vraga i ego piatoi oranzhevoi kolonny liberoidov vo glave s dutym oranzhevym bolvanchikom Naval'nym. [Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin], happy New Year!!! Vladimir Vladimirovich, I wish you persistence and strength in order to consolidate Russia [in the struggle] against the common enemy and its fifth, orange column of liberasts, headed by their blown-up orange idol Naval'nyi]. (kriwobokow 31.12.2011)

Such comments are usually not related in any way to the blog entry or to the comments of other users. If the 'orange' verbal abuse elicits a response from another user, the response remains unanswered by the user who wrote the initial abusive comment.

As was outlined in the previous sections, the close reading of comment threads called into question the authenticity of a considerable number of comments. We suspect that quite a large number of comments that fall within the selected time frame of our research can be attributed to bots, pro-Kremlin bloggers or paid users (see also Fedor & Nikiporets-Takigawa 2012b: 4). In recent years, the Kremlin has acknowledged the importance of online media and has sought to influence online discussions (Oates 2013: 101). While it was not the aim of this study to examine the political manipulation of the blog, this finding underlines the importance of combining quantitative research methods with qualitative analysis, in particular in the case of digital memory discourses. It remains difficult to differentiate between the diverse groups of users that are engaged in the manipulation of the online discourse on the protest leader's *LiveJournal* blog. As our research has shown, the topics of the Orange Revolution and the memory constellation of Yeltsin-1991 are more likely to be instrumentalised, whereas the more temporally distant memories, such as Lenin, are seldom the object of comments that seek political manipulation. Within the collected sample of comments, we can

see that references to the Orange Revolution are mainly employed by paid users or bots, in a very repetitive and simplistic way, while “memories” of the 1990s and Yeltsin are slightly more sophisticated and most probably traceable to paid users. Whether the last group is related to pro-Kremlin users, vehement supporters of the current regime or to politically engaged technologists remains an open question. While there are a number of bots that serve, for instance, commercial or spamming purposes and can be investigated automatically because of their repetitive communication patterns, bots involved in the political manipulation of online content tend to be more sophisticated (cf. Mowbray 2014). Detection with quantitative methods alone is unreliable and it is therefore difficult to quantify the spread and impact of those automatic or semiautomatic contributions. Further research is needed to respond to this challenge and to provide a more precise and detailed answer to the question of how to trace and contextualize such users and how to access ‘the meaning and influence, the authority and authenticity of digital texts’ (Fedor 2013: 239).

A second observation is that bots and paid users often become the object of meta-discussion themselves. This pattern of communication – the detection of bots and paid users – takes place in the large majority of comment threads, regardless of the topic that is being discussed. A typical “intervention” interaction goes as follows. At a given point, one user makes some kind of accusation against the supporters of Naval’nyi or puts forward some controversial idea and this sparks off an interaction among two or three users. A “normal” user replies to this by trying to prove that the previous comment was written by a paid user or bot. Let us illustrate this with the following comment thread. User ‘naval_mudak’ makes an abusive statement by writing: ‘Eto zhe mitingovy el’tsin obraztsa nachala 90-kh! Vy el’tsina s gaidarom khotite? Esli net to za Putina! A inache vsem ot natsionalista-barana pridet PIZDETS!’ [‘This is like the Yeltsin of the rallies at the beginning of 1990s! Do you want Yeltsin and Gaidar? If not, then you should support Putin! Otherwise everybody will get FUCKED by this nationalist ram.’] (naval_mudak 27.12.2011). The comment is followed by a response from user ‘hontoriel’, who suspects ‘naval_mudak’ of being a bot: ‘Odna zapis’ v zhurnale, odin drug, iavno spetsial’no sozdanniy akkaunt (po nazvaniyu vidno)... Otkroite snachala lichiko, a to ved’ BOTOksoM pakhnet...’ [‘One blog entry in the diary, one friend, it’s obviously a specially created account (it’s clear from the username)... Show your face, it smells like BOTox.’] (hontoriel 27.12.2011).

Referring to user profiles on *LiveJournal* in order to distinguish authentic from non-authentic contributions appears to be a common way to detect bots and paid users. These user profiles contain relevant information on, for example, the date the account was created, the number of blog entries, friends, received and written comments, last updates and so on. In a very similar manner, a comment written by ‘soybk’ in which he alleges that ‘u naval’nogo sovsem krysha s’ekhala’ [‘Naval’nyi has lost his mind’] (soybk 23.03.2012) and ironically refers to him as ‘lider, mliat’ [‘a fucking “leader”’] (soybk 23.03.2012), evoked a response from two users. Both of them refer to the profile of ‘soybk’ and determine that he is a bot. ‘pavin_au’ brings forward the following “evidence” from the user page: ‘soybk’'s account was created on 12 December 2011 and was last updated on 23 March 2012. The user has posted one blog entry, has sent 460 comments and received no replies (pavin_au 23.03.2012). This is sufficient to draw a final conclusion: ‘Diagnoz – bot. Vam vse eshche

platiat za kommenty?' ['Diagnosis – bot. Do you still get paid for [writing] comments?'] (ibid.). The comment is endorsed by the next user, 'sukin_sbln', who was also planning to quote the information from the user's profile (sukin_sbln 23.03.2012).

Interestingly, the term "bot" loses most of its original meaning here. The term transcends the limits of referring to a non-human user who automatically generates messages and becomes synonymous to a troll, provocateur, paid user or pro-Kremlin blogger. Users come up with creative ways to designate the (suspected) specific background of the accused, such as, for example, 'edroboty' [United Russia bot], 'zaputinskii bot' [pro-Putin bot], 'Putinskii troll' [pro-Putin troll], 'kremliadskii bot' [pro-Kremlin bot], 'Nashist-troll' [Nashi's troll], 'bot-provokator' [bot-provocateur] and so on. Based on our observation, (non-human) bots are less numerous than paid users on this particular *LiveJournal* blog. It is only in the context of the Orange Revolution that bots outnumbered other non-authentic activities.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the online memory discourse on Aleksei Naval'nyi's *LiveJournal* blog during the protest movement of 2011-2012 in Russia. The results of the quantitative analysis of the protest leader's blog entries and responses to comments, combined with the outcomes of the complementary qualitative analysis to assess whether historical references amount to memory models, support the claim that Aleksei Naval'nyi refrains from using memory models on his *LiveJournal* blog. Quantitative analysis of the comment threads has indicated that references to historical figures and events are widespread in the comments. The close reading and in-depth analysis of a random sample taken from the comments, however, has shown that a large number of these references are, in fact, not memory-related. Commenters tend to use memories and historical references in highly heterogeneous and present-oriented ways. The majority of memory keywords can better be described in terms of memes, insults, rhetorical weapons or noise. Meanwhile, discussions of current politics prevail in the comment threads and evolve through several layers of contributions and lively interactions among users.

The different memory topics turn out to be used in distinct ways and involve different dynamics between users. The remembrance of Lenin is relatively constant throughout the whole time period of the protest movement. Both positive and negative associations can be found in the comments. The combined memories of 1917 and Lenin are often set in relation to Naval'nyi as a political leader and to the revolutionary events of the protest movement. The remembrance of Yeltsin involves various associations and personal recollections of users. A negative portrayal of Yeltsin and the 1990s in general prevails in the comment threads. The most numerous historical references within the selected time frame of research concern the Orange Revolution. The comments that mention the Orange Revolution range from detached observations to emotional remembrances. Apart from this, the term 'orange' itself is frequently used in the context of accusations, insults or hate speeches. In numerous comments, the Orange Revolution is tied in with the events of 1991, associated with negative and traumatic experiences that continue to shape collective memory in Russia. These negative

associations shared by a majority of *LiveJournal* users on Naval'nyi's blog are often targets of political instrumentalisation and manipulation.

Based on the results of qualitative research, we suspect that a considerable number of comments can be attributed to bots and/or paid users. For that reason, there are grounds for questioning the authenticity of certain online memory peaks. This underlines the importance of combining quantitative research methods with qualitative analysis. Furthermore, the claim that the use of memory models is a common feature of the Russian protest movement proves to be inconsistent with the findings of our research, which demonstrated a lack of memory content in many cases, as well as a persistent focus on the present rather than on contesting the past.

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