Tweeting the Russian protests

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Abstract: This paper discusses the interaction between social media and the Russian 2011-2013 protests. First, it critically observes the existing analytical work on the role of social media in movements worldwide, situating the Russian experience within this context. Secondly, it examines sporadic facts and presuppositions by mapping and analysing a large number of hashtags and tweets written during three protest rallies in Russia. And finally, it offers a methodological and analytical framework based on an understanding of the relationship between social media and the protest movement as complex, multifaceted, and constantly evolving. This approach rejects any one-sided assessment and uses methods of continual monitoring, mapping, measurement and the analysis of a large body of evidence.

Keywords: social media, internet, protest, social movements, Russia, Twitter.

Recent protest and social movements around the world are 'interwoven inextricably with the creation of autonomous communication networks supported by the Internet and wireless communication' (Castells 2012), described as 'Facebook rebellions', 'the Internet revolution', 'tweeted protests', 'Twitter revolution'.[1] There is, however, a great deal of disagreement over the accuracy of these labels, even among their authors such as Morozov, who dubbed the Moldova uprising in 2009 a 'Twitter revolution' (Morozov 'Value of the question'[2]), and there is criticism from others.

> By repeatedly putting the Internet corporations – Facebook, Twitter, and the like – at the center, it seemed as if particular Western characteristics were artificially being inserted into a genuine popular Arab revolution. Such an approach also ignores the decades-long history of social and political protest in Egypt, starting with the mobilizations in solidarity with the Second Intifada and the U.S. (and British) invasion in Iraq, which led to huge

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protests expressing anger at leaders seen as the local lackeys of the U.S. and Israel' (Alexander et. al 2011: 1346).

Even though the opponents try to soften their positions[3] the dichotomies of central/peripheral, positive/negative persist in theories regarding the impact of social media on protest movements.

Such a dichotomized approach is simply a continuation of a wider, long-enduring and transnational discussion on the role of the internet in social and political change, covering established and nascent democracies. Social media heralded the end of the era of the internet as an elitist medium (Murphy 2012) revitalising hopes for 'e-democracy' based on the successful use of the internet in online campaigning. The most iconic case so far is Barack Obama's 2008 US presidential campaign; other examples include the 2010 Swedish election campaign (Larson et. al 2011). Again sceptical voices are heard among the success stories: a carefully grounded study of the Obama campaign's use of social media concluded that in fact their impact was almost non-existent and perhaps even harmful (see, for instance, Woolley 2011). The controversy surrounding social media impact assessment is characteristic of larger debates on social media use in social movements, particularly regarding those Eurasian countries recovering from long years of undemocratic socialist rule. This is evident in the volume 'New media and New Europe-Asia' which includes comparisons between Russia and western democracies (Finland in Gladarev & Lonkila) or between the websites of the Russian Communist Party and the British Liberal Democrat party (Oates), as well as a study of one post-socialist bloc country. Some of the authors praise social media for strengthening and uniting the voice of civil society (Bulgaria in Bakardjieva), other proclaim the internet and social media in particular to be the tool of governmental 'control, surveillance and consolidation of their power (vertical or top-down), for example the use of new media by regional governors and local authorities (Toepfl), and the Russian President Medvedev's blogging (Yagodin)' (Morris et. al 2012: 1351-1352) or continue, as Sarah Oates does, to discuss 'the normalization of cyberspace' (Margolis et. al 2000: 2 and more on the 'normalization school' and frame in Wright 2012) when online party communication is 'far more closely tied to national political culture than to cyber-culture in general' (Oates 2012: 1460). This phenomenon is illustrated in the Russian case: 'The Communist Party web activity tended to parallel the party activity offline, failing to craft the appearance of a more modern or inclusive party' (ibid).

In the newest context of social protest, rebellions and revolutions many experts are irritated by such statements as, 'it began on the Internet social networks' (Castells 2012: 2), and 'social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring' (Howard et al. 2011: 2). Particularly opposed to such 'cyber-optimism' are those who advocate the importance of face-to-face communication and offline networks (Gladwell 2010; Alexander et. al 2011; Ross 2011). They doubt the potential of a 'leaderless Facebook party' (Morozov 2011: 328) and question the ability of the internet and social media to produce a collective

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[3] That is, Clay Shirky in polemics with Evgeny Morozov (Shirky 2010), Morozov in the conclusion to his *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (Morozov 2011: 330-335), and Manuel Castells throughout *Network of Outrage and Hope*.

actor amidst increasing polarization, atomization and fragmentation (Rodgers 2003; Sunstain 2007; Woolley 2011). These critics have questioned whether Facebook users 'are really the best hope for us all' and remind us that, for instance, 'Twitter had scant internal significance in Moldova, a country where very few Twitter accounts exist' (Gladwell 2010). In addition, these claims by 'digital evangelists' have been assessed as strong but not sufficiently evidence-based: 'one problem of Castells' book is that his assumptions are highly speculative' (Fuchs 2012: 787).

In discussions of the role of social media in the Russian protest movement the polarised camps of cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists are still very visible, with members of the first camp, sporting their 'single-minded Internet glasses' (Alexander et. al 2011: 1350), said to be more prevalent. 'Today, all of Facebook are on Bolotnaia[4]' ('Ia prishol', 2011), 'the Internet is the backbone of civil society in Russia and it is a growing force against authoritarianism' (Aron 2011). Such ideas, particularly popular among journalists, emphasise the leading role of the internet in Russian political activism. More analytic and empirically-based views are rather sceptical and unenthusiastic (Kurennoi 2012; 'Protestnoe dvizhenie v Rossii' 2012; Ushakin 2012)[5].

This binary attitude is produced by the complex role of social media in protests, it being used by many actors, for opposing ends, with varying degree of success. Since the protests began in Russia, social media have played a significant role in the protesters' self-organization and coordination: they enable online registration for participation in the rallies, online petitions, fundraising, voting for the Coordination Council of the Russian opposition[6], as well as spreading information about the rallies among protesters (Martynov 2012). In response to the question 'How did you know about the rally?' 56 percent of the protesters on Sakharov square[7] named internet sites, and 33 percent SNSs[8] ('Opros na Sakharova', 2011). It is a quite predictable response as social media are a platform for the rapid mass distribution of information, to a much greater degree than other media[9]. They cannot be said to be the most popular and reliable source of the information in Russia, where TV is a winner[10]. But the internet and social media were in fact the only source of information about the protest movement during the first four days of street protest, when the authorities experienced a sort

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[4] 'Bolotnaia' is a name of a square in Moscow where the first massive rally took place on December 10 with up to 40,000 participants (see Monaghan 2012 about details).

[5] The debates on the Russian Radio Station Echo of Moscow / Echo Moskvy about the protest "Paper anniversary" clearly reflect two attitudes: a strong belief in the internet expressed by a journalist Natella Boltianskaia, and Lev Gudkov's negative reaction, based on sociological research and public opinion pool data ('Sittsevaia godovshchina protesta', 2012).

[6] An organisation of the opposition leadership with 45 seats, created in October 2012.

[7] A square in Moscow, setting of the second large rally within the current Russian protest movement on December 24 of 2011.

[8] SNS – social networking services or sites. Also 33 percent answered "friends/relatives/neighbors".

[9] It can be debated whether social media provide equal and unrestricted access to the information as they consist of many closed sites and often ban opposing points of view. However many of these restrictions can be avoided (Perepelkin 2012) and the information can technically be accessed.

[10] 92% of Russians obtain political information through television, 38% - print media, 32% - online news sites, 25% from "family-friends-acquaintances", 25% from radio, 12% through the forums, blogs, social networks. The most reliable source of information Russians were named as television (55%), print media (13%), news sites (5%), talks (3%), radio (3%), forums, blogs and social networking sites (2%) ('Osobennosti potrebleniia informatsii' 2012, see also Buzin 2012).

of shock (McGuinness 2012) and prohibited the main TV channels from covering the protest ('Chelovek iz televizora' 2011). This quickly passed as the government felt reassured of their strength in the face of the demonstrations and started to televise the protests. They did so, however, in a negative light, emphasising their modest scale[11] and the absence of homogeneity. Observed worldwide (Kahn et. al, 2003), this is a common tactic with the aim of swaying public opinion against the protesters. Again in this situation the role of social media was invaluable in providing eyewitness accounts. Conveying information via social media to different cities across the vast expanse of Russia also enabled the spread of information about events in Moscow and, in the latter stage of the protest movement, helped to coordinate the actions across the country.

Besides this organizing and coordinating function, social media also provide 'emotional mobilization' (Castells 2012: 219-221). The 'individual outrage' and 'increasing anger against injustice' expressed over the Duma elections and Putin's return to the Kremlin became connected to other individual issues through social media. This 'perpetual connectivity' (Castells 2012: 231) and multiple emotional interactions with followers could give the protesters a sense of camaraderie, helping to overcome fear of arrest (especially well-founded in December 2011, and before rallies on June 12 and December 15 2012) and come out onto the streets. Social media also helped to avoid clashes with the police (Babchenko 2012) and proved useful in cases when clashes could not be avoided.

However, this 'emotional mobilization' is not restricted to one side of the protest movement only. The anti-opposition debates unite their opponents and provoke anger against the protesters, increasing the unpopularity of the protest movement among the majority of Russians[12]. This is just one weapon in the arsenal provided by social media for the offensive against protest and protesters. Also, social media offer tools for surveillance, control, suppression, and manipulation of public opinion. The authorities in Russia (as well as around the world) actively utilise all of these. Here, again, social media have greater potential than other media[13], providing the possibility of total control (Assange 2012; Badanin et. al 2012; 'How Facebook could' 2012; Morozov 2009; Robertson 2012), being the fastest and most openly and deliberatively aggressive method of control

This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why the government in Russia has never actively blocked the internet or restricted its use over more than a year of on-going protests. If initially in December 2011 the independent media websites went down (Moscow Echo radio website, digital television channel Dozhd (Rain) TV channel, Novaya Gazeta newspaper website), supposedly on the orders of the government, there were no subsequent cases of this.

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[11] The state TV channels such as Channel One / Pervyi kanal (ORT) repeatedly showed live footage with a sparse crowd in the back and ironical comments such as: 'The organizers were hasty to name the march "of millions". In the fact, no more than a couple of thousand gathered', see ORT. Novosti (2012, 17 June), http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/209618 or ORT. Novosti (2012, 13 May), http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/206869.

[12] Here The Public Opinion Foundation / Fond obshchestvennoe mnenie (FOM), the Russian Public Opinion Research Center / Vserosiiskii tsentr issledovaniia obshchestvennogo mneniia (VTSIOM) and Levada Analytical Center do not agree on the details and methods (Mtiulishvili, 2010), but confirm the general conclusion that 'public opinion, however, has not turned in the opposition's favor' (Monaghan 2012, see also Roslov 2012, 'Ot redaktsii: 'Protestuite' 2012).

[13] See detailed observation for other media and for the earlier stage of Russian protest in Horvath 2011.

Moreover, the new Russian prime minister and old Twitter fan Dmitrii Medvedev has praised blogs for 'adding emotions to the news and helping to solve people's problems' ('Russia's Medvedev orders', 2013) and promises to promote the internet and cut the price of internet connections. The Russian state news agency RIA Novosti in October 2012 offered 'all support to bloggers with access to news in real time, photos and infographics with permission to publish them in their blogs and social networking services' ('Neforum' 2012).

The *RIA* initiative can be interpreted as the attempt to control and influence bloggers' content, and by extension the free internet access in Russia as a part of 'virtual politics' (Wilson 2005) in the epoch of 'networked putinism' (Strukov 2012: 111[14]). It could also be interpreted as a lesson learned from similar (almost futile) global exercises to cut off and block the internet (Elkin 2011; Ackerman 2011; Shveits 2012). Otherwise, it can be interpreted simply as short-sightedness or foolishness in state attitudes to the internet together with the repressive offline actions (searches, arrests, etc.) which cause many to think that 'the government is idiotic'[15] because they whip up more hatred towards the authorities.

Not only interpretations but even the facts concerning social media use in the Russian protests can be questioned, as data remains sporadic and not systematically collected or analysed. The anti-opposition DDoS attacks are widely speculated upon, but the majority of them are not documented. Even less evidence or systematic research can be found on the pro-opposition use of social media. What is the scale of these anti-opposition and pro-opposition functions? How do these two contra activities affect each other? All these have to be analysed and answered and this paper takes a first step in this research task. The task is to carry out continued monitoring of a wide range of social media coverage, and of current debates on the on-going Russian protest movement, as well as to measure and map the dynamic of these debates, using various tools and techniques of quantitative and qualitative analysis. This research draws upon media accounts, a considerable amount of participant observation data from the Russian movement, and is aided by a large amount of empirical data from sociologists and political scientists as well as colleagues, students, friends and acquaintances who participated in the rallies.

The theoretically and methodologically challenging research on social media (Karpf 2010; Manovich 2012; Rogers 2009) provides controversial data, depending on whether the research focuses on the internet as a whole, on internet-based communication, all social media, a part of social media or even several blogs. As soon as Castells declared the end of 'a meaningless debate about the causal role of social media on social movement' (Castells 2012: 103), the next turn of detailed criticism of social media's determining role in revolts and revolutions immediately appeared (Fuchs 2012). Perhaps, the debate on whether 'the revolutions are tweeted' (Lotan et al. 2011: 1401) will continue further and not be put to rest any time soon.

This paper does not intend to contribute to debates of this sort. The research is based on an understanding of social media and the internet as simultaneously playing a supporting but also a destructive role in the protest movement, and carries out the mapping, measuring, and

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[14] 'in the narrow sense, which refers to the ways in which Putin's regime has utilised new media, especially the internet, to manage new participatory democratic processes in the country' (Strukov 2012: 111).
[15] Rubinstein 2012.

analysing of massive datasets on social media use during the protest. The research attempts to sharpen the analytical presuppositions and find proof or negation of the sporadic facts. Within the general task of mapping different social media which are in a constant process of creation, tweets[16] written during three major protest actions were gathered and analysed:

on 15 September 2012	'March of Millions'
on 15 December 2012	'Freedom March'
on 13 January 2013	'March against Scoundrels'[17]

Empirical cases

The first stage of the empirical research examined the top trending hashtags on Russian Twitter during the marches in the expectation of finding relevant trends. This expectation was met: 5 trending hashtags on 15 September, 6 on 15 December and 4 on 13 January mentioned the march, as pictured on the screenshot taken at 6:30 p.m. on 15 September 2012. The screenshot shows the second most popular hashtag in Russia to be the 'rotten march', while 'march of invaders' was seventh, 'march of five thousand, laundering of millions' eighth, and 'march out of here' was the ninth most popular (Image 1):

Image 1. A screenshot of the 'Russia Trends' on Twitter as of 15 September 2012 at 6:30 p.m. of Moscow time:

Russia Trends · Change
#jedwardwassup
#тухлыймарш
#блогохипстотавновгороде
Jensen Ackles Is Our Idol
Сахарова
Санкт-Петербург
#ОккупантовМарш
#Марш5тысячОтмывМиллионов
#МаршОтсюда
#СамаяЭпичнаяФразаЖёлудя
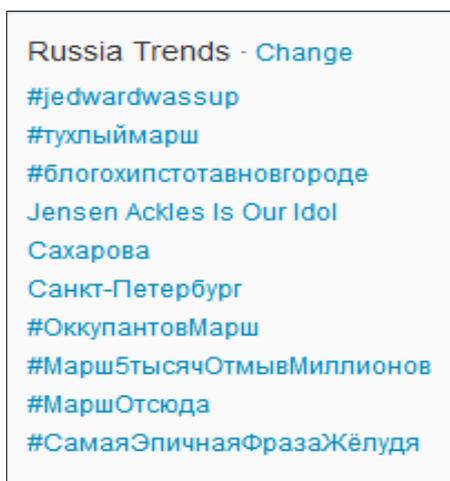
Source: https://twitter.com (accessed 15 September 2012)[18]

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[16] See Appendix 1 for information about the Russian internet penetration rate, the number of the internet users in Russia, the popularity of social media in Russia and of Twitter among them.

[17] See Appendix 2 for details of the 'Marches' in the development of the Russian anti-government protest movement 2011-2013.

[18] March related hashtags on this screenshot: number two – #marshmillionov ('marchofmillions', 'march of millions'), number seven – #okkupantovmarsh ('marchoftheinvaders', 'march of the invaders'), number eight – #march5tysiachotmyvmillionov ('marchoffivethousandslaunderingofmillions', 'march of five thousands, laundering of millions'), number nine – #marshotsiuda ('marchoutofthere', 'march out of there').

Tables 1.1 – 1.3 show all the hashtags related to the protest marches, in the order in which they appeared as 'Russia Trends' on Twitter during the period from 30 minutes before the march started until 30 minutes after the march finished (the march timetable is shown in the second top row, while the popularity rating of the march-related hashtags is given in the cells on the left. Irrelevant hashtags are not specified).

Table 1.1. 15 September 2012

	0:30 p.m.	1:30 p.m.	2:30 p.m.	3:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	6:30 p.m.
	1:00 p.m. start of the march						6:00 p.m. end
2	marshmillionov	marshmillionov	tukhlyimarsh	tukhlyimarsh	tukhlyimarsh	tukhlyimarsh	tukhlyimarsh
3				marshotsiuda		marsh5tysiachotmyvmillionov	
7							
8							
9				marsh5tysiachotmyvmillionov	marsh5tysiachotmyvmillionov		
10					marshotsiuda	okkupantovmarsh	

Source: Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa

Table 1.2. 15 December 2012

	0:30 p.m.	1:30 p.m.	2:30 p.m.	3:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	6:30 p.m.
	2:00 p.m. start of the march				4:30 p.m. end		
2			marshzapedofilov		marshzapedofilov		
3		marshzapedofilov	ostorozhnomarshpedofilov		ostorozhnomarshpedofilov		
4		ostorozhnomarshpedofilov	marshprotivpodletsov				
8			zakonpodletsov				
9		zakonpodletsov					

Source: Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa

Table 1.3. 13 January 2013

	0:30 p.m.	1:30 p.m.	2:30 p.m.	3:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	6:30 p.m.
	2:00 p.m. start of the march						6:00 p.m. end
3		iapoidu	15dekabria15sutok	protestzamiorz		konetsprotesta	
4		marshsvobody					
5				15dekabria15sutok			
6		lubianka			konetsprotesta		

Source: Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa

This survey of hashtags primarily proved that they had peaked in activity during the marches and is a precise mark of the intensity of the debates on Twitter. Secondly, it showed that these hashtags could be more or less clearly allocated to two semantic clusters:

a)   pro-opposition:

    #marchofmillions ('marshmillionov', 'march of millions')
    #Iwillgo ('Iapoidu','I will go')
    #freedommarch ('marshsvobody', 'Freedom march')
    #lubianka ('Lubianka'[19])
    #lawofscoundrels ('zakonpodletsov', 'law of scoundrels')
    #marchagainstscoundrers ('marshprotivpodletsov', 'march against scoun-
     drels')

b)   anti-opposition:

    #rottenmarch ('tuchlyimarsh', 'rotten march')
    #marchoutofthere ('marshotsiuda', 'march out of there')
    #marchoffivethousandslaunderingofmillions ('marsh5tysiachotmyvmillionov',
     'march of five thousands, laundering of millions')
    #marchofinvaders ('marshokkupantov', 'march of the invaders')
    #15December15daysinjail ('15dekabria15sutok', '15 December fifteen days
     in jail')
    #frozenprotest ('protestzamiorz', 'frozen protest')
    #endofprotest ('konetsprotesta', 'end of the protest')
    #marchofpaedophiles ('marshpaedofilov', 'march of paedophiles')
    #cautionpaedophilesmarch ('ostorozhnomarshpaedofilov', 'caution, march of
     paedophiles').

The definition of the (a) cluster as 'pro-opposition' is not entirely accurate; from a linguistic point of view three hashtags in this group convey only the name of the marches ('March of millions', 'Freedom march', 'March against scoundrels') and one of them simply names a square in Moscow where the march on December 15 took place. Only two hashtags in this group express the 'pro' attitude in a direct sense: an intention to go to the march ('I will go') and a criticism of the ban on Americans adopting Russian children ('law of scoundrels'). The names of the marches themselves, however, have quite strong emotional connotations, emphasising the large scale of the protest (in which 'millions' participate), criticising the regime over the lack of 'freedom', and calling the government 'scoundrels'; thus it was highly likely that these hashtags were used by the 'pro-opposition' side.

    These contrasted with the 'anti-opposition' hashtags which were deliberately offensive to the protests, calling them 'rotten', 'money laundering', 'leading to fifteen days in jail', or failed ('frozen', 'end of the protest'), as well as labelling the protesters as 'paedophiles' and 'invaders' who should 'march out of here'. Many of the anti-opposition hashtags were openly aggressive, while only two pro-opposition tags were of this kind ('law of the scoundrels' and 'march against scoundrels').

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[19] Lubianka is the popular name of Lubiansky square in Moscow in front of KGB building.

The next finding of this survey concerned differences in the timescale of activity between anti-opposition and pro-opposition hashtags: the latter being active before and at the beginning of the march, while the anti-opposition tags became active *after* the march had begun. This is seen, for example, in the timeline of the marches on 15 September (Table 1.1) and on 13 January (Table 1.3). However the march of 13 January did deviate slightly from this trend. The anti-opposition hashtags appeared before the start of the march, while the pro-opposition hashtags before the march were much less active (number 9 in the top trending hashtags) in comparison with two previous marches (number 2 on 15 September and numbers 3, 4, 6 on 15 December).

This could be interpreted as the result of the latest addition to the assortment of tools available for use against the protesters – the service ka-2.ru, currently being tested by members of Young Guard[20]. This new service allows thousands of real users (instead of bots which are easily recognizable) to send tweets on a certain topic in exchange for payment. The aim is to spam the protesters' twitter feeds and promote pro-Kremlin tweets to the top trending list in Russia and worldwide (Barabanov 2013). Alongside paid bloggers who wrote posts in *LiveJournal* about 'the march failure' the day before the march started, and posters online and offline (Image 2), ka-2 did much to discredit the march.

Image 2. (left) 'Caution! March of Paedophiles!' – stickers which were put up around Moscow (this expression then became a top-trending hashtag). The image (right) of a prominent Russian blogger Rustem Agadamov (Drugoi), who was recently accused of paedophilia by his ex-wife, appeared on Twitter in advance.
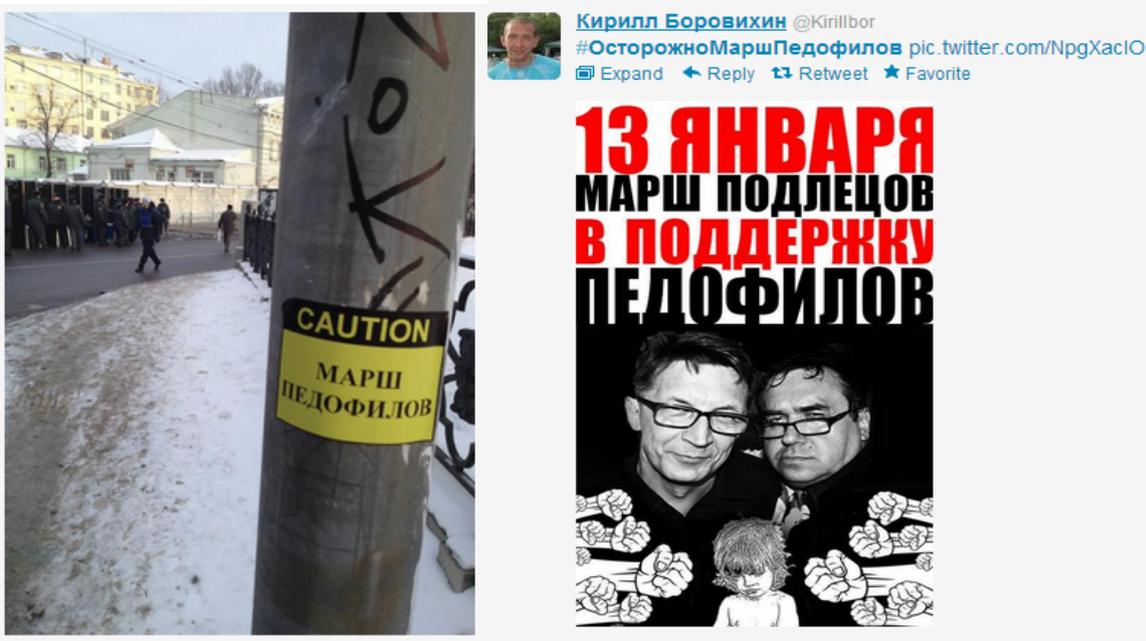
Source: https://twitter.com (accessed 12 January 2013).

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[20] "Molodaia Gvardiia" (a youth wing of the United Russia / Edinaia Rossiia party).

To summarize, the hashtags survey produced several findings:

- The march was discussed on Twitter.
- The discussion was split between those supporting the march (pro-opposition) and those against the march (anti-opposition).
- The anti-opposition side used more aggressive language.
- Twitter was used at different times by the two groups, with pro-opposition trends appearing before the marches, and anti-opposition trends coming later.
- Twitter was used more actively by the anti-opposition side: their hashtags were more numerous (nine in total, compared to the pro-opposition's six).

The pervasive use of Twitter by the anti-opposition side was ascertained during **the second stage of this research.** This time, the number of tweets with the top trending hashtags was counted (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of tweets with top trending hashtags counted separately.

	Number of tweets with top trending hashtags
15-Sep	**total number 45289**
#marchofmillions ('marshmillionov')	25102
Total pro-opposition	**25102**
#marchoffivethousandslaunderingoffivemillions ('marsh5tysiachotmyvmillionov')	1353
#rottenmarch ('tuchlyimarsh')	8875
#marchoutofthere ('marshotsiuda')	3544
#marchofinvaders ('marshokkupantov')	6415
Total anti-opposition	**20187**
15-Dec	**total number 20109**
#lubianka	2965
#Iwillgo ('iapoidu')	644
#freedommarch ('marshsbobody')	7564
Total pro-opposition	**11173**
#15december15daysinjail ('15dekabria15sutok')	3757
#frozenprotest ('protestzamiorz')	2791
#endoftheprotest ('konetsprotesta')	2388
Total anti-opposition	**8936**
13-Jan	**total number 31170**
#marchagainstscoundrels ('marshprotivpodletsov')	10229
#lawofscoundrels ('zakonpodletsov')	2338
Total pro-opposition	**12567**
#cautionmarchofpaedophiles ('ostorozhnomarshpaedofilov')	8958
#marchofpaedophiles ('marshpaedofilov')	9645
Total anti-opposition	**18603**

Source: Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa

The results partly contradict the conclusion of the hashtag analysis, according to which the anti-opposition movement was more active on Twitter. The second step of the survey relying not only on the hashtags but on the tweets themselves showed that for two marches on 15 September and 15 December the micro-blogging service was used more actively by the pro-opposition side. The number of tweets with pro-opposition hashtags was larger than the number of those with anti-opposition hashtags on 15 September and on 15 December (55% of 'pro-opposition' vs. 45% of 'anti-opposition'). For the last one from the three analysed marches – the march on 13 January – the number of tweets with anti-opposition hashtags became larger than the pro-opposition ones (40% to 60%) (Table 2).

These findings were then further checked during **the third stage of the empirical research** which examined all tweets relevant to the protests, written on the three days of the marches. In order to have this relevant dataset, the tweets comprising the word 'march' were collected. The word 'march' was chosen in expectation that its use in such short messages (140 characters) on the day of the march would very likely signify that this tweet is related to the march. Russian Yandex Blogs[21] was a major source (http://blogs.yandex.ru/) of this data. Yandex Blogs' 'advanced search' function enables a search of all publicly available[22] tweets on Russian Twitter and thus covers a large volume of Russian tweets[23]. The 'search by field' feature makes it possible to run separate searches across subsections of Russian social media ('blogs', 'forums', 'microblogs', 'blog posts', 'blog comments', 'all blogs and forums', 'popular blogs'); while the 'search by server' feature allows one to search only within twitter.com (or on 'lifejournal.com', 'liveinternet.ru', 'diary.ru'), and the 'search by data' feature limits the search results to a certain day (week, month, or given period of time). Thus, for this research task, Yandex Blogs returned all relevant tweets, in total (Yandex blogs, Search results):

on 15 September	25,664
on 15 December	5,220
on 13 January	21,325

Yandex Blogs serves as a reliable Twitter archiver, but has two limitations. The first is that Yandex shows the overall amount of tweets found for a given search (25,664; 5,220; 21,325 for this research task), but gives access to the full texts of no more than 2,000 tweets among them. To overcome this, it was considered that the number of tweets for 15 December gives an opportunity to avoid the limitation, since 2,000 tweets comprised almost 38 percent of all selected tweets for this day (5,220). The second limitation of Yandex is that it gives access only to the first 1,000 and the last 1,000 tweets from the all tweets which are found for a given search. For example, the first 1,000 of accessible tweets on 15 December finished with a tweet written at 2:16 p.m., and the last 1,000 begin with a tweet written at 6:16 p.m.. It was a

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[21] Yandex uses confusing terminology: 'Yandex Blogs' in fact includes not only blogs but also forums, microblogs, and social networks (though the latter are also referred to as 'microservices' in Yandex);

[22] 'Twitter is a markedly public medium: even though the messages can be protected as private, most users allow them to be openly accessible to everyone, including people who do not have Twitter accounts themselves' (Paulsen 2013: 83).

[23] 6 337 632 as of 4 July 2013.

major gap given that the largest actions in Moscow and St Petersburg started at 2:00 p.m. and continued until 6:00 p.m.. Fortunately, on December 15, Yandex gave access to the highly relevant tweets written just before the march and at its beginning, so, these tweets (191 totally) was chosen as the sample on the assumption that this would be sufficiently representative to check the findings of the previous two stages of this research. Then, the content analysis of these 191 tweets was undertaken and showed that their content featured various positions and views:

1. Praising the march ('What a wonderful march we've had', 'How many have come, how brave we are').

2. Inviting people to the march ('Come to the march!').

3. Expressing support for participants ('How I'd like to be in Moscow on the march').

4. Reporting individual participation ('I am just back from the march in Omsk, frozen but alive').

5. Criticising opposition leaders (accusing them of being paid by the U.S., or supported by the architects of the colour revolutions).

6. Criticising the march participants (as rich, slackers, hating Russia etc.).

7. Criticising the march as a whole (as sparsely attended, not supported by Russian citizens, paid for by Gosdep[24], misguided and ineffective as an instrument of protest; a carnival, show, circus etc.

8. Swearing about everything related to the march without having a reason for doing so.

9. Sharing information about the march route, time, weather cancellation; asking people where to find a live stream on the internet.

10. Sharing reports about marches in various towns, the arrests, and police violence in the form of video, photo, mainstream media or blog reports.

11. Mentioning some other 'march' ('Mendelsohn march' in a tweet about a wedding ceremony).

12. Unclear for coding ('It seems that there is an unsanctioned march of OMON and police in the centre. I'll go and see').

The semantic palette was more complicated for tweets than for hashtags, but two groups were recognizable and matched the findings of the hashtags survey: 'pro-opposition' (1-4) and 'anti-opposition' (5-8). The third large group (9-10) could be classified as 'informational' as the general message of the tweets belonging to this group was to share the information about the march in various forms. The interpretation of the each message in this group was difficult. The user who tweets: 'According the police, around fifty people took part in the 'Freedom march' in Tomsk' or 'There were arrests in St Petersburg' can be a protester, a slacktivist (Morozov), an opponent of the protesters who reports how scarcely attended or dangerous (i.e. leading to arrests) the march was, or just a user who tries to have more fol-

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[24] U.S. Department of State.

lowers by tweeting on the trending topic of the day. The fourth large group could be described as 'irrelevant to the analysis' (11-12) together with retweets by the same user[25] and automatically generated retweets.

This content analysis of tweets thus widened the purposes of Twitter use during the marches to cover 'pro-opposition', 'anti-opposition' and 'informational'. When all tweets were counted separately according to semantic cluster over the one hour period 13:15-14:16, which preceded and covered the start of the march (Table 3.1), their mapping showed that the pro-opposition tweets were more numerous before the march started and the anti-opposition tweets were less active. After the march started, the anti-opposition tweets became more numerous, and from this point on the pro-opposition tweets became less visible. This tendency was further confirmed with two additional control groups: the first and last hour of December 15 (Table 3.2), and the Table 3.3 visualizes the cross-group dynamic in a simpler way.

Table 3.1. Total number of tweets mentioning the word 'march', classified in semantic clusters, posted an hour preceding and during the start of the march on 15 December 2012.

Time zones on 15 Dec 2012	1:15-1:30	1:30-1:45	1:45-2:00	2:00-2:16
total number	59	45	46	100
irrelevant	14	10	11	58
not irrelevant	45	35	35	42
anti-opposition	6 (13%)	11 (31%)	13 (37%)	12 (29%)
pro-opposition	11 (24%)	7 (20%)	8 (23%)	8 (19%)
informational	28 (62%)	17 (49%)	14 (40%)	22 (52%)

Table 3.2. Total number of tweets mentioning the word 'march', classified in semantic clusters, posted during three analysed time periods in 15 December 2012.

Time zones on 15 Dec 2012	00:00-01:00	1:15-2:16	23:00 - 24:00
total number	57	250	128
irrelevant	16	93	43
not irrelevant	41	157	85
anti-opposition	7 (17%)	42 (27%)	24 (28%)
pro-opposition	16 (39%)	34 (22%)	10 (12%)
informational	18 (44%)	81 (52%)	51 (60%)

Sources: Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa

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[25] Retweets with multiple authorship was considered relevant.

Table 3.3. Dynamics of pro- and anti-opposition Twitter activities
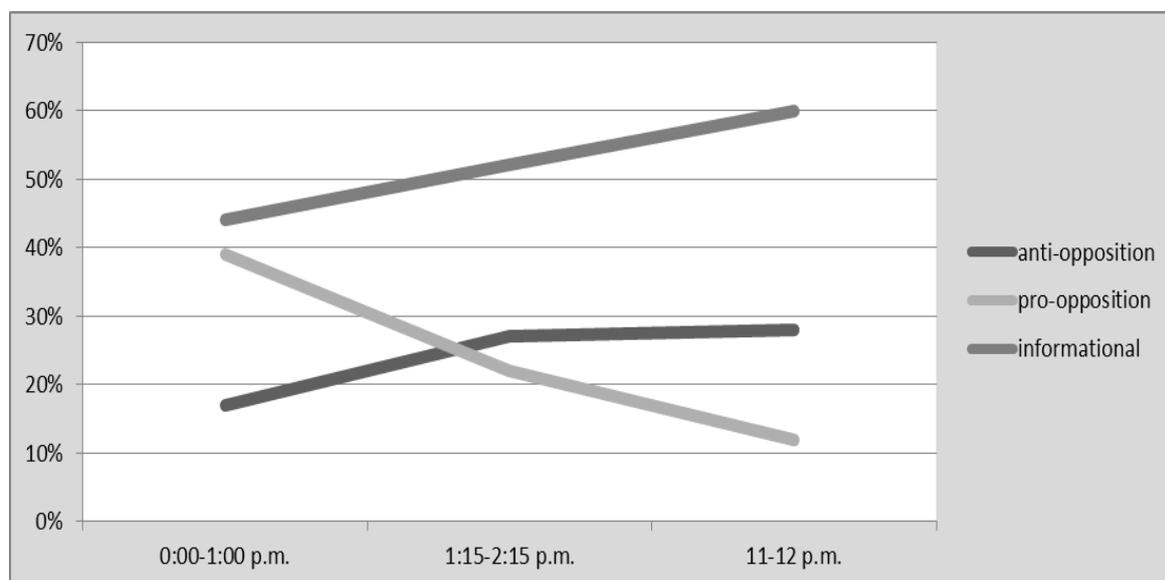
Source: Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa

Together with the previous two stages of this qualitative and quantitative analysis of tweets and hashtags, this survey showed that Twitter was used during the march for various purposes with at least three clearly recognisable: pro-opposition, anti-opposition and informational.

Any attempt to decide which of these three might be foremost in size or influence would not succeed. The group of informational tweets was the largest one, suggesting that the main aim of those tweeting about the protest was to share information about marches (for many reasons, some of which bear no significance beyond coding). But this group does merit further consideration. The lack of a clear 'pro' or 'anti' attitude does not indicate its absence. Digging deeper, however, gave more information about the tweeters' position – for example, looking at their profiles (though they are not usually detailed) and at journalistic and blog reports which these informational tweets share. Once informational tweets are added to the anti-opposition or pro-opposition group the statistical data changes dramatically.

However neither of the other two groups (pro-opposition and anti-opposition) could be said to be more important than the other. The data invalidated the presupposition about the use of social media to prevent people participating in marches. Evidence of a large concentration of the anti-opposition activity before the action, and blocked or spammed pro-opposition tweets, would be needed to sustain such an assumption, and this was not found. On the contrary, the material evidenced the scarcity of anti-opposition tweets and showed the huge volume of protest-supporting tags and tweets before the action. This can be explained by the theory that Twitter was not used in an organised fashion to interrupt the opposition's attempts to gather people to the action. Or, alternatively, it could be an effect of the protesters spamming the disruptive content and promoting the important (reported in, for example, Ser'gina 2011).

It is highly likely that the principal scenario of Twitter use during the actions was as follows. Before the marches the protesters actively used Twitter to gather people and express

support for those who are going to the march. The pro-opposition tweets become less active during the march, but over the whole day they were not significantly fewer in number than the anti-opposition tweets and were even greater than anti-opposition tweets on 15 September and on 15 December. During the marches, active attempts to discredit the protest and protesters increased and continued on after the march ended. The growing number of anti-opposition tweets towards the end of an action seemed to be a reaction to the scale of protest. Towards the end of the march the number of pro-opposition tweets sharply decreased but the number of anti-opposition tweets rose. By the end of the march and immediately after it, the pro-opposition hashtags were almost non-existent, but anti-opposition ones remained very active even on the following day (Images 3 and 4).

Thus, Twitter was used at different times by these groups, with pro-opposition use prevailing before the marches, and anti-opposition use coming later. Altogether they appear to be separate and not affecting each other.

This systematic analysis confirms preliminary results collected sporadically during previous marches (Nikiporets-Takigawa 2012). For instance, before the massive March of Millions on 12 June 2012, the number one 'trend' on Twitter in Russia was #vsenapushku ('Come to Pushka'). There were no anti-opposition hashtags in the top-trending list before or during the march. Given these results, an increase in the use of Twitter by the anti-opposition side is evident and the most evident in the data for 13 January 2013.

Image 3. A screenshot of the 'Russia Trends' in Twitter as of 13 January 2013 at 7:30 p.m. Moscow time:[26]
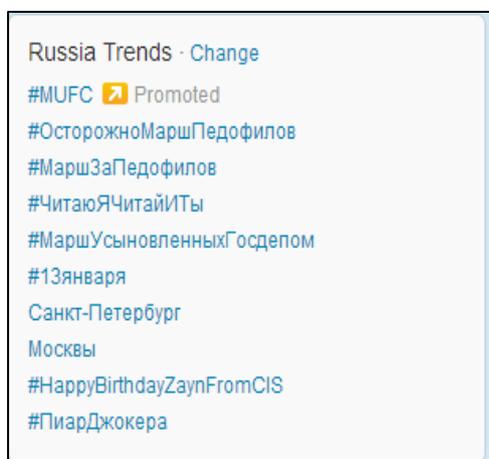
Source: https://twitter.com (accessed 13 January 2013).

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[26] March related hashtags on this screenshot: number two - #ostorozhnomarshpaedofilov ('cautionpaedophilesmarch', 'caution, march of paedophiles'); number three - #marshzapaedofilov ('marchforpaedophiles', 'march for paedophiles'), number five - #marshusynovlennychgosdepom ('marchofadoptedbygosdep', 'march of adopted by Gosdep').

Image 4. A screenshot of the 'Russia Trends' in Twitter as of 14 January 2013 at 8:30 p.m. Moscow time:[27]
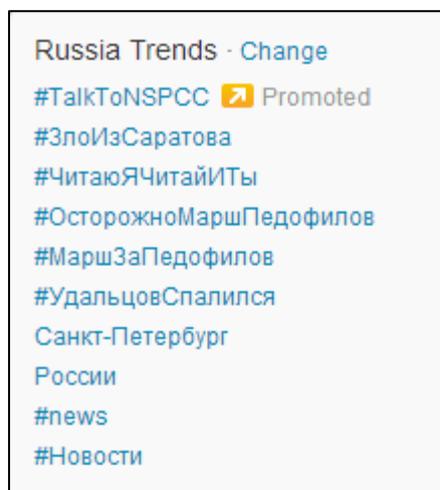
Source: https://twitter.com (accessed 14 January 2013).

This leads to several conclusions.

Conclusions

Firstly, this paper rejects any one-sided understanding of the role of social media in the protest movement and considers attempts of this kind to be a great simplification. The interplay between Twitter and the protests is multifaceted, with Twitter simultaneously playing neutral, supportive, organizational and destructive roles.

Secondly, each of these roles come into play in differing time periods during the action, which brings into question the possibility of generalising the role of social media in such a situation, highlighting the necessity of specifying each role identifiable at each particular time during the action.

This research was limited to Twitter. But Twitter is only one form of many social media platforms. Can these findings be extrapolated to all social media? All the empirical findings can be specific only to Twitter and have nothing in common with, say, discussion of the protest on forums or on Facebook. Thus the database should be extended by further studies which examine more data from other social media - only then is it possible to draw more general conclusions about the connection between social media and protest. This, then, is the third conclusion of this research.

Can these conclusions be extended to other protests where Twitter featured heavily? Misnikov argues that 'online political discussions in Russian internet forums can be analysed as forms of democratic deliberation' in the Habermasian spirit (Misnikov 2012: 5). This does

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[27] March related hashtags on this screenshot: number four - #ostorozhnomarshpaedofilov ('cautionpaedophilesmarch', 'caution, march of paedophiles'); number five - #marshzapaedofilov ('marchforpaedophiles', 'march for paedophiles').

not mean, however, that the findings for three forums can be extrapolated to all Russian forums. The data on discussions on Russian, Ukrainian forums (Nikiporets-Takigawa 2013a, 2013b) do not always prove Misnikov's conclusions. Moreover, this data shows us that various forums differ considerably. They feature differing threads, varying intensities of horizontal links between participants, differing topics of interest, forum members, and many other factors. The same can be found for the connection between Twitter and the Russian protest movement; thus again the generalisability of the findings is seriously questioned.

Do these empirical findings mean that the next case (the next large pro-opposition action is scheduled for the Spring under the name 'March against torturers') will not bring new results, and may reject or even challenge existing findings? Social media are changing rapidly. The protest movement is also in perpetual change. This leads to the fourth conclusion, which represents a challenge for researchers of social media and protest: the connection between two clearly defined but constantly developing subjects cannot be concluded upon decisively, but requires on-going attention and analysis.

Which methods can best develop an adequate understanding of the connection between social media and protest? The laborious but rewarding method of mapping every case in detail resulted in the in-depth findings of this paper. All dimensions of the data are relevant and necessary for a comparative approach. The issue of timing is important here. The fluidity and changing nature of social media in relation to protest became evident only from the juxtaposition of tweets and hashtags, and certain periods of time. If this timeline were ignored, the findings would be different: we could claim that the role of Twitter is multifaceted but we would not know that this is less pronounced in each period of the marches, as pro-opposition Twitter use is more active before, and anti-opposition after. Twitter's constant development and improvement can reflect the results - here the technical dimension should be reassessed for each further case. And of course it is important to avoid any speculative claims not sustained by a large volume of evidence. This is a big challenge, but in the long-term, if this research is systematically and accurately undertaken the findings could bring a remarkably clear understanding of the specifics and potential of the implications of social media in protest movements.

This paper discusses not only the methods needed to understand the connection between social media and protest, but also raises the question of a suitable theoretical framework.

The analytical paradigm used here deliberately moves beyond the simplified or unambiguous assessment so characteristic of the global debate on the role of the internet and social media in recent movements, uprisings and rebellions. This framework enables an analysis of the many functions of social media and their mutual dynamics, on the premise that this produces a more detailed understanding of the functions of social media. Within this paradigm it is not necessary to argue about whether social media having a determining role in protest movement, as such debates are unhelpful here. The varied uses of Twitter during the protest marches are evidence of the futility of seeking an answer to this question.

This empirical research strengthens existing assumptions about the revolutions as simultaneously 'tweeted' (Lotan et. al 2011) and undermined through the very same medium; social media play a supportive role in protest, being a powerful tool for the dissemination of any kind of information, but for the same reason are simultaneously able to discredit and de-

stroy the protest movement. We can then also see to what extent the distribution of these roles depends on each certain case. Data gathered during the next large pro-opposition event in Russia will enhance the understandings pursued by this research.

Appendix

Appendix 1. The popularity of the internet, social media, and Twitter among other social media in Russia.

Since 2007 the number of Russians who access the internet daily has grown by 10-15 percent ('The Internet World Statistics', 2011). As of Spring 2011 (before the Russian protests) the number was almost 40 million ('Proniknovenie Interneta v Rossii', 2011). In autumn of 2012, 52 percent of the total population of Russian adults (61.1 million) were using the internet, and of these 40 percent (46.8 million) used it daily ('Internet v Rossii', 2012; 'Razvitie interneta v regionakh' 2012). Social networking is highly popular in Russia: Russia has one of the most highly engaged global social networking markets with visitors spending an average of 10.4 hours on social networking sites per person per month (in comparison with the worldwide average of 5.7 and the US average of 6.9. hours per person ('It's a Social World', 2011). As of January 2013, Alexa places Twitter as number 15 among the top 500 sites in Russia after Yandex, Vkontakte, Google.ru, portal Mail.Ru, Google.com, YouTube, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Wikipedia, LiveInternet.ru, LiveJournal.com, Web-SERV uCoz, Rambler, rutracker.org. (The sites in the top-ranked lists are ordered by their 1-month Alexa traffic rank. The 1-month rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and pageviews over the past month. The site with the highest combination of visitors and pageviews is ranked #1). **Sources:** 'Top Sites in Russia' (2013); Gavriliuk (2011); 'It's a Social World' (2011); 'Internet v Rossii' (2012); 'Razvitie interneta v regionakh' (2012).

Appendix 2. Data of the opposition marches in the development of the Russian anti-government protest movement of 2011-2013.

Date	May 6, 2012
Place	Moscow
Number of participants	8,000 (according to the police) to 20-100,000 (according to protesters).
Note	The 'March of millions'. The first action which was called a 'march'. As several participants were arrested and faced criminal charges for assaulting the police, *Freedom for political prisoners* became a new slogan during subsequent rallies.

Date	June 12, 2012
Place	Moscow
Number of participants	18,000 (police) to 80,000-100,000 (protesters).
Note	The 'March of millions'. The first rally after the authorities began to respond with harsher measures towards the opposition, including increased fines of up to $10,000 for violating protest laws (McGuiness 2012), harassment and searches of the homes of prominent activists. These new tactics of repression angered protesters and trigger associations with Stalin's secret police in the 1930s, and the Gestapo. The 'March' drew thousands of people, and attendees wrote on Twitter: '*So many have come! I am surprised! It seems that the searches were good ads*'!

Date	September 15, 2012 13:00 - 18:00
Place	Moscow and several towns across Russia
Number of participants	15,000 (police) to 150,000-200,000 (protesters), 'White calculator' data is 14,000.
Note	The "March of the Millions". The new participants in this rally: trade unions of medical workers, educational professionals. New slogans: social reforms, communal prices cuts.

Date	December 15, 2012 14:00 - 18:00
Place	Moscow and other Russian cities
Number of participants	700 (police) to 5000 (protesters), 'White calculator' data is 700.
Note	The 'Freedom March'. It was an important march to symbolically celebrate one year from the beginning point of the Russian protest on 4 December 2011. This was the first unsanctioned march as the organizers could not agree on the route of the rally with the city council. The opposition did not change their plan to finish the action at Lubianka and invited people just to come to Lubianka and lay flowers at the monument to the victims of political repression. The march was called 'the largest unsanctioned action in the last twenty years in Russia', and also took place in other Russian cities, for example in Irkutsk in -30C (in Moscow it was -16C).

Date	January 13, 2013 14:00 - 16:30.
Place	Moscow
Number of participants	9,500 (police) to 100,000-150,000 (protesters), 'White calculator' data is 25,000, the precise number is 24,474.
Note	The 'March against scoundrels'. A protest against the legal ban on Americans adopting Russian children. Many held photographs of pro-Kremlin legislators who backed the ban with the word 'Shame!' scrawled across them. The 'new energy of the protest' and 'many new participants' were mentioned by many reporters, observers and participants after this march - the first of 2013, unsanctioned and considerably larger than previous ones.

Sources: Baczynska et. al (2013); 'Skol'ko bylo uchastnikov' (2012): 'V Moskve proshla' (2012), Rain TV online live translations. It is not an easy task to find reliable data of offline participation since the exact numbers are exaggerated by the opposition and falsified by the government ('Chislennost' marsha millionov' 2012). One reliable toll was created in September: 'White calculator' / 'Belyi shchotchik', named after the Russian protest movement key defining symbol and developed by a mathematician Anatoly Kats computer programme for analysing the number of participants in rallies on the base of the data of video screening which gave the precise numbers for three last marches (Dozhd' Television Channel 2013). The data of this 'calculator' was used in this table. The accuracy of the 'White calculator' is proven by a new additional source, a blogger who counted the number of participants with 5 percent accuracy error, his result is 24,474 ('Dmitrii Ternovskii poschital' 2012).

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