

Social Networking on Runet: The View from a Moving Train

KARINA ALEXANYAN
Columbia University, USA

Any discussion about the parameters of online social networking is like trying to describe a landscape from a moving train as the view keeps changing as one is attempting to grasp it. This article attempts to capture this shifting landscape by synthesizing data about the nature, parameters, and demographics of Russian social media use from four major sources into one relatively cohesive “snapshot” of a moment in time; in this case: Spring 2009.

Towards that end, this paper examines public opinion, data mining, and marketing research by four international organizations: FOM (Public Opinion Foundation), Yandex, Universal McCann, and Comscore. These were selected for their authoritativeness, relevance, and timeliness. The Russian Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) has been conducting nationwide surveys in Russia since 1992, with a specific focus on internet penetration and use since 2001. The data in this paper is based on their most recent “Internet in Russia” Report, released in March 2009 (FOM 2009). Yandex is Russia’s leading search engine, as well as a key index of news and blogging sites, combining characteristics of the search engine Google and the blogosphere index Technorati, as well as features unique to Yandex. In 2006, the Yandex research division began compiling reports based on their extensive data, and the figures in this paper reference their two most recent “Trends in the Blogosphere” Reports (Yandex 2008; Yandex 2009). Universal McCann (UMC) and Comscore are US based companies with an international digital media focus, conducting digital market research on a global scale. The data in this article is based on UMC’s Social Media Study Wave 3, released in March 2008 (Wave 4 is imminent), which surveys the social media habits of 17,000 “active internet users” in 29 countries and Comscore’s July, 2009 measurement of Russia’s social networking sites and audience (UMC 2008; Comscore 2009).

The Big Picture

When considering Internet penetration and other demographics in Russia, two elements are important: the subtleties of what constitutes a “user” and the disparities between Moscow and the rest of Russia.

The simple term “Internet user” has multiple layers. One aspect is Internet penetration, or what percentage of the population goes online. Another aspect is frequency of use, both among the general populace and among Internet users themselves. In Russia, the figures are

telling: while Internet penetration is not deep, i.e., those who do go online do so relatively frequently. And, as usual, the numbers in Moscow are at least double the national average.

As recently as March 2009, in the Russian Public Opinion Foundation's (FOM) most recent report on "The Internet in Russia," the term "Internet users" referred to anyone who goes online at least once in six months. The definition is unnecessarily generous, because the difference between these users and those that go online at least once per month is not significant (37.5 million or 33 percent to 35 million or 31 percent, respectively). Similarly, the numbers for "active" users, i.e., those that go online at least once a week, are not much less (30 million or 27%). The break comes when one focuses on daily users, who, at 20.6 million, make up only 18 percent of the population. In other words, among Russian Internet users, a large majority (80%) do so at least once per week; a smaller majority (55%) go online daily (see Table 1).

In Moscow, daily users are far more common, making up 48 percent of the capital's adults, far above the national average of 18 percent. Among Moscow's Internet users, a full 92 percent are online at least weekly, and 80 percent go online every day. In fact, while Moscow has only 8 percent of the country's adults, it has 14 percent of its average Internet users and a full one fifth (20%) of its daily users (see Table 1).

Table 1. Internet Use and Frequency: Russia versus Moscow

	Adult population (Russia)	% of Russia's adult population	% of Russia's Internet users	Adult population (Moscow)	% of Moscow's adult pop.	% of Moscow's Internet users
Total pop.	112.5 mil			8.8 mil		
General Users — Over 18, go online at least once						
In six mos.	37.5 mil	33%	100%	5.3 mil	60%	100%
In a month	~ 35 mil	31%	93%	5.1 mil	58%	96%
Active Users — Over 18, go online at least once:						
Per week	30.4 mil	27%	81%	4.9 mil	56%	92%
Per day	20.6 mil	18%	55%	4.2 mil	48%	80%

Source: FOM, Internet in Russia, Special Report, Spring 2009

At the national level, Russia's current Internet penetration of 33 percent can be compared to Brazil's, for instance, which is at around 29 percent. In contrast, Internet penetration in Moscow is currently at European levels (approximately 60%) and slightly below that of the U.S., which is above 70 percent (FOM 2009). As a comparison, in the U.S., Internet penetration was at 35 percent (roughly Russia's current level) in 1998 and reached Moscow's current level, 60 percent, in 2002 (PEW 2009).

These numbers highlight, among other things, the danger of a common error: extrapolating from Moscow to "all of Russia." Moscow may hold a central position as the nucleus of political and economic power in Russia, but, in terms of Internet use, it certainly does not represent the country as a whole.

Furthermore, while a national Internet penetration of about one-third may not seem impressive, the rate of growth in the Russian Federation has been steady and exponential, especially outside Moscow (during the years between 2002 and 2009, the percentage of Internet users increased from around 5 percent to around 30 percent). In Moscow the pace was a bit slower, but still impressive, with penetration more than doubling, rising from 27 percent to 60 percent (FOM 2009). As a comparison, in the United States during that same time period, i.e., 2002 to 2009, Internet penetration increased less than 20 percent (PEW 2009).

Socio-economic demographics paint a similar picture, influencing perceptions of “Internet boom” versus “Internet hype.” In Russia, as elsewhere in the world, the higher the income and education, the higher the rate of Internet access and use. For example, while only 17 percent of Russia’s total population has advanced degrees, a majority of them, almost 65 percent, are Internet users. Moscow, of course, is more educated than the rest of Russia: a full 43 percent of Muscovites have advanced degrees, and 78 percent of those are online. For roughly 70 percent of the population, those with a secondary education and a high school diploma, Internet penetration is below the national average, ranging from 30 percent to 22 percent. And of the remaining 12 percent who have not completed high school, only 5 percent are Internet users (See Table 2). In other words, for the urban educated elite, it may seem that virtually everyone they know is online, and virtually all the time; however, for many others, the Internet is categorized as a desired “luxury item,” or even something that has no significant relevance to daily life.

Table 2. Education and Internet Penetration, Russia and Moscow

Education	Russia	Moscow	Monthly Internet users (Russia)	Monthly Internet users (Moscow)
Advanced Degree	17%	43%	63%	76%
Some College	39%	31%	30%	48%
High School Education	32%	21%	22%	41%
Less than High School	12%	6%	5%	12%

Source: FOM, Internet in Russia, Special Report, Spring 2009.

Definitions and Distinctions

Narrowing the focus to those 35 million people across vast expanse that is the Russian Federation who access the Internet at least once a month, (FOM 2009) it becomes clear that not only is the social media landscape in constant flux, but the various categories—blogs, online journals, friends, communities, social networks and mainstream media—overlap and converge in different ways in Russia than they do elsewhere.

In the U.S., for instance, blogs could be divided into public and private, with a distinction based on content, focus, and intended audience. Public blogs are usually topical, and aimed at a wide audience, while private blogs are more like online journals, with a personal focus and a narrower group of viewers or readers. American blogs have a certain typical structure, with a static blogroll of links identifying what or whom the blogger reads, and a dynamic series of posts and comments.

In this context, the distinction between blogs and social networking sites is relatively clear: one group is for spreading information, whether private or public, and the other is for connecting with friends and communities of like-minded thinkers. According to the US based blogosphere index Technorati, lines may blur, but not between blogs and social networking sites, but rather between blogs and mainstream media:

As the Blogosphere grows in size and influence, the lines between what is a blog and what is a mainstream media site become less clear. Larger blogs are taking on more characteristics of mainstream sites and mainstream sites are incorporating styles and formats from the Blogosphere (Technorati, State of the Blogosphere 2008).

The Russian “Webscape”

The Russian landscape is quite different, and the categories have different connotations. A case in point: in the detailed quarterly reports on the Russian blogosphere that Yandex has been issuing since 2006, the terms “blog” and “online journal” are entirely synonymous, “friends” are interchangeable with “readers,” and “communities” are included in the total blog count (Yandex 2009).

This language reflects the global predominance of personal blogs, ignored by the emphasis on public blogs in the Technorati quote, above. According to a global Social Media Study by Universal McCann, 64 percent of active Internet users worldwide write and read personal or diary blogs (Universal McCann 2008). At the same time, there are additional historical and cultural factors that make the Russian situation unique. Russian “blogging” began in the early 2000s with LiveJournal (LJ), a site which continues to dominate the Russian blogosphere. LiveJournal does not follow the traditional blogging model, but is rather a social media hybrid that combines features of both blogs and social networking sites such as personal diary entries, blog posts, comments, communities, and friendship networks.

In its early days, most journals on LJ were like the public blogs in the U.S., kept by a veritable “Who’s Who” of literati, with friends lists that often numbered over 1000. These lists represented subscribers, or regular readers, rather than friends, creating a virtual listing of the blogger’s “fan base.” In a 2007 article on Russian blogging for *The Nation*, Moscow News editor Anna Arutunyan describes Russia’s blogosphere: “What for Americans is an electronic diary accessible to a few chosen acquaintances became for Russians a platform for forging thousands of interconnected virtual friends” (Arutunyan 2007). Although in more recent years this scenario has changed, and the average number of “friends” has dropped considerably, the central assumption still exists that in the Russian blogosphere, “friends” are readers, not friends; hence the interchangeability of the terms “friend” and “reader” in Yandex’s most recent, Spring 2009 Blogosphere Report: “The average personal blog is read by 18 people and the average community has 112 bloggers. Only 2 percent of bloggers have over 100 friends, and 0.2 percent more than 500” (Yandex 2009; author’s translation).

It is additionally telling that the average number of “friend/readers” varies significantly by gender and age. So, for example, while the national average is 18 “friend/readers,” men usually have 21, while women average 15. The number of friend/readers grows in proportion to the age of the blogger, so that while 18-27 year olds have fewer friends than average, and

those between 28-37 have around the average number, those over 38 average significantly higher (24 to 28 friends) (See Table 3). One might deduce that the older group is more likely to view and use LJ in its original form—as a public platform—and hence be more likely to skew towards “readers” rather than “friends”.

Table 3. Average Number of Friends/Readers

All Bloggers	18
Men	21
Women	15
Adults, age 18-22	11
Adults, age 23-27	16
Adults, age 28- 37	19
Adults, age 38-47	27.5
Adults, age 48- 52	24

Source: Yandex, “Trends in the Blogosphere,” Spring 2009.

Currently, almost 3,000 blogs in Russia have over 1,000 reader/friends, and there are 40 bloggers whose online diaries have over 10,000 “friends” (Yandex 2009). These top blogs are regularly listed on the Yandex Blog Search Page:

Figure 1. Screenshot of Yandex Blog Search Page.

The screenshot displays the Yandex Blog Search Page interface. At the top, it features a section titled "Самое популярное и обсуждаемое в интернете" (Most popular and discussed in the internet). Below this, there are three columns of results: "Сервисы" (Services), "Блоги" (Blogs), and "Запросы" (Queries). The "Сервисы" column lists various blogging platforms like LiveJournal, Blogi@Mail.Ru, and LiveInternet. The "Блоги" column lists individual bloggers with their names and follower counts. The "Запросы" column lists search terms like "Дмитрий Хачковский" and "усейн болт".

Below the main results, there are sections for "Сервисы микроблогов" (Microblogging services), "Фильмы" (Movies), "Сериалы" (TV Series), "Выставки" (Exhibitions), and "Театры" (Theaters). The "Сервисы микроблогов" section lists services like Blogi@Mail.Ru and Miroblogi na QIP.ru. The "Фильмы" section lists movies like "Бросок кобры" and "Сумерки". The "Сериалы" section lists TV series like "Джонни Д" and "Район №9". The "Выставки" section lists exhibitions like "Бесславные ублюдки" and "Бруно". The "Театры" section lists theaters like "Лопухи".

On the right side of the page, there is a section titled "Популярные записи" (Popular posts) with a sub-section "Сводный рейтинг" (Summary rating). Below this, there are several filters and options, including "По количеству ссылок" (By number of links), "По комментариям" (By comments), and "По посещаемости" (By popularity). There is also a section for "Владельцу блога" (Blog owner) with options like "Добавить в поиск блог или форум" (Add to search blog or forum) and "Кнопка «Читать в Яндекс.Ленте»" (Button «Read in Yandex.Lenta»).

Source: <http://blogs.yandex.ru/> (accessed August 15, 2009)

Russia’s top four “blogging platforms” (LiveInternet, Ya.ru, Blog.Mail.ru and LiveJournal) host nearly 70 percent of all blogs, and all emulate the hybrid LiveJournal model (Yandex

2009).¹ Acting like social networks, they all provide “friend lists” and the option to join communities/groups and share images, video, and audio. According to Yandex, these groups and communities are also included in the “blog” category. So for instance, in its Spring 2009 Report, Yandex claims that the Russian blogosphere contains 7.4 million blogs, comprised of 6.9 personal journals and over 500,000 communities (Yandex 2009).

Pure social networking platforms emerged more recently, in about 2006, and were essentially modelled on their U.S. counterparts, namely Classmates and Facebook. These differ from the blogging platforms in that, by not catering to extended blog/diary posts, they focus primarily only on locating, reconnecting with, and compiling lists of (actual) friends, participating in groups and communities, and sharing images, video, and audio. In the case of these social networking sites, “friends” are indeed friends, and not simply readers of one’s posts and diary entries.

Russia—The World’s Most Engaged Social Networkers?

In July of 2009, Comscore released a report claiming “Russia has World’s Most Engaged Social Networking Audience” (Comscore, 2009). According to the report, Russians spend more time on social networking sites than anyone else in the world, scroll through pages faster, and ultimately rack up more page views than any other nation. Russians’ monthly average of 6.6 hours spent on social networking sites, viewing 1,300 pages at a rate of 3.3 pages per minute, far exceeds the global average of 3.7 hours and 525 page views at a rate of 2.3 pages per minute. The average American, in contrast, is quite slow, spending only 4.2 hours online, and viewing a comparatively small 477 pages at a rate of less than two pages per minute (Comscore, 2009).

Table 4. Internet Users and Social Networkers

	Internet Users	Social Networkers	Percentage
World, over 15*	1.1 billion	734 million	67%
Russia, over 15*	32 million	19 million	59%
Russia, over 18 [†]	35 million	19 million	54%

Source: Comscore 2009* and FOM 2009[†]

While this distinction may seem prestigious, it is somewhat misleading. It does *not* mean that Russia has proportionately more social networkers. In fact, according to Comscore, the 19 million Russians who have visited at least once social networking site in the last month make up 59 percent of Russia’s 32 million monthly Internet users; this is still below the global average of 67 percent (Comscore 2009). Using FOM’s measurement of 35 million monthly Internet users, the percentage goes down to 54 percent (see Table 4). Ultimately, the data only indicates that those Russians who use social networking sites are quite infatuated with them, and that they spend a great deal of time zipping through large numbers of pages.

¹ Blog.Mail.ru has a bit of a different history, as it began as a popular, web-based, free email service called Mail.ru, which later added other features/platforms, including Blog.Mail.ru for blogging and “My World” for social networking.

The Importance of Being Active

Yandex's Spring 2009 Blogosphere Report lists 7.4 million blogs, comprised of 6.9 million "personal journals" and over 500,000 communities (Yandex 2009). This number is almost double the figure recorded in Spring 2008, when Yandex tallied 3.4 million blogs (Yandex 2008). Based on 35 million monthly Internet users in Russia (FOM 2009), one could surmise from these numbers that one in five people have a blog.

The number of blogs, however, means almost nothing if they are initiated and then dropped. So, for example, in the most recent data, the number of "active blogs"—generously defined as those with at least five posts, and which have been updated at least once in last three months—is less than one million (890,000), which would bring the number of bloggers down to less than one in 35 Internet users. Furthermore, while 890,000 blogs is 130,000 more than was the case a year ago, it is nevertheless a mere 12 percent of all blogs (Yandex 2009). In other words, 88 percent of all Russian blogs have been abandoned (see Table 5).

While the number of blogs keeps growing, the proportion of active blogs continues to decline. A year ago, active blogs were at 20 percent of the total, and two years ago half of all blogs were active. Yandex explains this phenomenon by stating that "seven, eight years ago, when 'electronic diaries' first appeared, there were few bloggers, but they wrote regularly and many of them keep journals to this day. In the past three years, having one's own journal has become fashionable. The number of bloggers has sharply increased, but the percentage of those who write regularly has gone down" (Yandex 2009, 2). In other words, the number of people "experimenting" with blogging has been increasing more quickly than the number of active bloggers. Consequently, the portion of people who "stick with it" has decreased.

Table 5. Total Blogs versus Active Blogs

Blog hosting	Total Blogs	Percent of all blogs (7.4 million)	Active Blogs	Percent of all active blogs (890,000)
LiveJournal.com	981,000	13%	250,000	28%
Blogs.Mail.ru	1,323,000	18%	200,000	22%
Ya.ru	583,000	8%	80,000	9%
LiveInternet.ru	1,960,000	26%	75,000	8%
SUBTOTAL	4,847,000	65%	605,000	67%

Source: Yandex "Trends in the Blogosphere" 2009

According to Yandex data, the top four blogging platforms host 65 percent of all blogs and 67 percent of all active blogs. LiveJournal commands only 13 percent of all blogs, but the greatest percentage, almost 30 percent, of all active ones. This is consistent with LJ's audience numbers, which, at 8.7 million per month, constitute over a quarter of the Russia's monthly Internet users (See Table 6). The other ratios are not as consistent. Blogs.Mail.ru contains 18 percent of all blogs and 22 percent of all active ones, but attracts only about 14 percent of Russia's Internet audience (See Tables 5 and 6). LiveInternet has the most blogs total (more than 25%), but a great majority of them are inactive. Despite hosting only eight

percent of all active blogs, LiveInternet attracts 17 percent of the country's monthly Internet users (see Table 6).

User Stats and User Habits

According to Comscore, 19 million of Russia's monthly Internet users have visited at least one social networking site during the month of April 2009. Judging by the numbers shown in Table 6, they usually visit more than one, as the total monthly audience for the top three social networking sites alone (Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, and "My World" on Mail.Ru) is over 28 million. Table 6 combines monthly audience numbers for the top blogging and social networking sites in Russia as provided in the Spring 2009 Comscore Report and the Spring 2009 Yandex Blogosphere Report.

In terms of popularity, social networking sites are ahead of most blogging sites, with the critical exception of LiveJournal. The social networking service Vkontakte, modeled on Facebook, is by far the most popular site, attracting 40-45 percent of Russia's Internet users. However, if one considers Mail.ru to be a single site, with two interconnected services—blogging and social networking—its total audience rises to 11 million, which is roughly one-third of the monthly users. LiveJournal is by far the most popular blogging site, attracting more than quarter of Russia's Internet users. The social networking site Odnoklassniki, modelled on Classmates, follows close behind with almost a quarter of the users (See Table 6).

Table 6. Blog/Social Networking Sites and Audience Numbers

Blog Hosting /Social Networking Sites	Monthly audience	Percentage of Russia's monthly users (32-35 million)
Vkontakte.ru	14.3 million	40-45%
Live Journal	8.7 million	25-27%
Odnoklassniki.ru	7.8 million	22-24%
Mail. Ru—My World	6.3 million	18-20%
Live Internet	5.6 million	16-17.5%
Blogs.Mail.ru	4.7 million	13-14%
Ya.Ru	Under 3 million	Less than 9%

Source: Comscore, 2009 and Yandex 2009

Another source of data on bloggers and social networkers is a March, 2008 report on Global Social Media, published by Universal McCann (UMC). The report presents the results of a survey of global "active users," i.e., 17,000 people from 29 countries, including Russia, who go online at least every other day. Among other things, the report explores what percentage of its respondents from each country have ever read a blog, written in blog or created a profile on a social networking site.

UMC applied the percentages from its own survey to existing population and Internet penetration data from various external sources to come up with final numbers of active users in each category. The data that UMC aggregated from various outside sources for 2008 is problematic in that it differs quite substantially from data taken directly from FOM's reports.

FOM's numbers for Internet penetration and "active" users in 2008 are significantly higher than those provided by UMC. Nevertheless, if one assumes that UMC's survey data is essentially sound, we can still extrapolate from those percentages to create a range of internet use statistics.

Using the percentages from the UMC survey data, Table 7 illustrates the differences in total numbers of Internet users, bloggers, and social networkers, based on UMC calculations and FOM data, and provides a comparison with the U.S.

Table 7. Activities of Active Internet Users: Russia and the United States, Spring 2008

Source: Universal McCann*, Global Social Media Study, 2008 and FOM, "Internet in Russia" 2009

	RUSSIA			UNITED STATES	
	Percent of all active Internet users* who:	Internet users, 2008*	Daily Internet users, 2008†	Percent of all active Internet users* who:	Active Internet users*
Use the Internet	100%	8.6 million	15.7 million	100%	100 million
Read a blog	70.8%	6.1 million	11 million	60.3%	60.3 million
Started a Blog	28%	2.5 million	4.4 million	26%	26.4 million
Have posted a profile on a new social network	71%	6.1 million	11 million	43%	43 million

Population and Internet Users

It is important to note that, based on what we know about the growth in popularity of blogging and especially social networking over the past year in Russia, the numbers in this report, even though they are only a year old, should only be considered helpful starting points.

For instance, UMC lists total Internet penetration in Russia in 2008 at 19.8 percent, as opposed to FOM's 29 percent in the spring of 2008, which rose to 33 percent one year later. Similarly, UMC estimates the number of "active" users (at least every other day) in Russia in 2008 at 8.6 million—far less than FOM's 15.7 million daily users in 2008—up to 20.6 million in the spring of 2009. The same UMC report lists global "active" users (at least every other day) in 2008 at 475 million (as compared, for example, with the 1.1 billion people who go online at least once a month in 2009, according to Comscore) and estimates only 100 million "active" users in the U.S., one third of the number of "average" users (UMC 2008).

Reading Blogs

According to the report, among those “active” users surveyed, 70.8 percent of Russians say they have read a blog, compared to 60.3 percent of Americans. Based on these numbers, UMC concludes that, of 100 million active U.S.-based users, 60.3 million have read a blog, and out of 8.6 million active users in Russia, 6.1 million have read a blog. Using FOM data, the number of blog readers in Russia in 2008 goes up to 11 million. Among the blog readers specifically, Russians and American read blogs with roughly the same frequency (UMC 2008) (FOM 2009).

Starting Blogs

In terms of which active users have started a blog, Russia and the U.S., at 28 percent and 26 percent respectively, both rank below the global average of 35 percent. The leading countries include South Korea, Taiwan, and China, where over 70 percent of the national population have started a blog. UMC estimates that 26.4 million active users in the U.S. write in blogs versus 2.5 million active bloggers in Russia (UMC 2009). Using FOM data, the number of active Russian bloggers goes up to 4.4 million (FOM 2009). The implication that, in the spring of 2008, there were somewhere between 2.5 million and 4.4 million blogs in Russia is confirmed by Yandex’s 2008 Blogosphere Report, which counts 3.8 million blogs in 2008. According to Yandex, this amount almost doubled by 2009, reaching 7.4 million (Yandex 2009).

Social Networking

According to the UMC Survey, as of 2008, 71 percent of Russia’s “active” (i.e., every other day) users have “created a profile on a new social network,” a significant growth from the 42 percent that UMC documented in 2007. Accounting for nearly three-quarters of Russia’s active users, this figure also far exceeds the global average of 59 percent, and far outstrips the U.S. average of 43 percent.

In addition, where UMC has 71 percent of active users creating a profile, Comscore and FOM data indicates that only 54-59 percent of monthly users visited at least one social networking site over the course of a month, suggesting—somewhat unsurprisingly—that active users visit social networking sites more frequently than average users (Comscore 2009) (FOM 2009).

According to UMC, there were 43 million social networkers in the U.S. in 2008, and 6.1 million in Russia. Using FOM data, the number of Russian social networkers goes up to 11 million. By 2009, Comscore measured 19 million people who had visited a social networking site, not quite the same as creating a profile, but close enough to indicate significant growth (UMC 2008; FOM 2009; Comscore 2009).

In sum, UMC’s Survey finds that a significant majority of Russia’s active Internet users (70%) have either read a blog or posted a profile on a new social network, while a much smaller number of users (28%) have started their own blog.

A few other areas stand out in the UMC report and warrant future inquiry: Russians lead other countries in podcast downloading (58 percent compared to the global average of 49 percent and U.S.'s meagre 30 percent.). Similarly, Russians are leaders in RSS feed subscriptions, which allow for subscription type updates and aggregates of content, possessing a usage rate of 57 percent compared to the global average of 38 percent and U.S.'s 19 percent (UMC 2009).

Conclusion

The goal of this article has been to analyze and synthesize the data above into a relatively cohesive “snapshot” of the contemporary Russian webscape, our “view from a moving train.” In conclusion, I find that, while Russian Internet penetration is relatively low—only one third of the population—those who do go online do so relatively frequently, and with a passion for social media. I note that statistics for Moscow are usually at least double those of the national average, concluding that Internet users in Moscow are more educated and more active. In addition, I point out that, in Russia, blogs and social networking sites overlap more closely than they do in the US. As a result, while “pure” social networking sites may not, yet, be as predominant as elsewhere, social media use—through both blog/social networking hybrids and “pure” social networking sites—is considerable, especially among active internet users.

In fact, if the statistics are to be trusted, the percentage of active Internet users that blog and use social networking sites is consistently higher in Russia than in the US (Table 7) and those who do use social networking sites are “engaged” to an above average degree (Comscore 2009). Among Russia’s active Internet users, a large majority (70%) are creating profiles on social networking sites and reading blogs. A smaller percentage (28%) are starting their own blog (UMC 2008), and, it is important to note that few new blogs are maintained over time (Yandex, 2009). With the notable exception of LiveJournal (which, as explained above, is more of a social media hybrid), “pure” social networking sites are more popular than blogging sites. Based on this data, I suggest that the locus of online social activity in Russia may be shifting from blogs and blog/social network hybrids to pure social networking sites, a stylistic shift from keeping an “online diary” for an interactive network of “readers” to simply (re)connecting with friends.

References

- Arutunyan, Anna. “In Russia’s Blogosphere, Anything Goes,” The Nation.com web site, 22 February 2007. <<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070312/arutunyan>> (accessed 21 August 2009).
- Comscore. “Russia Has World’s Most Engaged Social Networking Audience,” 2 July 2009. <http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2009/7/Russia_has_World_s_Most_Engaged_Social_Networking_Audience> (accessed 21 August 2009).
- FOM. “Internet in Russia, Special Release,” FOM Public Opinion Foundation (March 2009). <http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/smi/smi_int/int0309> (accessed 21 August 2009).

- Pew Internet. "Pew Internet and American Life Project Surveys (March 2000-April 2009)." <<http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data/Internet-Adoption.aspx>> (accessed 21 August 2009).
- Technorati. "State of the Blogosphere 2008." <<http://technorati.com/blogging/feature/state-of-the-blogosphere-2008>> (accessed 21 August 2009).
- Universal McCann. "Social Media Study, Wave 3," (March 2008). <<http://www.universalmccann.com>> (accessed 21 August 2009).
- Yandex. "Trends in the Blogosphere," (Spring 2009). <http://download.yandex.ru/company/yandex_on_blogosphere_spring_2009.pdf> (accessed 21 August 2009).
- . "Trends in the Blogosphere," (Spring 2008). <http://download.yandex.ru/company/yandex_on_blogosphere_spring_2008.pdf> (accessed 21 August 2009).