Russian journalists and social media: Updated traditions and new challenges

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ABSTRACT: Russian journalism has certain peculiarities based on deeply rooted traditions and state of the modern media system. It has developed a double professional culture; on the one hand it has been serving state interests and on the other hand journalism has been a mission of enlightenment and education in the tradition of the "intelligentsia." New technologies drastically affect media work. Since the mid-2000s the introduction of social media challenged journalists' role in society as well as professional practices and norms. This paper discusses an existence of pattern of using social media by Russian journalists based on historical roots and socio-cultural and political background.

KEYWORDS: Web 2.0 journalists, Russia, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, LiveJournal blog platform, the role of journalists, social media

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INTRODUCTION

In Western democracies journalists traditionally have had the role as watchdogs of the government and a watchdog of business elites (Hanitzsch et al., 2011) and functioned as gatekeepers (Singer, 2010; Lewis et al., 2010). Their job has been to gather, filter, edit and publish the news (Hermida, 2011). Other key norms of journalism were non-partisanship (a disinclination to take sides on issues of public controversy) and accountability. Russian journalism however does not exactly fit the western paradigm; it has certain specificity due to a long historical tradition as service to the state.

Russian media as institutions were initially established by the authorities as a tool for informing, manipulating and managing the public (Trakhtenberg, 2007). Russian tsars were often the principal censors while socio-political media coverage was significantly restricted or even forbidden. Moreover, Russian journalism was straightly linked with literature: the most famous writers were at the same time well-known

journalists (publicists). Media publishing was enough profitable business that time but major journalists thought of themselves first of all as enlighteners and contributed to Russian culture. Several among them worked even as censors (Zhirkov, 2001). The first Russian journalists were identified rather as writers who laid down a basis for public debates particularly on general cultural questions (Mirsky, 1999). Vartanova (2012) points out that until nearly the end of the 19th century the literary journals were the major form of print journalism while the leading journalistic genre was the literary criticism. These features of journalism were traded on the later stages.

The Soviet conception of journalism implied it as an instrument of power, which strives to affect the public consciousness and current practice and keeps up the state efforts to organize and educate the masses. As Pasti (2005) mentions those Soviet journalists played the role of state propagandists and organizers working with a natural collaboration with power. It is true; on the one hand journalists were a part of the party-state and reproduced the official ideological discourse (propaganda), but it would be a simplification of journalists' role. On the other hand, Soviet journalists had always a strong link with the Soviet public, being a part of the "intelligentsia" (a social class of people, engaged in mental labor aimed at disseminating culture) that in Eastern Europe "always connoted impeccable moral integrity and a perceived duty to put one's education and social and cultural capital to use for the betterment of society" (Roudakova, 2009, p. 415):

> As many former Soviet journalists have explained to me, they understood themselves as the moral "leg" of the Soviet state, as the state's most "humane" branch, to which the average Soviet person wronged by the bureaucracy or by the courts could actually turn for help, particularly when no other channel (e.g., complaining to local Soviets or to party representatives) yielded results. This kind of "turning for help" took the form of citizens writing letters to the newspaper and making phone calls and personal visits to editorial offices.

The role of journalists has varied in post-Soviet Russia. According to Zassoursky (2004) in 1970–1985 (Soviet Union times) this role could be regarded as "instrumental" but since the beginning of perestroika in 1986 it became more significant, especially for printed media. During the "Golden Age" of Russian journalism which flourished during 1991–1995, journalists were almost "the fourth estate" but already in 1996–2000s they played a "completely 'instrumental' role" providing political interests of economical elites in the "informational wars." Since 2000, when Putin settled down in the Kremlin, the role of journalists remained "instrumental" on TV and more significant for the printed media and Internet.

Pasti (2005, 2007) points out that the close alliance between the media and government during the 1990s became a basis for the arising collaboration of media, business and politics in the beginning of the 2000s. Because the old (pro-state) values have been displaced by the new (pro-market) norms in post-Soviet Russia, journalists' roles in society became balanced between state and market forces. On the one hand journalism devoted a new function: entertaining its audience to promote goods and services in a consumer-driven marketplace. On the other hand

being in close alliance with political and economic groups, the media challenged the journalists to be almost PR workers.

According to conclusions drawn by Pasti (2005) a typical modern Russian journalist is usually a young happy person, often employed in a media company for a stable income (although being restricted professionally) and realizing his/her creative ambitions outside their official working place, for example, as a freelancer (Pasti, 2012). Nygren and Degtereva (2012) point out that Russian journalists generally share the same professional values as western colleagues. They feel, however, a double pressure — both the commercial and the political ones — that some of them describe as a form of self-censorship. It is remarkable that many Russian journalists recognize that the level of press freedom in Russia has been declining over the last decade. However, they have significantly low demands on freedom from the state and on freedom to criticize political power.

The state of Russian journalism is defined not only by traditions but also by specifics of a contemporary media model, which is identified by Vartanova (2012) as a unique "Eurasian hybrid system" or a "Statist Commercial model." It has several key characteristics, first of all a strong relationship between media, journalists and the state, legitimized by a shared belief — consciously or unconsciously — in the regulatory/decisive role of the state (or state agencies)." In this conceptualization the media play the role of "an innocent and obedient child" (Vartanova, 2012, pp. 141–142). All the aforementioned affects the Press Freedom index: Russia traditionally ranks the lowest.[1]

However, even being in conditions of vertical regulation "from above," in the absence of a "social contract" Russian journalism does not deny general professional standards and quality. Russian journalism has traditionally been personified; according to Vartanova and Azhgikhina (2011) this is rather a mission, than a profession and its participative function, inherited from the Soviet times, revives again. Hanitzsch et al. (2011) analyzed professional journalistic cultures in 18 countries and identified three different clusters: "western journalism culture," "peripheral western," and developing countries/transitional democracies/non-democratic.

In the frameworks of this analysis Russia is placed in the last group. Russian journalism is characterized, among other things, by the least vigilant and critical attitudes toward monitoring political and economic elites, relatively weak power distance, indicated by the willingness of journalists to convey a positive image of political and business leadership on the one hand and by the inclination of journalists to motivate people to participate in civic activity and political discussion, the most favorable attitudes towards providing analysis, and strong orientation towards the audience (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

The paradox is that the contemporary Russian media system is represented by two main groups of the media: mainstream media (mainly TV channels) which are

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[1] *Reporters without borders: Press freedom index-2011–2012.* Retrieved April 15, 2014 from http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html.

rigidly supervised by the state as well as those which are more independent and relatively disloyal to Kremlin political and business media (Figure 1). They belong to individuals, parties, or foreign corporations, but they are also managed by the state, albeit indirectly. The mechanism is quite complicated, however one can mark out three types of state influence on Russian media (especially television): direct state control (I), indirect control over state-owned companies for example Gazprom media holding (II), and indirect control through pressure on the owners or of media-tycoons (III) which may be based on personal relationships between government officials and private media owners, and so on (Kiriya & Degtereva, 2010).

Introduction of the internet in the last decade has reinforced this tendency; the Russian media sphere has been significantly challenged and split to "official"
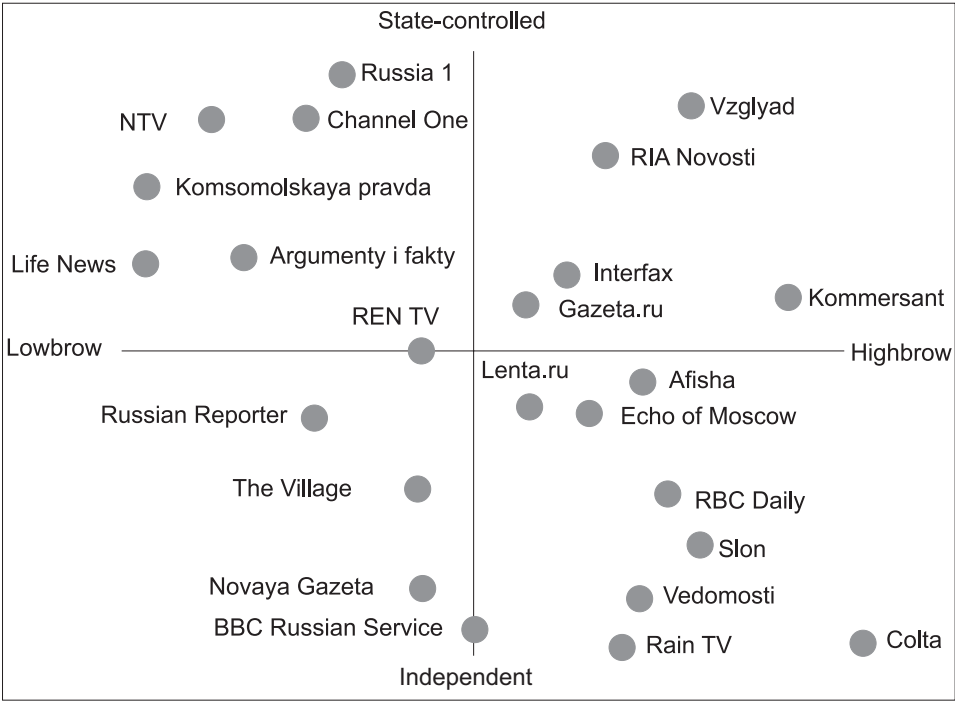

Figure 1. Russian media landscape

Source: TNS Global, BBC, Colta. Retrieved April 10, 2014 from http://calvertjournal.com/features/show/2234.

and "alternative" shares (Gorny, 2007). Formally, the internet remains a relatively free space from state control in Russia; anyone with internet access can criticize the government, the political system and other issues of state power. According to conclusions by Berkman Center Research (Etling et al., 2010–2011) the Russian blogosphere became a central "Discussion Core" that contains the majority of

political and public affairs discourse and this core is comprised mainly, though not exclusively, of blogs on the Live Journal platform.

Gorny (2007) calls the internet in Russia as a modern substitute of a Habermasian public sphere and compares it with Russian classic literature which was a substitute for public discussions in the 19th century and "kitchen-table talks" in Soviet times, when being deprived a voice and forced to be passive consumers of propaganda, Soviet people developed private communication spaces at home, there they could discuss and express their opinions freely, usually drinking alcohol. So, according to Gorny (2007) in the 2000s Soviet "kitchen-table talk culture" was revived in cyberspace while the internet became similar to Russian classic literature which was a substitute for public discussions in the 19th century and "samizdat" (reproduced censored copies by hand) in Soviet times.

Kiriya (2012a) considers today's Russian media in the terms of "main" and "parallel" public spheres represented accordantly by widespread TV channels, radio and some political print media on the one hand and by institutionalized (opposition TV channels, media outlets controlled by elite groups close to the state and online-media) and non-institutionalized (blogs and social networking sites) media on the other hand. He extends his point of view affirming that Russian authority provides a function of gate keeping or switching of both "main" and "parallel" public spheres and between institutionalized and non-institutionalized ones. It keeps the political debate within each cluster, and within each group of political activists, making them isolated from each other and from the wide audience (Kiriya, 2012b).

To sum up, one can conclude that Russian journalism has been developed in a special historical context where media was a "manipulative tool" in the hands of the state. But the role of journalists in society has not only consisted of serving for authorities' interests, or in other words to be an advocate for government and business elites. Journalists also tried to respond to publics' needs, being a sort of "missionaries" who as far as possible provided enlightenment function and tended toward opinioned and personified journalism.

HOW JOURNALISTS WORLDWIDE USE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The journalistic profession is now much affected by development of new technologies. Merging of editorial teams, multi-publishing, multi-skilling and consequently incremental load toward journalists in conditions of permanent times of trouble have become characteristics of modern media work. New demands of the audience, which has now extensive opportunities for customization of content and for increasing interactivity, influence changes inter alia in professional practices traditionally rooted in the "relatively closed professional culture for the production of knowledge based on system of editorial control" (Hermida, 2012a).

These challenges to professional journalism have become even stronger since the middle of the first decade in the 21st century, the "new" or online media have developed towards Web 2.0. Dougherty, a vice-president of O'Reilly Media Inc, first officially coined the term "Web 2.0" in 2004 during a discussion on a potential future conference about the Web (O'Reilly, 2005a). O'Reilly (2005b) defines Web 2.0 as follows:

> Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation," and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.

Web 2.0 is complex and multi-dimensional; it pulls not only in economics and technology but also new ideas about a connected society. According to Anderson (2007, p. 5) for many average people Web 2.0 is rather "a group of technologies which have become deeply associated with the term: blogs, wikis, podcasts, RSS feeds etc., which facilitate a more socially connected Web where everyone is able to add to and edit the information space." A big group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 is usually called social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Introduction of social media has increased individuals' ability to interact with media and to collaborate by way of user-generated content, citizen journalism and participatory journalism. This modern interaction became embedded and interwoven with media to the extent where the relationships between journalists and audience/citizens can be called even "symbiotic" (García de Torres et al., 2011). Social media challenge the role of journalist and the old journalistic practices and norms. Now, when any "average consumer" is able to not only consume but also "to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways" (Jenkins et al., 2009), professional journalists finds themselves puzzled how to invite the audience in the process of media content production without losing control (Lewis, 2012).

Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) identify three groups of journalists who use social media: non-users or "the skeptical shunners" who avoid having anything to do with social media and two groups of users: so-called "pragmatic conformists" — who regularly use social media, being forced by industry trends and professional requirements but who are selective and judicious in their usage and "enthusiastic activists" — usually younger journalists who lead a life online, being almost permanently connected, twittering or blogging.

Singer (2005) writes, for example, that "the traditional role as a non-partisan gatekeeper of information, already undermined in the new media environment, is further challenged by the participatory blog format. At the same time, those attributes potentially facilitate the professional norm of accountability." According to Singer's conclusions, journalists try to overcome such drastic changes by 'normalizing' of new platforms (blogs) to fit the traditional professional practices and norms:

most journalists are "normalizing" blogs in at least one key way: they are maintaining control over the information provided under their names, sticking to their traditional gatekeeper function even with a format that is explicitly about participatory communication. [...] In broader terms, this study supports earlier research indicating that journalists continue to think in terms of their professional role as information providers as they migrate to the interactive online medium (Singer 2005, p. 192).

Lasorsa et al. (2011, p. 31) extending the research for Twitter, found out that journalists (j-tweeters) "appear to be normalizing microblogs to fit into their existing norms and practices but, at the same time, they appear to be adjusting these professional norms and practices to the evolving norms and practices of Twitter." Thus journalists' usage of social media services is an interrelated and interdependent process.

As an aside, it is worth mentioning that social media emerge as an important assistant tool for professional journalistic work, both on the institutional level (media outlets represented in the social media) and individual level (journalists). First of all, it might be linked with searching, gathering, conveying, checking of information (e.g. Pew Research Center, 2011; Reed, 2011). Social media arose a networking collaboration in verification of news (Hermida, 2012b) and a new way of crowdsourcing in the collection and analysis of information for the preparation of stories (Moeller, 2013).

Social media can also be helpful for communication, for example with a media outlet's audience (e.g. Sheffer & Schultz, 2009), media institutes, being a "headline service for breaking news or a promotion for journalists' work on other media" (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010), for feedback and dialogue with readers/viewers, sources (e.g. Hermida, 2010), for professional discussions with colleagues, and so on. Media companies and individual journalists can also carry out marketing and branding *via* social media.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This background leads us to the following research questions relating to how patterns of journalists' using social media might be affecting the socio-cultural and political matters and specific role of a journalist. Thus this study poses the following research questions:

RQ 1. How do Russian journalists use social media with professional purposes in comparison with Western colleagues?

RQ 2. What explanation could be behind the differences? If so — can it be a question of age, of cultural and historical traditions or about political reasons?

RQ3. Is social media use changing the professional role of journalists?

METHOD AND SAMPLE

This research has been conducted in three stages. *The first stage* has been related with the project "Journalism in Change: Professional Journalistic Culture in Poland,

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Russia and Sweden"[2] is the cross-national survey conducted in the spring and summer of 2012 in Russia, Sweden and Poland. The choice of countries goes along to Hanitzsch et al. (2011) cluster analysis of professional journalistic cultures: Sweden represents "western journalism culture" group, Poland — "peripheral western," and Russia — developing countries/transitional democracies/non-democratic.

The survey covers different areas of professional culture; one section was devoted to interactivity and journalists' use of social media. The questionnaire was constructed in collaboration with the researcher teams to make the questions relevant for journalists in all three countries. It was originally written in English and then translated into Polish, Russian and Swedish before distribution.[3]

There are no registers or any official written records of journalists' names in the three countries and therefore it is not possible to have a representative sample. Instead quota sampling was used to select participants in the survey, to build a sample as representative as possible for journalists in each country (Lavrakas, 2008). Drawing on previous knowledge about the media structure and where journalists work, a quota of journalists was decided for each media type with the goal of collecting 500 surveys in each country.

Questionnaires were sent to a wide range of newsrooms in different parts of each country and different types of media, both on paper (mostly in Sweden and Poland) and by e-mail with links to a web-based survey (mostly Russia and Poland) until the quota for each media type was filled. The results show that the sample became quite close to other recent surveys (like Weaver & Willnat, 2012). Finally, the results have been combined in a common database, giving the answers and analyzed using SPSS software. We have divided the sample for three age groups: up to 35 years; 36–50 years and journalists aged over 50, for clarification of differences for each generation (see Table 1).

Table 1. Age among journalists in the survey (per cent of respondents)

Country	Age group		
	<35	36–50	51<
Russia	69	23	7
Sweden	27	36	38
Poland	42	39	18

Source: Project data "Journalism in Change: Professional Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden."

During the second stage a short open-question survey was conducted especially for the Russian case study in summer 2012. 100 selected Russian journalists' blogs on

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[2] Project website: http://www.journalisminchange.com/.
[3] More details about the survey might be found on http://www.journalisminchange.com/Files/content/Survey-2012.pdf.

the LiveJournal blog platform were selected with the help of monitoring media web-sites, Google, Yandex, Wikipedia, private contacts and the LiveJournal search engine. The journalists who maintain the individual blogs (j-bloggers) were asked questions about their blogging via the LiveJournal messenger, how they use LiveJournal for professional purposes if so. The survey feedback amounted to 37 responses.

Finally, during the last stage the anonymous in-depth interviews with 20 journalists in each country were conducted for better understanding of results. The interviewed journalists were suggested to ask the question regarding social media in professional work: Do you use online social media (for example Twitter, Facebook, blogs) in your work and give examples of how these channels have been useful for you? Despite its limitations, we believe this study sheds light on how journalists use social media including Russia and what factors can shape patterns of media usage.

FINDINGS

Generally the surveyed Russian journalists use social media for professional work more actively than their Polish and Swedish colleagues (see Table 2). As expected, the number of so-called "pragmatic conformists" and "enthusiastic activists" is higher among younger and middle-aged generations of Russian journalists. However, a similar trend has been observed in Poland and Sweden.

Table 2. The usage of social media for professional purposes (once or more per day) (per cent of respondents in the age groups)

	Russia			Sweden			Poland		
Age groups	<35	36–50	>51	<35	36–50	>50	<35	36–50	>50
Use social media for professional goals	81	72	39	78	68	57	75	67	51
Total use social media in the sample	76			67			68		
Numbers of answers in each group	341	117	36	125	170	176	189	166	78
Number of answers in the sample	500			497			471		

Source: Project data "Journalism in Change: Professional Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden."

ARE YOUNGER JOURNALISTS FRIENDLIER TOWARD THE USAGE OF NEW INTERNET SERVICES?

As mentioned above a peculiarity of the Russian sample is that about 70 per cent of journalists were younger than 36 years old (see Table 1). However, it could be considered close to reality. The age explains a higher frequency of those using social

media to some extent: youth is usually the main contingent of popular Internet services and social networking websites. However it would be a simplification to explain the results only by the "age conservatism." The distribution of preferences between different social media platforms makes it possible to discuss a specific Russian pattern of using social media by journalists (see Table 3).

Facebook appears to be a favorite online social networking site for surveyed Russian journalists: 72 per cent use it at least once per day or more. Here we can see nothing special in comparison with Polish and Swedish colleagues. Frequency of using Twitter by Russian journalists is almost similar as for Swedish (30 per cent of respondents). Russians pay almost the same attention to using other social networking services as Polish journalists (30 per cent of respondents).

Talking about other types of 'other social networking services' in the Russian case we mean first of all extremely popular profile-driven social networking Russian language sites VKontakte and Odnoklassniki. According to TNS Gallup Media the daily reach of VKontakte amounted 27 212; Odnoklassniki 19 332 while Facebook 3 439; LiveJournal 2 654 and Twitter 1 292 million users between 12–54 years old in May 2012.[4]

A high activity in using blogs is a specific and peculiarity of the use of social media by Russian journalists. In comparison with Polish and Swedish colleagues, Russian journalists are significantly active in reading and especially in writing individual blogs, which they maintain outside media companies. So, 59 per cent of Russian journalists read blogs at least once per day and 25 per cent write in the individual blog daily or more often. For Sweden and Poland the figures are noticeably lower (Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency of social media use for professional work (journalists using social media for professional purposes on a daily basis (per cent of respondents)

	Russia	Poland	Sweden
Blogs (read)	59	33	29
Blogs (write)	25	5	3
Facebook	72	72	61
Twitter	30	19	33
Other social networking services	30	32	14

Source: project data "Journalism in Change: Professional Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden."

LIVEJOURNAL BLOG PLATFORM AS A RUSSIAN SOCIO-CULTURAL PHENOMENON?

First of all, such preferences in using different media platforms and especially shifting interests toward blogging can be explained by cultural issues. In Russian culture

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[4] *TNS Gallup Media. TNS Web Index.* Retrieved April 15, 2014 from http://tns-global.ru/services/media/media-audience/internet/information/?arrFilter_pf%5BYEAR%5D=2012&set_filter=%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C&set_filter=Y.

the word "blog" is almost a synonym of LiveJournal, a blog platform extremely popular in Russia since 1999. The Russian LiveJournal community was initiated by a small group of creative people (40–50 users) among whom there were many pioneers of the Russian Internet. In the beginning it was reminiscent of virtual "kitchen-table talks" until its present, considerable size was reached (Podshibiakin, 2010).

Nowadays LiveJournal is a common space for receiving news and information, socializing, polemic, discussions and developing collaborative projects. It has become an independent collective medium influencing traditional media and cultural production at large and a significant part of Russian Internet culture Gorny (2004). Despite a competition with other services, first of all Russian-language VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, and global Facebook and Twitter LiveJournal still hold a high position in the top 20 of the most popular social media platforms in Russia.[5]

TRADITIONALLY LITERATURE-CENTRIC JOURNALISM?

As mentioned above, Russian journalism is linked with literature. Modern Russian journalism differs from journalism in democratic cultures by the literature-centric peculiarity and tendencies to personification (Mirsky, 1999; Zhirkov, 2001; Vartanova, 2012; Vartanova & Azhgihina, 2011). Thus, blogging appears to be a suitable genre for Russian journalists who are traditionally literature-oriented and friendly to writing of long texts, as a surveyed male editor-in-chief of a regional TV Company said "a unique way to speak in a circumlocutory manner moreover with illustrations." The literature-centric feature of Russian journalism is also illustrated by other surveyed journalists (j-blogger) as following:

> …a Russian person is always a nuisance. Media people are not different. They need wide […] open spaces for publishing their immortal masterworks. They also need unlimited blogging space for multiple entries, threaded comments instead of the linear mode, news feeds and updates from friends organized chronologically. We are not fond of changes. If it works, leave it alone! [male j-blogger, Ogonyok magazine].

Actually journalists try to use advantages of each service. Blogging is more preferable for long text; 140 characters restricted by Twitter is better for short dynamically changing news, and so on. The anonymous in-depth interviews clarify different patterns of using social media platforms for professional work:

> I prefer LiveJournal and Facebook. All my materials ready texts I publish in these online social networks regularly. I also have a Twitter account, but there are only 500 followers there, so I do not understand this resource and use it less often [male 35 years journalist; freelancer, online media, co-works with Echo Moskvy radio station and Trud newspaper].

> I am spending my time "sitting" on Vkontakte; usually using this online social network to find the people I need for my work. I have also a blog on LiveJournal, but generally say it is not such an important resource now, so I do not try to update it regularly [female, 24 years journalist, editor; information service of state television].

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[5] Ibid.

> I prefer global online social networks, predominantly Facebook. I publish where [in Facebook — E.J. and G.N.] my materials, keep a dialogue with the audience and add some people to the friends list. Inadequate comments are extremely rare; I have banned only a couple people since I've been on Facebook. I do not like domestic social networking sites Odnoklassniki and VKontakte [male 65 years journalist, editor-in-chief; niche magazine web-page, observer of niche magazine].

Generally the purposes of using social media in the journalistic workflow vary between social media platform. The survey shows Russian journalists in Singer's (2005) terms "normalize" the use of social media in many regards in the same way as their colleagues in Sweden and Poland. Social media are built into the old work process and are used to get ideas, to conduct research and to have contact with both colleagues and audience. In addition, different kinds of distribution are important — self-promotion, get new audiences and to strengthen the trademark of the media company are important reasons to use social media in all three countries.

But there is also a special Russian pattern in the use of blogs. They are very much used to publish content beside regular work, every second Russian journalist in the survey say they publish on blogs, and 40 per cent take part in socio-political discussions on blogs. This is much more than colleagues in other countries. Russian journalists also to some extent try to make money on social media by PR and advertising, and this is not the case among Swedish and Polish journalists (see Table 4).

Table 4. Purpose of social media use (users of each type of social media; per cent of respondents)

Country	Russia			Sweden			Poland		
Social media platform	FB	Tw	Blog	FB	Tw	Blog	FB	Tw	Blog
Purposes									
To get ideas	81	60	73	61	73	86	52	34	64
In research/investigation (to find information)	71	66	78	45	52	60	63	70	62
To have a dialogue with the audience	76	53	41	56	55	18	68	28	15
To keep in contact with colleagues	82	48	33	83	54	12	84	22	5
To publish content besides my regular work	63	40	51	27	23	17	18	8	21
To get more readers/viewers, self-promotion	69	51	40	49	58	22	49	24	14
To strengthen the trademark of the media company	60	45	25	42	52	17	51	22	13
For professional discussions	64	32	37	36	50	14	46	32	23

For making money by advertise-ment or PR	21	14	15	2	0	1	11	1	9
To discuss sociopolitical questions in general	68	40	40	37	36	16	41	28	20
Number of answers	367	248	344	292	202	242	309	99	189

Source: project data "Journalism in Change: Professional Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden."

PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN THE BLOGS: A WAY FOR THE "BETTERMENT OF SOCIETY" OR LETTING OFF STEAM?

The high activity of journalists in socio-political discourse is easy to explain by the peculiarity of the Russian public sphere. As mentioned above Gorny (2007) argued, the Internet in Russia is a substitute of the public sphere, a virtual "kitchen-table-talk." According to conclusions of Berkman Center Research (Etling at al., 2010–2011) the Russian blogosphere became to serve as a central Discussion Core that contains the majority of political and public affairs discourse. In the survey journalists confirm the important role of blogging for socio-political discussions:

> It's mostly a habit to use LiveJournal. It gives a chance to express myself, to share the thoughts with a large audience. It is a possibility to be a part of society, to have a space for expression of opinions and beliefs. In LiveJournal there is no censorship. But I have accounts both on Twitter and on Facebook and in Blogpost. LiveJournal is a means of publishing and broadcasting information, and making it open and available to everyone [male j-blogger, freelancer].

> …Facebook, VKontakte, Twitter are social networking sites for promotion of information and thoughts, no more. There is practically no possibility for debates, for development of opinions, for serious discussion. LiveJournal in this sense is a more convenient platform. That's the reason I am still in LiveJournal [male j-blogger, national newspaper].

STRIVING INTO A "SPACE OF FREEDOM" — STAYING THE MORAL "LEG" OF SOCIETY?

Publishing of content besides regular work in the social media is also prevalent among Russian journalists. As mentioned above Russian mainstream media and first of all national TV channels are rigidly controlled by the state while other media are also under state supervision (Kiriya & Degtereva, 2010). It takes forms of censorship which can also be represented as editorial policy and self-censorship. Thus journalists operate in a climate hostile to press and political freedom and recognize that this situation has degraded even further during the last decade (Nygren & Degtereva, 2012).

Among other things Russian journalists use blogging for overcoming of editorial restrictions (Kachkaeva, 2013). Several surveyed and interviewed journalists told about social media as a compensatory means:

> I started blogging only because there are subjects who won't be covered in Kommersant newspaper, where I work, but I feel the necessity of public discussion or simple publicity […] when I wished a resonance, to give publicity to some facts, to lift a problem, or to notify the authorities, I simply made posts in LiveJournal. In 90 per cent of cases posts got into a top […] and were widely discussed. […] It is clear that regional and local officials follow the flow of information and discussions around it. The Kremlin also keeps an eye on it [male j-blogger, newspaper Kommersant].

Publications outside a media company can also be a way for extension of professional creativity. So-called "specialization" in the team of journalists or "media format" sometimes limits the freedom of professional self-expression:

> what should an economics observer should do, if he wants to write about cinema? No options! He must create a blog and write there, as much as he wishes. I work for several media. One of them provides me with the ability to write the blog on their site. But it is only one from three of them. Also, I have a hobby: gonzo journalism. There is no platform for this format, and there is no media interested in it, or they simply cannot afford it [male j-blogger, freelancer].

Some journalists succeed in "reconciliation" of professionally-written content published "besides regular work" and commercial profit. They consider social media as a sort of an alternative media platform. Thus blogging also gives a good chance for deriving profit, especially for freelancers:

> LiveJournal has become a part of information space, and if my materials are good, they are occasionally taken by Lenta.ru, Grani.ru, Echo Moskvy, Svobodnaya Pressa I do not focus on an individual editor's office, I have trouble in accepting words like "editorial policy" and "format." A text is good or bad, interesting or uninteresting; the expression "text outside format" drives me crazy. So far I have virtually created my own information channel within journalism with no middleman project, money paid by readers can pay for a living if you work and write well [interviewed male freelancer, co-works with online media, radio and national newspaper, 35 year old].

It would be logical to assume that Russian journalists use social media mostly for publishing commercially-profitable content outside regular work: indeed they consider Facebook, Twitter and blogs as a tool for "making money by advertisement or PR" more frequently than Polish and Swedish colleagues. However the correlation between those two options is found insignificant.

CONCLUSIONS

Journalism has always had some kind of interaction in professional practice, relations with sources and audiences. This was especially true in the Soviet tradition of letters from the readers, but also in the subordinate relation to political power. Journalism has never been isolated from society, but social media makes this interaction much more intense and gives a new speed for interaction. Journalists have to adapt to this, and the finding shows journalists in the three countries finding different ways to relate to social media.

Journalists in Russia (as well as in Poland and Sweden) try to "normalize" the use of social media; they incorporate social media in the old practices and use social media as new tools in the work processes to get ideas, to conduct research, checking

facts, contact audience and to distribute the content with links. This is the same pattern as seen in other research in other parts of the world (Singer, 2005; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Pew Research Center, 2011; Hermida, 2012b). But there are also important differences between journalists in Russia and journalists in western countries — differences that can be related to several reasons.

The general use of social media platforms is higher in Russia. This can be related to a younger profession in general, almost 70 per cent of the Russian journalists in the survey are younger than 35 years old. But also within each age group the general use is higher. The difference is most visible in the use of blogs on platforms like LiveJournal. More than 50 per cent of Russian journals say they use blogs to publish mostly non-commercial content besides regular work, and 25 per cent say they write in their personal blog every day.

The use of blogs among Russian journalists fits well in the tradition of a literary centered journalism where opinions and discussions are the most important. This tradition of the Russian *intelligentsia* achieves new space in the blogs and creates a new and wider "kitchen-table-talk" (Gorny, 2007). In a situation with limited press freedom, social media also offers an alternative public sphere where journalists can both write and discuss sociopolitical matters according to Russian tradition.

As Singer (2005) argues j-blogs indicate a departure from a traditionally neutral position of journalists; therefore in theory blogging leads to personalization of journalism. Moreover the blogging format is similar to classical journalistic genres as a column, essay, and reportage. It goes along with literature-centric, personified and opinioned specificities of Russian journalism. It is questionable however, if journalists operate as professionals or as private persons in the social media.

The character of discussions and communication in the blogosphere are also discussible. Fossato and Lloyd (2008) advanced a hypothesis that the Russian blogosphere serves as a means of people's adaptation to the regime rather than an instrument of social change. According to Panchenko (2011) despite active discourses in the blogosphere, it is anyway based mostly on the "chewing" of official news agenda (published by state/state-controlled and so-called "liberal" media) in conditions of so-called "trans media storytelling."

Golynko-Volfson (2009) affirms that the phenomenon of active interaction in the public sphere is frozen or equated to forms of leisure or entertainment. The internet partly acts rather as an environment of ideological manipulation than a unifying force for consolidation of marginal and sub-cultural minorities. Thus, in the 2000s, the internet imposes mostly state isolationist trends and values of total control like print media and TV. Kiriya (2012b) also mentions the isolated character of political debates in the Internet.

These critical perspectives show how important it can be in the short perspective. But in the long perspective, it is also difficult to disregard the fact that social media platforms create new public spheres more difficult to control by political

power. Koltsova and Scherbak (2013) for example conclude that LiveJournal is an important media platform for political opposition and that blogging can really influence political life in Russia (i.e. online activity provokes offline activity).

Despite efforts to a more strict control over Internet communication (Barabanov et al., 2012) these new public spheres give journalists new professional spaces that fit very well in the Russian tradition of journalism. In Russia, a social media builds a system of horizontal communication in a society with a strong tradition of vertical power structures and strict control over communication. In a longer perspective this might change the professional role of Russian journalists, giving them a more independent position in relation to political power.

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