Collective action frames and Facebook fan and group pages: the case of the Russian Snow Revolution 2011-2013

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Abstract

The article reveals the shortcomings of the framing strategies of the Russian Snow Revolution movement. The author hopes that this scholarly endeavor can help activists of different movements to present and frame their ideas in a best way. Moreover, the study investigates whether Facebook provides a space for the framing processes and whether it helps sympathizers of the social movement to take part in the creation of shared meanings and collective action frames.

The author compares two collaborating Facebook communities, a fan page and a group page of the Russian protest movement. The findings are the following: it was proved that the main collective action frame is constituted by the joint efforts of ordinary users and online moderators. The frame has been given the name "The fear of getting back into the USSR". There are two specific framing strategies, which can be explained from the political context and from the specific features of this social medium. The first strategy –re-framing- refers to granting a new meaning to a situation by placing it in another context or explanatory model. The second strategy –discourse incorporation - is a process of an intentional use of a discourse, borrowed from another historical era, by a political actor for the purpose of persuasion. Both strategies secured the movement a longlasting attention of Facebook users, but seem to be (1) too much relying on the narratives from the past, and (2) using unclear definitions. That makes the movement reluctant to draw a picture of a desirable future. The final section provides a few simple guidelines for successful framing strategy.

Introduction

The paper offers a deep insight into the framing processes within a social movement. Two online communities, belonging to the Snow Revolution movement in Russia, were the object of the study and the source of the empirical data. The author employed mixed research design and a grounded theory. The frame theory was chosen as a starting point for the study and aims to answer the following questions: (a) are there any specific communication patterns within these online communities? (b) are there any deep structures behind their argumentation?

The author concentrates on the cognitive structures stimulating the spread of the movement, and on the cognitive constraints, averting its growth, and especially on the worldview, which inspires both activists and ordinary

adherents. This worldview is a key to understanding the internal drives of the movement, since this view is formed in alignment with and under the influence of the political environment, in which the movement was born.

The first section starts with a chronological description of what has been happening in Russia in 2011-2013. The author highlights the unstable character of the claims, the lack of any enduring agenda which the movement would tried to bring to the public discussion, and argues that there must be some ideological concepts behind these changing claims. It is therefore suggested to use framing theory, and the idea of collective action frames in particular, in order to reveal these concepts. The second section deals with the literature about Facebook communities and political engagement, as well as describing the fan and the group pages of the object of study. The third section reviews frame theory and builds an analytical scheme, which is to be applied to the empirical data. The fourth section presents the results of the analysis, The data analysis was based on the socio-cognitive approach. In doing so, the author tries to understand the very motivation of the movement and afterwards finds the collective action frame "The fear of getting back into the USSR". The fifth section provides a possible explanation of the dominance of this frame in the discourse by addressing the elitists' approach. The origin of the frame "The fear of getting back into the USSR" lies in the long-lasting dominance of the political elites over the state institutions, which is no longer acceptable for society.

The Snow Revolution: main events and agendas

The movement that has inspired writing this paper is known as the "Snow Revolution" or the "Bolotnaya Movement" (in Russia) and refers to the civil engagement of thousands of Russians during 2011-2013, starting from the "election fraud" during the parliamentary elections in 2011. Because of the intensive use of the different communication channels, mainly online, the movement attracted a lot of public attention to many social and political problems in present-day Russia.

In December 2011 the sixth parliamentary elections were held in Russia. Even before the polls were opened, the public opinion was suspicious about the transparency of the elections. Many independent observers stayed at the polls during the elections to prevent any abuses of the voting procedures. Lots of crowd-sourcing online platforms were created for the information exchange between observers and for publishing their reports. That makes one think that suspicions about the transparency were quite strong. Afterwards, the observers made public lots of violations by sharing their reports and personal statements in the blogosphere and on Facebook. This online information wave was so strong that later on the same day the first street demonstration took place in Moscow. The city administration granted a permission to hold those events, but it seemed that the officials did worry about any possible escalation, since a few military troops were called to Moscow to insure public security.

In the very beginning, the movement declared the following demands: to force

the resignation of the Chairman of the Central Election Committee, to cancel the results of the elections and to schedule new ones. Additional claims were: more safety and freedom for independent observers, less violations etc. Participants of the street demonstrations were dissatisfied with the violations and a possible use of the "administrative resource" by the dominant political party – the United Russia. The administrative resource means that the members of the United Russia used their contacts among officials to manipulate the results. The officials, it was claimed, helped to change the data in the polls in favor of the United Russia. Many Internet users distributed the idea that the employees of commercial and state-owned organizations were forced to vote for United Russia by their supervisors and top-managers. It was also stated that the members of United Russia were seen giving bribes in exchange for votes.

A few days later the claims of the movement became less fact-related and more program-like. Demands to change the entire party system, including the legislation, and to reduce existing barriers for participation in the elections for small political parties followed. Some slogans were directed against the Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin. The street demonstrations arranged to support the movement, were named "For Fair Elections" in the online public sphere that time, and then the name was coined.

In March and April 2011 a few street demonstrations and rallies took place. In April the Parliament adopted and the President signed the amendments to the law on the party system in Russia, which liberated political struggle. Nevertheless, a big rally named "The March of Millions" was held in May 2011. The event ended up with a mess; many people were injured. It is still not clear who started the disorder, but a few activists were arrested, and now find themselves under the trial.

The movement also demanded to keep Prime Minister Putin from participation in the presidential elections, since it would be going to be his third presidential term. Putin did not abandon his political plans. His inauguration was followed by several protest actions. The movement stated that the comeback of Putin was planed even before the presidency of Dmitry A. Medvedev, and that Medvedev had occupied this position in order to prevent Putin from losing his control over the country. In the beginning of 2013 the movement was still active in both offline and online public spheres, but the street activities declined.

The political agendas of the movement have been rather unstable. The movement started with clear practical suggestions, with accusing concrete persons, and ended up with a relatively broad demand to conduct democratic reforms. The reluctant and inattentive reaction of the government partially explains this. Since the "smaller" claims were not paid any attention, the anger grew up and the claims evolved from situational ones into the moral judgments. Alongside with that, the movement actively picked up many other pressing issues, for example, the adoption ban law, or also known in Russia as an anti-orphans law. The law was passed after the death of a Russian child, adopted by an American family. The family was obviously guilty, but the case was too much generalized. The adoption of the law fueled many Russian citizens with anger. A

similar impulse was given when the music band Pussy Riot was sentenced to prison for singing a political song inside the Cathedral of the Christ the Savior in Moscow.

It is still unclear to what extent the movement represents the population of Russian. Street demonstrations and rallies have taken place from time to time all over Russia, but there was a big anti-movement, supporting particularly Putin. During 2011-2013 the Snow Revolution movement intensively used ad hoc developed online platforms for the crowd-sourcing, and popular blogs and social networks for spreading their argumentations. As a result, many people from the regions visited Moscow and took part in the street rallies, and the citizens of Moscow voluntarily went to other regions of Russia to support the rallies or to attend local elections in the role of independent observers. Nevertheless, the movement was named "Rebellion of the angry city dwellers" in the media and social networks, highlighting that they mainly represent the population of Moscow.

Facebook and politics

Literature review

Scholars from different fields have tried to approach Facebook. Within communication science, Facebook studies mainly fall into the uses and gratification theory, which examines individual motives for use. The study of Park et al. (2009) says that people use Facebook for entertainment, informing, socializing and self-seeking. There is also an attempt to classify social networks on the basis of their functionality. Kietzmann et al. (2011) developed an idea of building blocks, which are entailed by biggest international social networks – Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube -, but in different proportions. The main building block of Facebook and its main function is mediation in establishing and sustaining social and professional relationships. Less important functions are instrumentality for maintaining an online presence, for maintaining an online identity, for conducting conversions with other users and for promoting a reputation. One can say that for a person actively using Facebook her profile must be an important part of the life experience. The question is, if the same is true for the Facebook-based groups and communities.

The relationship between an offline and an online political activity of Facebook users is still controversial for scholars. Some case studies provide evidence that Facebook is a simple extension of the offline world. The others give evidence that Facebook is a powerful and an independent communication tool.

A case study of Harlow (2011) about Guatemala gives a brilliant example of how careful one must be in drawing any conclusions about Facebook. In her paper Harlow (2011) examines a few Facebook communities that criticized the president of Guatemala. From the very emergence of the Facebook-based communities the discussions were influenced by racial and ethnic controversies, which have been disputed offline even before. At some point, the users switched explicitly to the racial and ethnic questions. Harlow states that she did not find

any new racial and ethnic discourses that could be different from those dominating the offline public sphere.

In another paper about Guatemala and the same social movement Harlow (2010) delivers a rather opposite finding. Although her other study showed little innovation in the web discourse, this study gave an example of one of the social movement organizations which emerged as a Facebook community, but then moved offline. This means that Facebook possesses its own mobilizing power.

The study of Chinese NGOs and their use of Facebook by Lo and Waters (2012) has ambiguous findings as well. The study shows that Facebook use does not say alone anything about communication strategies of an organization; further investigation is required.

The 2008 presidential campaign in the USA fuelled many research papers, among them one by Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison, and Lampe (2009), and one by Wolley, Limperos and Oliver (2010). A literature review provided by Vitak et al. (2009) proved that Facebook use promotes a slight increase in the voter turnout, since the online social networks serve as a resource of independent and reliable information about the candidates, thus, increasing the interest in politics and stimulating people for voting. A study of Vitak et al. showed that the main types of individual political activity on Facebook are adding comments to political posts and sharing links on political topics. The participants of the survey conducted by Vitak and his colleagues mainly used Facebook for receiving and spreading political information. The motives for online participation were a need for the involvement, and a need for learning. The participants of the survey were interested in looking into the experiences of other people. The study by Wolley et al. (2010) focuses on the way users discuss image of a candidate. In this study Facebook appears as a powerful tool of political campaigning.

Fernback (2012) in his study examines the resistance groups on Facebook who aimed to prevent an intervention in their private lives from the side of the Facebook owners and advertisers. Fernback highlights a specific discourse of the communities and the high level of their creativity efforts.

A strategic political use of Facebook was revealed not only in the case studies about online campaigning, but also in an interesting case study about an endeavor to change stereotypical thinking of young Americans and Palestinians in relation to each other (Alhabash 2009). Facebook provided participants of the study with the space for establishing new social ties. New social ties helped them to re-assess their stereotypes and attitudes to each other, although, not to the same extend for both nationalities. This study showed how one of the main Facebook functions – social relationships establishment assistance – can influence cognitive structures of the respondents.

The study of Langlois, Elmer, McKelvey and Devereaux (2009) not only argues that the Facebook-based political communities elaborate on many non-mainstream political topics, but also posits an innovative methodological question. Does the technical design of the online communities influence the

discourse that the users of these communities make use of?

> The code, languages, and architectures, as well as the other elements that produce a human-understandable visual interface, impose specific constraints on the communication process while also allowing for new possibilities of expression, and in that way, they redefine what it means to communicate online. (Langlois et al. 2009: 420).

Paying a special attention to the different elements of a Facebook page leads us to the clarification of their role in the spread of specific issues, and to figuring out their contribution to the mobilization of a movement.

Facebook communities of the Russian Snow Revolution movement

Two collaborating Facebook pages were chosen for a closer examination. The group page and the fan page were founded in autumn 2011 and have been supporting the movement by publishing all important news and announcements.

Both groups have been serving as information hubs. The most posts include a link to other online resources, for instance, other social networks – YouTube, Twitter, Live Journal, - to the crowd-sourcing platforms, to the opposition and pro-governmental media. The fan page keeps people informed about forthcoming events, publishes calls for help, for example, when volunteers are wanted etc., provides information about important law drafts discussed by the Parliament, about main changes in the government, other crucial economic and political news. These topics are also typical for the group page. The difference between them is that the fan page has a "moderator", who is mostly active in posting, but not present in discussions, and in the group page the users are active in both posting and commenting, and there is no "moderator". The first page is a kind of a one-to-many communication, and the latter is a many-to-many communication oriented towards the opinion exchange.

The intensity of visiting the fan page is rather high. For instance, the fan page was given 33,000+ "likes" and some posts on the newsfeed collected up to 800 „likes". The group page has 3,000+ followers. The intensity of users' activity is also high. Although the messages on the newsfeed do not receive so much attention as those from the fan page, the frequency of posting here is much higher– up to 20 new messages per day (less than 10 messages for the fan page, if there is no ongoing street rally). It proves that both groups do play a role in the development of the Russian Snow Revolution movement and constitute a real online-based social movement organization (SMO).

Facebook provides a social movement scholar with an enormous amount of information. People gather here because they have common interests and needs. Adherents, sympathizers and leaders openly publish their plans, ideas and opinions. Posts and comments are analogous to the data that can be collected

from the focus groups. A regular monitoring of the newsfeeds is a kind of a participatory observation. One of the available functions is to sort posts on the basis of their origin, and separate posts published by the community owners from those created by the ordinary users, and to compare communication patterns, discourses and dominating frames.

This case study aimed to answer the question, whether this particular SMO "actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" (Benford & Snow 2000: 613). For this purpose, a population of public messages in both groups was examined with the framing analysis methods. The underlying assumption was that if the SMO, particularly the online community, has attracted so many followers and sustained an enduring discussion, than one can expect a presence of a clear *collective action frame* in its messages.

Public discourse and collective action frames

I escape here from the detailed discussion of the frame theory, which has been already well elaborated by both social movement scholars and communication science students. I will only give a few remarks to bridge the history of the movement with my research strategy.

To frame means to structure a content of communication in such a way that a particular perspective dominates in the messages. Scheufele (2004) elaborates on the idea that any frame has slots – cells with defined functions. There is a rather stable set of slots, which a successful collective action frame must have to possess a high mobilizing power. Each slot has a specific function, for instance, a slot "causal agents". The slot indicates anyone or anything which makes a social group suffer. It can be an actor or an institution, or even a rather abstract phenomenon, like globalization, for example. Thus, the slot has a function of appointing a causal agent. The appointment can be different depending on the aim of an actor producing the frame, and is called "default value".

Since the members of the Facebook communities are the grassroots organizations, one should not expect that they publish professional press releases. Their messages are not products of a clear strategy. For this reason, the second assumption of the study was that the SMO did not have clear statements about their demands, but rather find themselves in the process of the articulation of the frame. I suppose that the default values in the slots of this collective action frame can be replaced with metaphors. That means that the data analysis would require some more sophisticated instruments, like discourse analysis.

A communicator does not randomly choose words and their sequences; these choices – linguistic choices - are influenced by the strategic goals and by the social and political environment. Any communication has its context and is a part of a specific public *discourse*, which is:

> The totality of codified linguistic usages attached to a given type of social practice.

(Marks 2013).

In this paper, the data analysis utilizes the methods of Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Discourse Analysis (SCDA) and mind mapping to explicate main discursive structures from the empirical data.

SCDA, like any discourse analysis, employs the idea of the discourse as a language in use, as vocabulary and grammar, which is made use of in a given situation and help to understand the situation and its connection with the historical path of a given society. SCDA incorporates this common idea of the discourse with the idea of a frame. As Tenorio writes,

> A large part of van Dijk's practical investigation deals with stereotypes, the reproduction of ethnic prejudice, and power abuse by elites and resistance by dominated groups. (Tenorio 2011: 190).

An SCDA highlights a process of bargaining over shared meanings between individuals and groups, as well as "coherence, lexical and topic selection, rhetorical figures, speech acts, propositional structures, implications, hesitation and turn-taking control" (Tenorio 2011: 191). The bargain about the shared meanings can be seen not only as a discursive process, but a framing process as well. Metaphors and rhetorical figures, stereotypes, which were inherited from the historical past, are used to highlight a particular perspective on an issue, to frame it in a way. Such an analysis requires grounded theory methods. After the coding is finished, the codes are classified into the categories; categories and rules constitute concepts, and eventually a theory can be formulated. Although grounded theory leaves a lot of free space for maneuvers, there are nevertheless a few predictable outcomes of the framing analysis to be expected. The literature from the social movement studies gives an idea of what types of collective action frame exist across movements, and which types of frames can facilitate the movement and which cannot.

The most popular frame is "an injustice frame" (Benford and Snow 2000: 615). If a message is written within this frame, then it is likely to have words, frames and modalities, which help to create a feeling of injustice. The injustice frame means that the ideas in the text highlight the situation of inequality, with some actors dominating or exploiting others.

As Gamson (1992) argues, any collective action frame that is successful in mobilizing people, must utilize not only the elements of the injustice frame, but also the elements of agency and of the identity frame. The agency frame must demonstrate that the followers of the movement are able to challenge the existing status-quo. The identity frame must demarcate the followers from other social groups and show them as a strongly coherent community.

Gamson sees the element "causal agents" as the key one in the injustice frame. Causal agents must not be "impersonal, abstract forces" (Gamson 1992: 32). The

more precisely these agents are described, the stronger is the mobilizing power of the frame. Besides, collective actors must show causal agents as intentionally acting. At the same time, the causal agents must not be isolated from the social structures, but be presented as rather a product of these structures. So, there must be a balance and a clear relationship between the political situation and a particular causal agent. The agent must not appear as a victim in the end. The best option is to define a causal agent as a social group, or a corporation, or an institution. For these reasons, the bargaining over the definition of the "causal agents" appears as a key framing process (Gamson 1992: 32).

Benford and Snow (2000) go a bit deeper. They look into the framing processes, and consider frames as products of the *strategic* creation of meaning. The investigation of the framing processes is another bridge between frame and discourse analysis. In this paper the author concentrates on the primary framing processes within a movement, which Benford and Snow call "discursive processes" (Benford and Snow 2000: 615). The very first process is frame articulation. A movement bargains over the events, issues and actors which are of a special meaning for it. On the stage of amplification the movement assigns dominant meanings to some events, issues and agents (Benford and Snow 2000: 623). That's briefly how the slots are chosen, highlighted and filled with specific default values.

Benford and Snow elaborate on compositions of slots, or what they call framing dimensions. There are three of them. Diagnostic framing is a victim positioning of a particular social group, a strategic production of meaning aiming to convince a wider audience in an existence of a social problem, and a process of labeling causal agents. Prognostic framing suggests a solution. The diagnostic frame presents the solution as rational, potentially successful and realistic for the implementation. The third dimension is a motivational one. It relates to collective identity, emotions, to the shared sense of "Us". A motivational frame legitimizes the movement and gives evidence that this particular movement or an SMO is the best candidate for solving the problem.

The components of collective action frames are subject to "conceptual stretching" (Sartori 1970), which is defined through the variable features. Variable features of a frame are the abilities of it to expand or to shrink in definitions, an ability to change a focus, and, thus, to change a problem or the way of labeling it.

Research design

Research questions

As previously highlighted, the Bolotnaya movement was reluctant to reach the goals that it had in the beginning, but has been existing for 2 years so far. After the first failures it did not disappear and was active in picking up new issues. There must be something in common in all these agendas, and something behind them that is a genuinely substantial concern of the middle class in Russia. A mixed research design was employed to reveal a true demand of the

movement. It was important not only to identify a collective action frame, which appeared to be a rather weak one, but also to investigate a historical discourse, a vocabulary of these collective action frames.

Based on the literature, the research questions are:

(1) What kind of collective action frames are present on the Facebook pages of the Russian Snow Revolution movement?

(2) What kind of discourse are these frames built upon?

(3) Which historical circumstances made the movement use this particular discourses and collective action frames?

The first phase of the study employed a qualitative analysis to investigate discourses and frames. On the second phase the author continued to work with the literature to collect scholarly pieces which explain use of the particular discourse and frames from a historical perspective.

Data and methods of the qualitative content analysis

The data set consisted of the publicly available messages from both pages. It included a manifest of the SMO (published by the group page), status updates (or posts) from the newsfeeds of both pages, analyzed separately, and comments associated with the status updates. The communities have been being monitored on the regular since their creation till now, and the data for this article was gathered from March to November 2012.

A qualitative content analysis was conducted. Messages were put through several readings. An ad hoc code book, prepared in advance, was made use of. New codes were added after the open coding procedures were employed. Together old and new codes were put through axial coding, and then a final explanatory concept was developed.

The codes for collective action frames were developed on the basis of the two scholarly articles: one by Benford and Snow (2000) and one by Gerhards (1995).

Gerhards suggests 5 simple slots (Gerhards 1995: 227):

▪ issue and the interpretation of it as an urgent social problem;

▪ agents who caused the problem (causal agents);

▪ goals of a movement or of a particular SMO;

▪ chances of success;

▪ addressee of the claims;

▪ legitimization of the movement or of the SMO.

The logic of the frame analysis can be updated a bit to make the theory more coherent and to facilitate operationalization, as well as to highlight the interplay between Othering and building a collective identity. The following codes were

added to the ad hoc code book:

- "Us" – active followers of a social movement;

- "You" - prospective followers of a social movement;

- "they" - opponents of a movement.

The issue is being pushed back and forth between "Us", "You" and "They", and, thus, turned into a social problem. That's why these categories must be identified in the data.

Findings

Results of the study fall into the following categories:

(1)   a weak collective action frame;

(2)   a strong collective action frame;

(3)   reference to a historical experience which caused the use of the latter frame;

(4)   theoretical elaboration: negative and positive poles of collective narratives;

(5)   methodological elaboration: new techniques of the frame analysis;

(6)   practical advices: how to build a successful framing strategy.

Messages in the fan and in the group pages differ considerably. The fan pages provide mainly news broadcasting and reports about last street manifestation, initiatives taken by the informal leaders, or recent political events with a few comments on their meaning for the movement. The group page is likely a space for comprehensive discussions. Nevertheless, the framing strategies of both communities are rather weak. First of all, I describe the results of the analysis of the manifest that was published by the group page community, then give examples from the fan page that made use of the similar collective action frame. In the second part I describe a collective action frame which was found in the messages of the group page.

Table 1 summarizes the findings and visualizes their location in the empirical data.

a fan page		a group page	
data	**findings**	**data**	**findings**
The newsfeed: single posts	a weak frame	The "info" tab: the manifest of the SMO	a weak frame
		The newsfeed: single post	a strong frame

Table 1. Empirical data and findings

Weak framing strategies

The analysis of the manifest has revealed a weak collective action frame that does not provide any clear understanding of the problematic situation and suggests no solution. It makes use of the "negative" descriptions ("what we do not want"), instead of the positive descriptions ("what we do want"), and uses pronouns instead of giving real names. It is supposed that readers have an idea of what is behind these pronouns because they share similar historical experience. The presence of negative description led to the elaboration of the specific concept of a negative frame and methodological tools for investigating it (the template cards). Before delivering a detailed report of the analysis, some more remarks must be provided.

The vocabulary of the framing processes can be placed into the different level of abstraction (Gamson 1992: 385; Tarrow 1992: 177): values, strategy and tactics. "Strategy" and "tactics" are respectively long-term and short-term guidelines for action; "values" are abstract ideas, like "god" and "bad", or "friend" or "foe". The meaningful interactions between "goals and chances of success" and 'legitimization" are assured by more practice based sub-elements like:

- "strategy";
- "tactics";
- "solution" as a special case of a tactic;
- "efficiency" – an assessment of the certain strategies or tactical instruments;
- "danger" – a negative assessment of chances.

The interaction between the elements "You" and "legitimation" appears as an "obligation" in the framing strategy of the Bolotnaya SMO. It means that the group is trying to mobilize people by convincing them that their participation is a kind of duty.

Below is the full text with some examples of coding (English translation).

> • We were on the Bolotnaya Square (*tactic*). We will be back again (*tactic*)!

> • Friends (*motivational*)! We are not the party (*no-strategy, no-prognostic*), and we are not launching any revolution (*no-strategy, no-prognostic*). We just demand (*strategy, prognostic*) to give us back (*solution, prognostic*) what was stolen from us – our votes in the election polls (*issue, diagnostic*). For this very purpose we gathered at the Bolotnaya Square (*tactic, prognostic*). There have we seen that there are a lot of us (*efficiency, motivational*). That inspires us (*efficiency, motivational*), it is already a big victory (*efficiency, motivational*). But our task is not so far solved; our demands were not satisfied (*danger, motivational*). The more important is (*obligation, motivational*) to continue what has been begun.

> For this purpose we created a group (*tactic, prognostic*). The group was created so that we do not lose each other. (*tactic, prognostic*)

> On the page with the same name

> • [link]

> The news and announcements will be published.

> Add your friends!

The collective action frame from this manifest violates the principles of an ideal frame, elaborated by Gerhards (1995). For instance:

1.   The phrase "We just demand.." is not followed by any addressee of the demands. This is a very serious mistake. It challenges all other elements, such as strategy and motivation, since no political opponent was identified.

2.   There is a good and rich description of the strategy, including the clarification of inappropriate methods ("party", "revolution"), but a lack of "Us" and "Causal Agents", so that the frame becomes even less trustworthy because of a frequent, but always dull and meaningless reference to "Us".

3.   There is no explanation like "Why are we better than the others in solving this problem?", although the question seems logical after one sees a teaser "We are not …".

4.   The "Us" appears in almost every sentence, but there is no clear reference to what "Us" actually means: which social group the adherents belong to, which strategic aims underlie their tactics.

5.   There are no long-term targets: what kind of a future is an ideal one?

The reference to "no-strategy" and "no-solution" must call in memory a negative historical experience, the stereotypes that people still have or have learned from

the public discourse. This experience is a failed endeavor to create a party system in the beginning of the 1990s (after the decline of the USSR), followed by the disappointment in political parties as such, and the Great October Revolution and disappointment in the Bolsheviks' Russia. Thus, the authors of the manifest wanted to show that their methods would not lead to any recurrence of this experience. From the one side, it seems reasonable in the current communicative situation – an entire public suspicion about the authoritative tendencies, which creates a fear of getting back into the time of the Great Repressions of the 1937. From the other side, any mention of a bad historical experience instead of elaborations on a desirable future seems to be a big strategic mistake. The demarcating line between these communities, political parties and revolutionary groups do not contribute to the understanding of the methods, aims and identities of the movement. Political parties are the insiders of the political system and revolutionary groups are the outsiders. So, this is already a dichotomy, and there is no place for any third category in it, which is not a party and not a revolutionary group. Of course, in a real life we also have NGOs and a civil society as alternatives to the first two categories, but such an unclear label for the community cannot help one to decide whether he or she should also join it.

Political ideologies "at work" often employ negative and positive narratives (Schlipphak 2011). Negative and positive poles of an ideology or political program not only help getting trust and building a collective "Us". They are necessary to show the strengths of a political actor in comparison with his rivals. No political actor can avoid presenting a negative pole of his ideology, because none exists in a political vacuum, where there is no political competition. The question of negative and positive poles in a collective action frame has not been touched on by any scholar so far. It needs some conceptualization. As Goertz (2006) says, any concept in sociology must have both negative and positive poles. The positive pole describes what is expected to take place, and a negative one provides an idea of what is not expected or allowed to exist. Let us apply it to the collective action frames. In a message produced by a movement there can be negative and/or positive poles. The slots of a collective action frame can be filled with the objects or ideas, which are not expected to be present or did not exist in a fact. The positive pole is positive in the sense that something has happened, and negative one is negative in the sense that something has not happened, not going to happen, or is not desirable.

Table 2 illustrates the consequences of this elaboration for the empirical qualitative framing analysis. One can start by identifying the framing dimensions and then sorting them into poles, or, vice versa, by indicating two poles and then the framing dimensions.

core framing tasks					
diagnostic		prognostic		motivational	
poles		poles		poles	
positive	negative	positive	negative	positive	negative
What was stolen from us	-	We just demand to give us back	We are not a party	There are a lot of us	-
		We gathered at Bolotnaya Square	We are not launching a revolution	That inspires	
				A big victory	
				Our task is not solved	
				Our demands are not satisfied	
				The more important is it – to continue	

Table 2. Template cards

This case study has shown that the content related to the motivational dimension outweighs two other dimensions. Recalling a negative historical experience and phrases like "We are not" are supposed to create trust. The shared myths ("We were on the Bolotnaya square ") are good stimuli, and can connect people together, create a common identity, attach adherents to the community, but they highlight here even more that there is no idea about how the future must look like.

The verb "to continue" ("The more important is to continue") could have built a bridge between the memory about the past, the understanding of the present and the future, but the latter one is just missed. "To continue" only intensifies the impression that the SMO is highly insecure about its own future.

Below are some examples of certain linguistic choices, and why they are fortunate or not.

We are not a party, and we are not launching a revolution ... We just demand ...

"Not – "not" versus "just"

After having read two negative statements one would expect to see more than two positive ones to understand who "We" are in the end.

> We just demand to give us back what was stolen from us – our votes in the election polls.

"Give back" versus "steal" (in this case, the modalities in Russian and English do not exactly match. The passive voice in Russian still possesses a kind of agency).

The use of "give back" and "steal" looks like moral judgments, which is a must for any collective action frame.

> For this very purpose we gathered at the Bolotnaya Square. There have we seen that there are a lot of us. That inspires us, it is already a big victory.

"Gathered" – "there are a lot of us" – "inspires" – "a big victory"

In his analysis of the anti-IMF protest frame Gerhards points the same phrase: "there are a lot of us" – as the example of a proper content for mobilizing slots in the frame (Gerhards 1995).

Nevertheless, in an injustice frame one would expect connotations of anger and not only of positive emotions. There must have been something between "stolen" and "inspires": a problem as an injustice and a ground of the deprivation, something that causes negative emotions in "Us", then a bridge to the solution, and from it to the motivation.

While it may seem obvious that the three core framing tasks – diagnostic, prognostic and motivational – must be congruent with each other, the empirical data have shown that the lack of congruency can take place. In the present example the core tasks do not contradict with each other, they were just written in the categories belonging to the different levels of abstraction. The diagnostic dimension says that the faked elections are problematic. The prognostic dimension offers a very abstract solution – "give [our voices] back", and motivational one uses emotional component ("that inspires us"). Of course, for any person who finds himself in this situation, it is more or less clear that the solution is to cancel the results of the faked elections and to organize new ones. But this, would it have been present in the declaration, would also have had no connection with the emotional emphasis of the motivational dimension.

The manifest is not the only message that leaves an impression of uncertainty. The SMO publishes a lot of live reports about the street manifestation and rallies. Below there is a message telling about a meeting, which was to have taken place on the Red Square – the very heart of Moscow, which is of an inestimable historical meaning for Russians. The city authorities closed the Square, arguing that it was in an urgent need of repair.

> [photo]
>
> That's how "the repair" of the Red Square looks like now. Tell me, doesn't it enrage **you** that **they** lie and that **everybody** just does not care? **You** do not care? Come to the zero point. (*Bold is mine*).

There is one more post as an example of the weak framing strategy. The post was published soon after the invention of the first official symbol of the movement – a white ribbon, which everybody was supposed to wear.

> If you don't want to attend the rallies – don't do it. If you don't want a ribbon – don't wear it. If you don't want to walk down the boulevards – don't' do it, nobody forces you. But don't pick to pieces those, who come, wears, walks. 'cause it turns out to sound unconvincing. From under the escapist and disdainful reasoning appears the mug of Philistine: "Ah aren't they like all others? Don't they have anything to do?

One can see that such an important element of a frame, as Othering, or a confrontation of the „Us" and „They", was presented only with pronouns, so that it is absolutely unclear which social groups belong to each category. Together with a few other posts, these pieces constitute a "Lie Frame". The Lie Frame is a highly abstract one; it blames a ruling elite in betraying citizens.

The administrators of the Facebook pages are trying to say that the most important evil is, first, that the authorities are not fair with the nation and, second, that the majority of the population is indifferent to this situation. From the administrators' point of view, these two facts must make people feel angry. And the anger is the legitimatizing reason to hold the rallies.

Thus, the weak framing strategy of the SMO can be characterized by the incongruent framing dimensions, the usage of the negative narrative, where the positive ones could be more appropriate and motivating, the shortage of clear labeling, or the usage of pronouns without introducing nouns.

Strong framing strategies

A qualitative content analysis showed two peculiarities in the stories published by the group page. The adherents of the movement are mainly concerned with the weakness of state institutions and the high personalization of the Russian politics. The idea which frames communication between the members of the group page can be given the name "The fear of getting back into the USSR". The community members do not reject the weak frame, which was manifested in the messages in the fan group page, and in the declaration of the SMO, but transform it and give it clear and precise meaning. They fill its slots by discussing different articles from anti- and pro-government media. The community members provide *a re-framing:* they retell a published story using historical metaphors and stereotypes, thus, giving the story a new meaning. Often they add a link to the same story, published in another media. The story in a post always has some core problems, or key persons, but different details are highlighted in the post and in the comments. The core problems or key persons find themselves in different contexts. In doing so, the users negotiate the meaning that should be granted to a story.

A communicative situation within which the discourses are produced refers to the collective resistance to the recent authoritative tendencies in Russia. One and the same person leads the country for a long time; it is logical to expect a growing fear of the power concentration. Since the democratization processes have not been finished so far, one can guess that the institutional make-up of the country is relatively weak. Thus, the context of communication is a strong power misbalance, a shortage of the transparency of the public institutions and the marginalization of the civil society. Those SMOs which in winter 2011 decided to change the situation met the problem of communicating their claims since they have been long ignored by official media and since communicating collective goals and strategies never appear to be a simple task. A movement has not only to communicate the components of a collective action frame, but also to change a proper vocabulary, use appropriate metaphors, catch phrases that are understandable for the target audience. Such a vocabulary must be connotative rather than denotative; must connect the previous experience of the nation with the current situation.

Unexpectedly, the Facebook community intensively makes use of the authoritative discourse of the Soviet propaganda, which every person in Russia learns through Soviet movies and Soviet literature. For instance, a user shares a link to an article in a pro-government online newspaper. Other users re-interpret the story by commenting on the post. The interpretation tells the story as it would have been presented in a Soviet movie, with the propagandist labels of that time. The discussants compare the current political situation in Russia with the past by sharing links to other online publications. Often the comparisons are sarcastic. The vocabulary of the Soviet propaganda is used to ridicule, for instance, government's initiatives. Since the Soviet Union has declined, any such reference means that a state-promoted project is going to fail.

Figure 1. A photo collage comparing Putin (right) and Stalin (left)

There are three more popular discourses in the messages. I would label them the managerial discourse, the "Imperial Russia" discourse and the the "Second World War" discourse. The last one is the extension of the Soviet discourse. It includes metaphors and expressions from the old Soviet movies about the Second World War, like "battle-front", "occupation" etc. The managerial discourse is a use of the managerial, financial and economic vocabulary in relation to politics, like, "optimization of education", where the word "optimization" means cost reduction and efficiency growth. The "Imperial Russia" discourse appears through the words and phrases which were typical in Russia before the Great October Revolution and which can now be found in the popular culture and classic literature. Two historical discourses play a role that cannot be replaced by any other discourse. They explain to the new generations, what is tolerated and what is not tolerated in politics. The managerial discourse grew up because of the symbiosis of the governmental and business elites (see the section "Political context").

Figure 2. A photo collage comparing Soviet elites (above) and ruling elites of the 1990s (below)

The discourse with the Soviet origin appears to be not just a simple vocabulary; it demonstrates the coherence of its metaphors, the presence of a durable imaginary construct behind it.

The last findings are the two types of discursive framing processes typical for this SMO. I would name these two linguistic phenomena discourse incorporation and a re-framing respectively. Re-framing was mentioned in a few political science papers (for instance, Dembrinska 2012; Killian 2012; Dyer 2010), but had another meaning. My definitions are the following.

Discourse incorporation is the process of an intentional usage of the discourse strategies, metaphors, catch phrases etc. which would more suit a political opponent, or are already used by them. *Re-framing* refers to granting a new meaning to a situation by placing it in another context and explanatory model.

As it was mentioned, both activists and ordinary followers of this SMO have problems with describing a desirable future, but strongly concentrated on discussing the Russian past, which scared them. The past is associated with the repressions and absence of political rights and personal freedom. But the centralized state is not the main threat in this collective action frame. In a few posts the users explicitly discuss the problem of the rejuvenation of the ruling elites. The question of the aging elite is elaborated, for instance, through

comparing Russia and China. In China, a user argues, the ruling elites are regularly replaced, despite not by means of the free elections. In Russia, on the contrary, the elites are not challenged by elections, but rather by processes that are not public. The inability to control these processes appears to be a main concern of the Snow Revolution movement. The SMO also mentions the Great October Revolution of 1917. A current leader of the country – the President of Russia Vladimir V. Putin – is compared with Nicolas II, the last Emperor of Russia, who was killed by the Bolsheviks. The SMO highlights that such ways of elite replacement cannot be tolerated.

There is also one more historical personality that is mentioned. The followers of the SMO make use of a newly invented word "Putler" to compare the political course of Putin with the leader of the Third Reich in Germany, responsible for genocide and mass murders. The metaphors, related to the Second World War discourse, are used in relation to a few legislative initiatives, which regulate a socio-demographic sphere, and intervene in the private sphere to some extent.

This overrepresentation of the negative connotations of the historical past shows that the followers see their past through the frame which can be called "The Degradation". Therefore, any possible return to the past through irremovability of the elites seems to be a way to the degradation.

The followers of the Facebook-based SMO provided a reach narrative explaining their fears, but failed to present the way of a political development that they want to implement. Alongside with that, they demonstrate a weak agency, formulate their collective tasks neither explicitly nor by giving any positive historical example. They intensively demarcate themselves not only from the ruling elites, but from other social groups, the scope of which is unclear as well.

Eventually, two main hypotheses about social and political backgrounds, which can give a meaning to an unstable agenda of the current SMO and explain its collective action frames, can be brought to the discussion. The first hypothesis is that the personalization of the politics in Russia might influence the choice of the frame. This means in particular that few persons have a monopoly on the political decision-making process in Russia. The second hypothesis says that the state and social institutions appear weak and amorphous, dependent on the personalities. Together these two traits make up and sustain a strong hierarchical order of the Russian society, with the shortage of the social lifts – opportunities to make a political career based on the professional skills and not on the personal relationships with the ruling elite. This also explains a weak agency of the SMO.

The main ambiguity of the collective action frame is that the followers of the SMO address their claims to the ruling elites, who have caused the problematic situation. The shortage of their own agency appears once again in a repeated statement that the current elites will decline, since the elites of the Soviet Union declined once and the new elites have a lot in common with them or have strong relationships with them.

A strong attention of the followers (and of the whole movement, one can argue)

to the political elites in Russia and the distrust in the state institutions can get an explanation from recent Russian Studies. The next section provides a literature review.

Political context and its influence on framing processes

The fact that the USSR had thoroughly settled in the heads of people who were born even in the end or right after the end of the communist epoch, was highlighted, for instance, by Holak et al. (2007). From the USSR Russia has inherited three main socio-political constraints: a strongly hierarchical social order, a personalization of the state power, and, as the mixture of the previous two, a leading role of the powerful clientéles. The Bolotnaya SMO sees its task in challenging these constraints physically, but seems to have inherited them cognitively as well. Since the communist and Russian studies are rather specific and not widely known research fields, I have to talk about them in detail.

In Russia, as Huskey (2010) argues, the election system is not a way to obtain power, but a confirmation of the power that has long been possessed. And this is the bridge between the political context and the first agenda of the protest movement –election fraud. The fact that the elections are perceived as a fraud has strong historical roots in a modern Russian history. The political system in Russia functions upon the decisions of the ruling elites, and not because the stable institutional design. And it was the same in the USSR.

Puffer and McCarthy (2007) distinguish between three types of the ruling elites in Russia: economic, oligarchic and paramilitary ones. Puffer and McCarthy (2007), as well as Kryshtanovskaya and White (2005), argue that new Russian business elites started to form during a first decade after the USSR decline, when Boris N. Yeltsin had been the President of Russia for 8 years (2 periods). The origins of the new elites had, nevertheless, strong roots in the Soviet Union administration (Kryshtanovskaya White 2005: 297). People who occupied the most important administrative positions were widely known as "nomenklatura". After the decline of the communist empire they moved to a business sector or continued their political careers. Among them was Yeltsin himself, who also created a strong political and economic clan, called the "Family" (Kryshtanovskaya White 2005: 294; Hashim 2005). This symbiotic fusion of the business elites and the state institutions constitutes Russian corporatism (Kryshtanovskaya White 2005: 296). Yeltsin's Family appears in the messages as the reference to the Imperial Family, and the paramilitary elites are articulated as the reference to the Third Reich.

The youngest part of the elites is the paramilitary group "Siloviki". Few key scholars mention it (Shlapentokh 2004; Kryshtanovskaya White 2005). Siloviki is a group of people who served in the army, the secret service and the police, and who afterwards went into business or politics and have been intensively using their contacts with old friends who stayed in the state administration.

Shevtsova (2012) highlights a huge degree of the personalization of Russian politics and the role of Putin as a key person in it. Putin, who has served in the

Russian secret service for many years, is perceived by the movement as a leader of the Siloviki clientéle. This led to the central position of Putin in the public discourse as a main referent of the negative connotations. In an attempt to express their anger, the netizens invented the word "Putler" and often mentioned state repressions in their discussions. De Vries and Shekshnia (2008) compare Putin with the head of a commercial company, who has to defend the interests of the stakeholders. This metaphor also reflects main results of the elitist studies about Russia.

One of the main leitmotifs of the Russian studies is that Russia is gradually going back to an authoritarian type of governance (Shlapentokn 2007). It results in a creation of hyperbolic state, permanently and increasingly intervening into the social and private spheres, by implementing censorship, for instance. This intervention has been being long "forgiven" by the citizens, as long as the state income from exporting oil and gas was high enough to keep the state functioning in the sense of providing population with common goods such as education, health care etc. The level of the state performance suffers from a higher corruption and underfinancing. Corruption, as Shlapentokh (2012) states, seems to be one of the main fundaments of the authoritative Russia under Putin, the extension of his personal power, and a status-quo fully satisfying the ruling elites.

Watching the fights between elites, remembering the slogans of the early 1990s that promised to set up democracy in Russia, and not just create new political clans, disappointed with the public services and corruption, feared by the presence of a hidden government, the population of Russia lost trust in the ruling elites and addressed its anger to Putin as the top person. Indirectly, the faked political competition between Putin and the third President of Russia D. Medvedev (Shevtsova 2012) contributed to the strongest deprivation, in which the population ended up in the beginning of the 2010s. This deprivation is a simple understanding that citizens exert no influence upon the long-term political planning, since the decisions are made exclusively by the elites and not by the elected officials. This fact led again to the dominance of the Soviet discourse, comparisons with the Imperial Russia and the Third Reich.

Another problem is the question of succession. The first President of Russia, B. Yeltsin, stepped down in 1999, few months before the formal end of his presidency. The official reason was that he was too old to go on. He announced it in his speech on New Year Eve, which every President in Russia routinely holds, a few months before Putin first seriously appeared on the big political scene. In 2008 Putin calmed down the public opinion, and promised that he was not going to change the Constitution of Russia in order to get into his office for a third time. He nevertheless took part in the presidential race 4 years later, because such a pause did not violate the constitutional order. Putin has spent 4 years of Medvedev's Presidency as Prime Minister.

A comparison with Nicolas II shows that the violent rejuvenation scared the movement and its adherents. But the comparison with Hitler is even more terrifying, since the transfer of power in that case was not only anticipated by a

bloody war, but was followed with terror and genocide. Besides, the faked political competition between two prominent politicians convinced citizens to believe that the democratic reforms in Russia were driven by the elites and have now been stopped by them.

Thus, in the year 2011 Russia embodied a corporatist state, whose political course was formulated within a narrow cycle of political, business and paramilitary elites. Since the protest movement finds itself in such a context for many years, its followers do not see any other solution thsn to start dialogue with the elites. This intention was reflected in the Facebook discussions that were examined in this study. The followers of the movement do not think institutionally, so to speak. They confront the police, for instance, strongly criticizing it. From their point of view, there are some power nodes in the country, organized in a strong hierarchical order, by which all political decisions are made. Even while discussing new legislative initiatives, the followers mostly try to guess, which elite groups can be in favor of a new law. It shows that the followers are strongly convinced by the idea of the hidden power structures, which sometimes appears publicly. The weakness of state institutions is permanently highlighted, together with the strong and enduring character of the old state and social non-democratic institutions that existed in the Imperial Russia and in the Soviet Union, for instance, serfdom and a repression machine.

The frame "The fear of getting back into the USSR" is highly ambiguous in two more aspects. Many studies confirmed that the ability of a movement to fit a collective action frame into the wider cultural and historical memories (Benford Snow 2000) is beneficial. The Bolotnaya SMO has such an ability, indeed. But it was also proved that a frame works better when the diagnostic dimension is not just a stereotyped label, but a rather detailed narrative (Cress and Snow 2000). The Bolotnaya SMO uses historical metaphors even as a diagnostic framing. Since historical personalities and situations remained in the past, *and are not present anymore*, this harms the explanatory power of the frame.

The frame must resonate with a dominant political discourse as well (Diani 1996). Although memories of the USSR can't leave anyone indifferent and, thus, strongly resonate with cultural experiences (Benford Snow 2000), the Snow Revolution movement must overcome this elite-oriented paradigm and start thinking in terms of democracy and human rights.

Discussion

A good concluding remark would be that Facebook does give an opportunity for spontaneous political creativity, and enables grassroot organizations to bring up their agendas and concerns, and listen to the public opinion about them. Facebook provides a space for elaborating shared meanings, for communication between adherents and between adherents and activists. On Facebook, adherents can offer their perspective on the problem, go deep into the issue, share their knowledge, as well as learn from each other.

It is nonetheless necessary to be careful with generalizing the findings of a single

case study. The collective action frame is built upon the comparisons with the historical past, and may be unique for Russia and not so typical for Western culture, for instance. Besides, other grassroot organizations of the Snow Revolution movement have made use of the local Russian social network, analogous to Facebook, which is called Vkontakte ("stay in touch" in Russian). Facebook was chosen for this study since the author wanted to concentrate on the content analysis and historical routes of the movement, and avoid the analysis of the technical features of Vkontakte.

Practical implications

Despite a few shortcomings, the collective action frame of the Bolotnaya Facebook community has been persistently functioning. It could function even better, if the following remarks were taken into account.

1.   In a collective action frame, all framing dimensions must be present and congruent.

2.   Communicating a collective action frame must involve three levels: values, strategy and tactic.

3.   Both short-term and long-term goals must be introduced.

4.   An appropriate vocabulary must be elaborated.

5.   Any historical examples can be used, but must be placed into the chain past-present-future.

6.   The goals must be considered in their relationship with the (desirable) institutional design: political actors come and leave, institutions are durable entities.

7.   The framing dimensions must work to attract new members, not to exclude them.

Any activist can use Facebook not only for information distribution, but also for exploring public opinion and as guidelines for writing their own public messages.

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