Social media - The only voice for oppositional media in Russia?

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore how Telegram is used as a tool for social media protests in Russia. The thesis will focus on the relationship between offline and online protests and mainly discuss the application Telegram in this context. It will analyze the positive and negative attributes, as well as the effects and future of Telegram as a tool for social media protests. It will do this by drawing on theory on political socialization, as well as mediatization, while also looking at various research that has been made on the subject. The result shows that Telegram is used as a tool for the Russian people to express their longing and wish for freedom, while it also shows that the Russian state is trying to prevent harm to the Russian people, while still harming them differently, by censoring and blocking their social media. The conclusion discusses these results and questions whether Telegram can uphold the image as a platform for freedom of speech for the Russian citizens.

Keywords: Social media, Russia, Protests, Online Protests, Offline Protests
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1. Introduction

Protests on social media have grown immensely, not only in Russia, but in the entire world. Social media has become an elemental mean for modern social movements (Clark, Freelon, & McIlwain, 2018, p. 991). In a country like Russia, which is filled with both direct censorship and self-censorship (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018, p. 3), social media has become a tool more important than ever for Russian citizens. The Russian states holds a firm grip on media in Russia and controls the majority of it (Johansson & Nygren, 2014, p. 3).

As the Russian states power over media has grown, so has social media. Popular messaging applications like VKontakte have outgrown applications like Facebook (Enikolopov, Makarin & Petrova, 2016, p. 8), and social media has grown as a tool against censorship and as a tool for the oppositional voices in Russia.

An example of this can be seen clearly with the application Telegram. Telegram is a messaging application that focuses mainly on speed and security. It is heavily encrypted and values the privacy of its users highly. The application was created in 2013 by brothers Nikolai and Pavel Durov (Telegram, 2013a). During the past few years, Telegram has faced many challenges - the most recent one regarding a ban of the application in Russia, in 2018. The ban occurred after one of the creators, Pavel Durov, refused to provide encrypted information about the users and the content posted in the application to the Russian state (MacFarquhar, 2018a). However, Telegram is up and running again and the fact that the application manages to come back after every ban, is a clear sign of how important it is to the Russian citizens. For the Russian citizens, Telegram has become a place of privacy, democracy and freedom online. It has become an online platform to freely express their opinions and to take a clear stand in the debate of censorship and privacy regarding Telegram. This essay will examine how Telegram is used as a tool for online protests as well as the negative and positive attributes of it.
2. Background

In order to understand the complex history of Telegram, it is advantageous to understand the history of the application that started it all. Therefore, this chapter will start by presenting the online platform VKontakte and then proceed to describe the history of Telegram. Lastly, this chapter will explain how censorship in Russia appears today and present a very recent example of this.

2.1 VKontakte

VKontakte is an online platform that was created by brothers Nikolai and Pavel Durov. The registration was made available in 2006. VKontakte grew rapidly and became the most visited website in Russia (Enikolopov et al., 2016, p. 8). The aim of the platform was to act as a youth- and student-oriented website. Its essential mission was to be a tool for students to maintain contact later in life. VKontakte has also been used as a platform for protests. During the parliamentary elections in Russia in December 2011, an outbreak of protests took place online as well as offline. One of the creators of the platform, Pavel Durov, was at this point contacted by the Federal Security Services (FSB). FSB asked the creator to block oppositional-minded online communities and protest events. Durov dismissed the inquiry, arguing that a potential block would make VKontakte’s users move to another social media platform and competitor, such as Facebook. A few years later, in 2014, Durov was forced to sell his share of the company. Up until he lost control of the company, the platform’s policies about freedom of speech remained (p. 9).

Today, VKontakte is partly owned by United Capital Partners, one of the most crucial investment groups in the Russian stock market (UCP, 2006), and mail.ru, a Russian internet company (Scott, 2014). The platform’s mission is to affiliate services, people and companies through uncomplicated and convenient tools of communication. On their website, they state that they oppose censorship, that they aim to provide every opportunity for their users to communicate and express themselves openly and to facilitate the means of expressing their opinions (VK, 2019a). They believe that every individual has the right to decide what
information they share and with who. Furthermore, they believe that every person has the right to confidentiality (VK, 2019b). However, on their website, they also state that in accordance with certain laws, there is certain information that they will have to provide if requested. They explain it in such a sense that they see it as their obligation to support the investigation for criminals all whilst preserving their user’s rights for privacy (VK, 2019c).

2.2 Telegram

A year before he was forced to sell his shares of VKontakte, Pavel Durov created a free messaging application named Telegram. The applications focus lies with security and rapidity. Much like other messaging applications, the user can send messages, videos, files and photographs to other users. It is also possible for the users to create groups or channels for up to 200,000 people. It is in the chats of the groups and channels where the priority of security truly can be noticed. Telegram has a feature called ”Secret chats”, which any user is able to create. These chats do not leave any traces behind. They do not permit any forwarding of messages and they provide a service of self-destructing messages. The messages are not saved on the Telegram cloud and can only be read on the original platform of the message (Telegram, 2013a).

2.3 Censorship in Russia

Johansson and Nygren (2014) state that Russian media has two sides to it: State media (supervised and managed by the state) and independent media (independent from the state). However, the situation is more complex than that. The Russian state has a strong influence over media that can be divided into three categories (p. 3). These categories are:

I - Direct state control.

II - Indirect state control over state-owned companies.

III - Indirect control through a pressure on the owners of media tycoons.
Category I refers to companies that the state owns. Gazprom Media is instead an example of category II. There are several media that are not owned primarily by the state, however, they are owned by Gazprom Media, which is a company that in turn is owned by the state. Therefore, the states receives an indirect control over the "free" media. Category III refers to a media not owned by the state. However, in this case, a person with a high position within this media (for example, the manager) might have a connection to a government official. This relationship between the two bestows indirect power over the media to the government official (Johansson & Nygren, 2014, p. 3).

2.4 Yarovaya laws

In 2018, a new data storage law was introduced in Russia, referred to as the "Yarovaya laws". The legislation regards saving of data, more specifically phone conversations, messages and chat activity. It requires internet and mobile companies to store this data for six months and hand it over to security services in the event of a court order. The law was co-authored by Irina Yarovaya, a member of the conservative political party United Russia, and has been heavily criticized. Activists have called it "Russia’s Big Brother Law” and argued that it will bestow more power to law enforcement to silence political activists. But the criticism has not only come from activists (The Moscow Times, 2018b).

Roskomsvoboda, a public organisation with the aim to counter censorship on the internet (Roskomsvoboda, 2012), criticized the law. Their director, Artyom Kozlyuk, states that it is unconstitutional and risks massive data leaks. He continues by saying that he is certain that because of the demands of the law, the databases will be leaked or hacked in the future (The Moscow Times, 2018b). According to The Moscow Times (2018b), the colossal telecom companies in Russia are also critical of the law. Not only are they forced to spend billions of dollars on the new infrastructure that is required to meet the storage demands (which may affect the costs for customers as well), it has also been hard to meet the requirements in time, since many companies have not had the technical capacity to reach the demands. One of the companies that faced this challenge was the mobile provider Megafon, where general director Sergei Soldatenkov declared that his company does not have the technical capabilities to reach the requirements and that it will have to turn into a process over a few years for all
However, even though there is a lot of criticism towards it, the law is first and formally an anti-terrorism law. It has tightened the punishments for users who re-post information regarded as extremist online, required Russians to share information with the authorities about suspected crime planning and activities and demanded that employees at postal offices examine packages (Roth, 2016). Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, even directed the government to help with the financial costs that arose for the telecom companies when the law was introduced (Roth, 2016).

### 2.5 Telegram and its relevance

Social media has grown immensely as a tool for protests. The Arab uprisings is a great example of this. In this case, social media has even been deemed by some as the essential force for the movement. Techno-utopian researchers argue that the internet is contributing with something positive. They argue that it contributes with an increased amount of ideas and information regarding political participation, democracy and civil society (Lim, 2012, p. 232). At the same time, social media is very much criticized in this context. Critics talk about social media’s relationship to democracy and politics. They state that the internet is a menace to democracy, a tool that corporations and governments use for manipulation (p. 232).

Both of these views can be applied to the case of Telegram. As an application with more than 200 million users all over the world with encrypted messages (which means that no third party can reach the information that is being shared) (Business daily, 2018), Telegram becomes a big source for information and ideas, according to Lim (2012, p. 232). At the same time, Telegram has become a force that the Russian government tries to manipulate and control. It all started when FSB required Telegram to open their encrypted messenger application, so that they could get access to it, with the aim to stop possible terrorist attacks that might be planned in conversations in the application. The creators of Telegram refused, with the explanation that it would disrespect user privacy (Business daily, 2018).
Roskomnadzor, the federal service for supervision of communications, information technology and mass media founded by Russia’s prime minister Dmitrij Medvedev (Roskomnadzor, 2019), responded to Telegram’s reaction by filing a lawsuit against the company (Business daily, 2018). The court ended up agreeing to Roskomnadzor’s demands and thereby made the decision to quit their contribution of technical assistance. They also decided to add restraints on the availability to the messenger on Telegram. These regulations caused problems for Telegram, but not only for them. The situation may not be as black and white as it appears to be, since Telegram is also used by the Kremlin to speak to reporters and organize calls with the spokesperson of Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin. The spokesman for Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, commented on the ban and said that the limitations of access was never the intention and that it is unfortunate that an agreement could not be reached between the organization and Telegram (Business daily, 2018).

As a response to the situation with the ban, a protest was held in Moscow in 2018. More than 12,000 people took part in the protests and paper planes (the shape of Telegrams official logotype) together with posters were brought to show the stand against censorship. Paper planes were thrown in the air and slogans such as ”We don’t want television, we want Telegram” were presented. Pictures and content were shared on various social media platforms, partly by using the hashtag #digitalresistance (The Moscow Times, 2018a).

This shows that Telegram has been and is a wildly discussed topic in Russia and that it has a relationship to social media protests. As the eight most popular global mobile messaging application (as of April 2019) in the world (Statista, 2019), the controversy and complications that regards Telegram becomes very significant for its future and not only for itself, but for all of its users, especially in the context of social media protests.
3. Research aim and questions

This paper will discuss how social media is used as a tool of opposition in Russia against the Russian state, focusing mainly on how the application Telegram is used as a tool for social media protests. I will discuss this subject based on these research questions:

*How is Telegram used as a tool for online protests in Russia?*

*What is the connection between offline and online protests?*

*How does this connection manifest itself in the case of Telegram?*

4. Theoretical framework

This chapter will begin by explaining the term “political socialization” and “mediatization”. Thereafter, previous research made in the field will be presented. Since the foundation of the prohibition of Telegram highly regards the Russian state and its politics, political socialization becomes a useful tool for analyzing the situation, since it strives to obtain a larger understanding of the structure in which political systems function. Mediatization becomes a tool in understanding the significance of media in the context of offline and online protests, related to the changes in culture and society.

4.1 Political socialization

Daniel B. German (2014) defines political socialization as the development by which different orientations toward the political system are evolved through generations. The orientations that this regards are: Political knowledge, opinions (regarding specific political issues, deeper attitudes, as well as values or beliefs) and behavior (for example, voting) (p. 17). Regards to in which geographical space these processes take place, these orientations form us as individuals. Several factors affect the development of political orientations. One of these are agents of socialization (where media, region, family, gender, education and ethnic or racial groups are included). The process of political orientations that affects us as individuals in turn form a political culture which shapes the operating of a certain political system.
German (2014) explains his definition of the term "socialized" by referring to Plato and his text *Republic*. In this text, Plato argues that a creation of various roles for the city state exists. He states that a soldier should always be a soldier. No matter which group an individual fits into, they have a distinct role and has to be brought up (socialized) to achieve a specific function. A soldier should be taught to fight in war, not take part in reading poetry. If a soldier would do something that does not fit into this socialization, for example engage in poetry, he or she would cease to be a soldier (p. 17).

As mentioned before, there are different political orientations. One of them, knowledge, is an outcome of the process of socialization. The amount of knowledge that exists within a society has an immense meaning for the progress of what kinds of political system exists. Democracy would not have been able to flourish in ancient Greece if it would not have been for literacy, since citizens had to read the laws that were put up and decide whether they should support or oppose them by direct vote. Today, a democratic government compels literacy for the citizens in it. A criticism towards authoritarian political systems (such as dictatorships, warlords or monarchies) is to make sure that the citizens in the society stay semi-literate or illiterate (German, 2014, p. 17-18).

Certain installations of values and attitudes (together with knowledge) regulate what type of political system prevails. These values and attitudes are alluded to as culture. Every nation has its own individual political culture which in turn refers to the nation’s political ways of acting and the nation’s political values. In conclusion, it can be said that knowledge, values and attitudes are associated to political behavior. The degree to what an individual feels that their participation is effective or not (attitude of efficacy) is deeply connected to political participation. A high efficacy is connected to education in political systems that are democratic. Together with faith towards the system, it is imperative to raise the involvement in political processes. If these attitudes would fall to a very low level, it is debatable if a system that is democratic could function or if it would fall victim to an authoritarian substitute (German, 2014, p. 18).
Erpyleva (2018) states a very common understanding and focus of political socialization, one that goes well together with German (2014). Erpyleva (2018) explains that the focus within studies on political socialization most often focus on how different institutions impact the political behaviors of young people (p. 22). What differs in German’s study of the term, is the fact that he does not only focus on how young people’s political behaviors are impacted by different institutions, but rather how different orientations toward the political systems evolve through generations (German, 2014, p. 17).

Whilst the focus shifts between researchers, German (2014) and Erpyleva (2018) agree on that family is one major factor that influences political values and activity, hence becoming agents of socialization. Erpyleva (2018) brings up Jennings and Niemi, who state that an individuals family impacts ones party preferences in a larger scale than peer groups (as cited in Erpyleva, 2018, p. 22-23). This is due to the fact that parents usually do not consciously keep in mind the political education for their kids and do not introduce them to alternative political perspectives. She also brings up Niemi and Sobieszek, who instead state that peer groups, such as schools, have a larger influence. They state that the influence can come from political discussions at university, which can affect the opinion of an individuals political attitude (as cited in Erpyleva, 2018, p. 22-23).

German (2014) agrees that "the nature of family life” may have a big impact on an individual’s political activity later in life. He deems the family as the biggest agent in the process of political socialization across the world. He brings up an example of how a very disciplined, patriarchal structure on a family may result in an authoritarian political structure later in life being more likely (p. 20).

Daniel Miranda, Juan Carlos Castillo and Particio Cumsille (2018) showcase a mix between the two previously mentioned articles. They state that the family is a very important variable, but also state that parental education is a very important factor, not only for political attitudes and activity but also for inclusiveness (p. 104-105). What they focus on more than the two previously mentioned, is how the social position of an individual is strongly connected to
political activity. The social position of an individual includes educational level, occupational status, money as well as income, among other things. Other than social positions of individuals, the authors also mention that resources are an important attribute to political activity, but more political activity such as civil movements and protests, rather than voting for example (Miranda et al., 2018, p. 104-105).

What is not mentioned is what in turn affects different agents of socialization - What transforms families, people in general and our social positions? This is where German (2014) turns to another agent of socialization: Media. Media, especially television and different types of electronic communication such as instant messaging and the Internet, are agents of socialization that are reconstructing both families as well as nations and individuals in a developing global world (p. 21). It is also a factor for expanding political awareness and awareness of democracy. German (2014) writes that it is more common that information technology is operated as a source for appealing people to political participation in developing countries, whilst it is more common that information technology individualizes people in more developed countries, which results in individuals withdrawing more and more from the real world and entering the virtual world more. However, this is not the case in all developed countries. In the presidential election in 2004 in the United States, the amount of voters that voted went from 50% to 60%, hence showing that this is not the case for all countries (p. 21).

German (2014) states that the mediated relationship between civilians and governments around the world vary a lot. In some places, media is owned by the government and censored, whilst in other places it is still censored but privately owned and in some cases it is almost completely private owned and not censored, but free. No matter which of these relationships exists in a country, they all have an enormous significance on the socialization process of it. Depending on which relation you find in a country, it has different affects on the socialization (p. 21).

Ekström and Shehata (2018) agree that media has an immense effect on us, in the sense that it has a startling effect on our political activity (p. 741). They particularly look at online media and mention that it not only affects us, but that it has alternated the circumstances for political
engagement. They continue by saying that social media and digital networks contribute with new dynamics, both to activism and social movements. Social media and digital movements have given citizens a much broader possibility to express their views in public, as well as the possibility to partake in collective actions (Ekström & Shehata, 2018, p. 741).

Much like German (2014), who states that media is (among other things) a factor for expanding political awareness and awareness of democracy (p. 201), Ekström and Shehata (2018) also mention that the networks that are created within social media constitute a continuous stream of information, which gives possibilities to share news from all kinds of perspectives. Social media especially gives a flexible, individualized and loose types of connection to movements that are collective (p. 742). Online media can add to a wider reorganizations of institutional contexts for political commitment. This can primarily be seen in the changes towards more self-organized activities which happen in more domestic environments and through mobile media. These particular trends mirror larger changes in political culture. Political activity or engagement online can conveniently be incorporated into one’s everyday life, wherever and whenever the individual prefers. This is due to the fact that it typically requires limited commitments (p. 743).

This easy access to media (particularly digital and social media) can be seen as the reason of why it affects our political values and activity so much. There are however researchers who argue that the political activity and participation of youths have dropped and that media is not the cure for it. Brian D. Loader (2007) discusses how the traditional means of political socialization does not engage or arouse inspiration for duteous participation anymore. He brings up hesitancy to vote and an increasingly higher age of members of political parties as two examples of this (p. 1) The reason for this is not the disconnection for youths and politics however. It is rather the political commissioners who appear as self-absorbed and reserved, unable to feel compassionate with youth experiences today of fast-pacing big changes within the cultural and social world. This is most clearly seen in the contrast between the political communications traditional style of chosen political representatives and young peoples new media-oriented life experiences (experiences that are characterized by social patterns of a higher amount of fluidity, individualization, mobility and consumerism) (p. 2).
Nevertheless, there are several researchers that show that the political participation among the youth has not decreased and that the geographical space matters. Sofia Yingfa and Miao Hongna (2014) argue the opposite and showcase that the internet has helped raise the political participation in China for example, due to the freedom and democracy it possessed, in contradiction to traditional media. It has inspired people in China to express their opinions and has promoted political participation (p. 346-347), whilst the voting participation in Russia has decreased through the last years, with one small jump up in 2018 (IDEA, 2019). At the same time, protests are emerging and gaining more attention in Russia. In other words, the political activity is increasing, but in different ways around the world. Therefore, it is unfair to state that the general political activity is decreasing. I would argue that one needs to look at the different categories within political activity, in different countries.

This chapter has explained that political socialization is the development of political systems over generations and how it affects people. It has explained that knowledge, values, attitudes and efficacy are associated to political behavior. It has discussed how family as well as ones social position has a huge impact on an individuals political values and political activity. However, it has showcased that the biggest impact comes from media and that media (especially digital and social media) has opened up a broader chance for people to express themselves and for freedom and democracy to take place in societies. It has shown that some researchers do not think media is the main driver, however, it is not as easy as saying that, since there are several factors included in the question and problem. And more researchers show that media does in fact have a big impact on political values and activity.

4.2 Mediatization

Mediatization is the most fundamental theory in order to understand the significance of media to culture and society. The term has only recently been explored with the aim to elaborate it to a more specific understanding of mediatization as a cultural and social development.
Since little work has been made to establish a common understanding of the term, several definitions exist. Hjarvard (2008) mentions a definition by Kent Asp, a Swedish media researcher, who defines the term (within a political context) as the process in which political systems are greatly impacted by, as well as accommodate to, the requirements of mass media in their reports of politics (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 106).

Furthermore, Asp views the flourishing independence of media’s political sources as another proof of mediatization. He states that it contributes to the increased dominance for media over media content. While Asp’s view of the term is somewhat narrow, he does acknowledge Gudmund Hernes’ (a Norwegian sociologist) term ”Media-twisted society” (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 106). Hernes himself explained mediatization by stating that media has an essential influence on every social institution and the relationship in-between them. Hernes might not have used the term mediatization, however, the term ”Media-twisted society” agrees well with mediatization. The main questions regarding Hernes’ understanding of mediatization are for individuals to question the repercussions that media has, both regarding individuals as well as institutions. It is also to ask how administrations that are public, parties, organizations, businesses and schools work and how these are connected to each other (p. 106). It can briefly be stated that the main question regards how media modifies the inner workings of communal entities, as well as the reciprocal relationship between these. A central point that Hernes brings up regarding mediatization is that media has reconstructed our society in the sense that we have moved away from a state of information deficiency to a state of information opulence. However, in this state of opulence, the competition toughens and the possibility to present one’s message becomes tougher (p. 107).

Mediatization has been defined in the context of politics by several researchers. Hjarvard (2008) mentions Mazzoleni and Shulz, two researchers who just like Asp have ascribed the term to the impact that media has on politics. They identify the term as the dubious consequences of modern mass media’s development and bring up different examples of the increasing impact mass media has over political power (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 107). The use of television in the Brazilian election campaign in 1989 by Fernando Collar de Mello is one example, as well as how Silvio Berlusconi used media to reach his power in Italy.
Mediatized politics as these examples, are politics in which the autonomy has vanished. These types of politics have developed a need for mass media and are incessantly constructed by interactions with mass media. However, it is not a case of media that has taken over politics completely. Political institutions still manage and control politics, however, they have developed to rely heavily on the media and continue to have to accustom to the rationality of the media (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 107).

Apart from viewing mediatization from a political context, several researchers have specified the term in the context of social change. Schulz and Krotz are two researchers who talk about this. Schulz describes four different processes in which media has modified human interaction and communication (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 109). Essentially, media has broadened the capabilities of human connection regarding both time and space. Secondly, media has developed into a replacement for social activities which formerly occurred face-to-face. Schulz brings up internet banking as an example of this, where it has replaced the face-to-face meeting in between clients and their banks. Thirdly, media has become a consolidation of offline and online activities. Communication that takes part face-to-face incorporates with communication that is mediated, as media pervades into our everyday life. Lastly, media has made actors in various sectors adapt. These actors are forced to accustom their behavior to the formats, routines and valuations of media, in order to accommodate it. An example of this is politicians who have to learn how to phrase themselves in interviews with reporters (p. 109).

While Krotz does not offer a distinct definition of the term mediatization, he explains that mediatization is consistently attached to the context of time and culture (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 109). Mediatization is a constant process in which the changes in human connections made by media affect and change our culture and society (p. 110).

Whilst the definitions mentioned above may be thorough and detailed, Krogh and Michelsen (2017) argue that a broader definition of the term is in order. The detailed definitions of mediatization need to be enriched by a broader definition, to supplement what they are lacking. In order to give a broader definition of the term, Krogh and Michelsen (2017) bring up Couldry and Hepp as an example. Couldry and Hepp define the term as an approach used
to critically analyze the relationship between developments within media and communications and developments within culture and society, as well as the relations between these developments (as cited in Krogh & Michelsen, 2017, p. 523).

5. Previous research

5.1 Protests

Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (1999) explain that protests are ways of influencing social, political and cultural processes in a way that is not routinized (p. 165-166). They are places of disputes where symbols, identities, bodies, discourses and practices are adopted in order to cause or prevent modifications and changes in power relations that are institutionalized. In contrast, social movements are seen as something that engages mannerisms of persuasion, which usually are unorthodox and dramatic. Protests on the other hand, are locations for disputes where identities, practices, symbols and discourses are adopted to exert or avert changes within departmental power relations (p. 165-166).

Something that can silence protester’s voices and diminish their success, is if political oppression grows. Openness and/or oppression in a society can have an immense influence on the tactics and strategies of social movement (Duncan, 2016, p. 25). As Duncan (2016) refers to Porta and Diani, if political systems and authorities implement more points of access to the different decision-making processes, the chance is bigger that social movements will embrace more conventional and regulated ways of sharing their opinions and voices (as cited in Duncan, 2016, p. 25).

Just as the state of a society may have an immense influence on the strategies of social movements, protests may have an influence on political decision-making. By influencing public opinion, protests may contribute to political decision-making, since public opinion has an influence on that. Public approval is also a very important factor for people to want to engage in protests (Zlobina & Gonzalez, 2017, p. 235). According to Klandermans, this is because when a collective action is supported by sympathizers who accept the strategic and political aims of it, the strength within the collective action grows (as cited in Zlobina & Gonzalez, 2017, p. 235).
Apart from a public approval making a protests audience broader, Cohen-Stratyner (2017) argues that something that can do that as well and gain more attention to it, is media. Attention in traditional and broadcast media (such as magazines, newspapers, television and radio) implement information and documentation of protests (p. 86). This information should be retained in order to authenticate factual information, regarding corollary texts (for example, interviews with the people participating in the protest) and attendance for example. These types of documentations that are spread may also showcase associated protests, something that can broaden the coverage of the protest (p. 86).

5.2 Online protests

The presence of large-scale protests has grown immensely through the years. Over the years, social networks have also become a part of offline protests (Steinert-Threlkeld, Mocanu, Vespignani & Fowler, 2015, p. 1-2). There are several perks with using social media for protesting, several factors that make it easier to protest. Becoming active on social media does not require as many resources as for example having a television station or starting a civil society organization or creating a newspaper. One outcome of this becomes that the information that is shared on social media can be reproduced by more people, in comparison to the other cases, like television or magazines. Another factor that can be a positive attribute for social media in this context, is that social media fosters relationships between people who in other cases might not have come into contact at all. This can in turn raise the amount of people that get to know about an event (p. 2).

In her article, Yumei Bu (2017) mentions Lou and Liu, who talk about the movement from online to offline. They explain that it consists of three stages. The first one is about ”Actual-virtual” initiation and transformation. This means that certain situations and events offline triggers activity online. The mobilized objects then go to online environments in order to find target groups and to promulgate information about the mobilization (as cited in Bu, 2017, p. 209).
The second one is about symbolic communication within the internet as an environment. During the second stage, the objects and subjects within the mobilization have a contemporary interaction and communication in the internet as their environment. The third stage is about making a transition from the "virtual" to the "actual". During this stage, the mobilized subjects and objects move back to the "offline" world and affect the situation as expected by mobilizers, indirectly or directly. Stage one and two are essentially carried out in the environment of the internet, which becomes a platform for interaction and information. The third stage becomes the target, when a collective action needs or wants to turn into offline action. It also successfully demonstrates the importance of the internet for collective activity (as cited in Bu, 2017, p. 209-210).

In her article, Bu (2017) mentions Postmes and Brunsting, who talk about the different influences that online versus offline has and what they are good for, from a perspective of identification and recognition. Their conclusion is that online actions are more convenient for soft or persuasive actions (an example of this can be exhibiting a petition or composing a letter) while offline actions are generally more convenient for radical actions (an example of this can be protests, demonstrations and blockades). As such, the importance of the internet in this context lies more within altering people’s way of thinking regarding actions, rather than strengthening or creating a shared identification (p. 211).

5.3 Online and offline protests

Zeynep Tüfekçi (2017) is a researcher who has talked a lot about the subject surrounding online and offline protests. In her book, "Twitter and tear gas", the author brings up examples where online activism has played a part in different movements. She mentions the Zapatista uprisings in Mexico, Gezi park and the Arab Spring, to name a few. However, the author also speaks generally about the history of protests as well as networked protests.

Tüfekçi (2017) talks about how the operation of protests has changed immensely through the years. Not only do protests also take place online today, but the practice in which protests work differ a lot between protests in the past and protests today. Numerous changes derive
from political and cultural origins that existed before the internet. However, these changes were not fully adequate to flourish until certain technical developments were made (p. xxiii). Networked protests have numerous strengths as well as numerous disadvantages. One advantage is that the possibility to use digital appliances to promptly assemble a large number of protesters with a mutual aim empowers movements. However, when the group of protesters is assembled, a challenge may arise, as the process has bypassed several traditional assignments of organizing. Traditional organizing does not only help with constructing mutual decision-making capabilities (at times, through informal or formal managements), it also creates a cumulative capacity between the participants of the movement over shared events (p. xxiii).

A networked protest frequently attracts lots of individuals (both online and offline) on account of the eloquent and often playful style of it (Tüfekçi, 2017, p. xxiii). However, if not able to navigate the inescapable challenges, the movement is bound to fall Movements as these rest their organizing and publicity considerably on digital means and online platforms. Even though online media are more accessible, it does not always signify a participation as equally big as the interest. The inclusiveness of online media also does not equal a balance within the movement. Rather, it is often the individuals with extensive followings on social media that become informal spokespersons. The informal spokespersons often possess a strong influence. However, they also often lack the proper legitimacy found with a person that would be chosen as a leader in an open and sanctioned process (p. xxiii).

Quite often, this results in a problem (p. xxiv). The people who participate in the movement might object to the spokesperson, who view themselves as the person who runs things without any mutual agreement, and start to utter opinions about him or her online. Even though these types of tensions emerge, the movement itself does not possess the necessary equipment to dispel these concerns or make decisions. It can be argued that digital technologies, to a certain extent, immerse the constant tensions among individual expressions and the collective will inside movements (p. xxiv).
Another disadvantage of networked protests has to do with the "Normalization or standardization" which may occur for individuals offline, going online (Dogaru-Tulică, 2019, p. 108). On the internet, people tend to seek themselves to areas where they can connect with users who share similar views and opinions. Dogaru-Tulică (2019) refers to Wojcik, who explains that the searches on the internet rarely extend to new interest, which only amplifies the individuals previous beliefs (as cited in Dogaru-Tulică, 2019, p. 108). She continues by referring to Sunstein and Ulen, who state that due to this, it can be argued that the internet will not broaden any users perspective, rather, several negative outcomes may come from it. The polarization of an online group with the same visions may be one of them (as cited in Dogaru-Tulică, 2019, p. 108).

5.4 The Telegram protest

On April 30 2018, a protest took place in Moscow, Russia (MacFarquhar, 2018b). Thousands of people participated in the demonstration against censorship. The protest started off as a stand against the blockage of Telegram. The reason why Telegram was blocked was because the creator of the application, Pavel Durov, refused to unlock the applications encryption keys after the Russian state had demanded it. The reason that the state wanted to be able to view the information in the application was in order to see potential harmful content related to terrorist attacks. In the attempt to shut down Telegram, several other websites, such as VKontakte (Russias version of Facebook) and Yandex (Russias version of Google) were affected in the sense that they as well were occluded for a short period. The situation caused a lot of indignation, both from companies like VKontakte and Yandex, but also from the individuals taking part in the protest. Several spokespersons from the Libertarian Party in Russia (who organized the protest) took part in it (MacFarquhar, 2018b). Among them were Aleksei Navalny, a lawyer and activist who has been arrested multiple times for participation and organizations of protests (The Guardian, 2018) as well as Alexander Gornik, a software entrepreneur, who talked about how the blocking of Telegram is not only restricted to the specific application. Rather, it is an endeavor to segregate the Russian segment from the internet. Neither the Russian state, nor the president, has commented further on the protest (MacFarquhar, 2018b).
6. Methodology

6.1 Interviews

Blomberg, Burrell & Guest (2002) describe that one can either choose to use a structured or unstructured method when conducting an interview (informal or semi-structured). The structured interview often includes established questions, which gives the interviewee a very limited amount of control. The unstructured interview, however, is build up more as a conversation. The questions in this type of interviews are broader and rather include follow-on questions, associated to the answers, rather than having established, controlled questions (p. 970).

Skinner (2012) mentions Kvale, who talks about semi-structured interviews. He mentions how a give-and-take element to it exists, that is the centre of the interview. He views the interview as something that co-creates knowledge, a situation where the interviewer and the interviewee together construct knowledge. The interview has a structured layout: It consists of a beginning and an ending. Between this, there is questioning, listening and answering (as cited in Skinner, 2012, p. 8). A semi-structured interview will be conducted in this essay.

Using a qualitative approach to the interview is beneficial in several ways (p. 9). Kvale explains that a qualitative interview aims to comprehend the object’s understandings of their world, meanings, narrations and interpretations. The interview should always be a safe place for the interviewee, in order for them to speak in an untroubled way. In every interview, a relationship appears and is acted out between the interviewer and the interviewee. In the conversation between these, knowledge is created: we learn and extend our knowledge through conversation. An interview has the possibility to manufacture the invisible visible, as well as give the interviewer admittance to the world of the interviewee and their emotions, perspectives, understandings, reactions and so on (as cited in Skinner, 2012, p. 9).
The reason that I chose to conduct an interview is because I felt that it would present the most authentic picture of the complexity of the case of Telegram. By interviewing someone who has worked with Telegram as well as lives in the context of where the controversy of it has taken place (Russia), this interview will contribute to a more genuine picture of the issue. Since the interviewee has been working in the field of marketing and advertising on the internet, it may also give a sense of the role that Telegram has as an actor within Mediatization. Since Mediatization analyzes the developments within media and communication as well as the developments within culture and society and the relation between these developments (Couldry & Hepp, as cited in Michelsen & Krogh, 2017, p. 523), it felt relevant to conduct an interview where I could get a better understanding of how Telegram has contributed to these changes. This understanding can in turn help to see the connection between the changes within media and communication and the changes in culture and society. An interview can also show a very clear picture of what powerful position Telegram has an agent of socialization. Since media are agents of socialization (traditional and social media) (German, 2014, p. 21), Telegram definitely falls under this category and to conduct an interview with someone who has worked with Telegram in her workplace (even though she has not worked for the company), can showcase the effect of Telegram on the individual worker. Whilst the interviewee might not be an expert on Telegram, her knowledge about it and the controversy around it says a lot about the attention that Telegram has gained through the years.

6.2 Limitations - Interviews

With every method comes a few limitations. When it comes to interviews, the limitations mainly regard the interviewee. The answers that the interviewee gives may not always be in line with their behavior. They may also forget certain details about the theme that they are being asked about and/or forget about some things. The outcome of this becomes a deficient research which may lack several important details, and which restricts the information that the researcher obtains (Blomberg, Burrell, et. al, 2002, p. 969).
Blomberg, Burrell, et al (2002) state that the timeframe of the method becomes a restriction as well (p. 970-971). When conducting an interview, the researcher encounters the interviewee once or twice, in best case for a few hours. While convenient information and insights often come out as a result of these encounters, the method falls short when compared to ethnographic long-term fieldwork. With long-term fieldwork, researchers have the opportunity to spend a very long time with the matter of the subject. This does not only give the researcher an opportunity to go through several research methods (like participant observation and semi-structured interviews for example) but it also gives a perspective on people as human beings that are operating participants in the world, who commit to different social activities. In contrast to interviews, which gives a perspective of people as human beings who as narrators attempt to understand their personal and particular paths. Another limitation that comes with using this method, is that the method may not feel judicious to some people, to the point where the material (in some settings) might become completely irrelevant and ineffective. Personal reasons can also affect the limitation of using interviews as a method. Some people find it easier to take part in an interview and to share their story, while some people find it difficult to engage themselves in such situations (p. 970-971).

6.3 Visual analysis

Visual analysis is a method for analyzing the visuals in our world. The visual analysis also provides assistance in analyzing human action, language and cognition. However, whenever a visual object is being studied, the viewer cannot simply view the object itself. As a viewer, we need to consider several aspects, such as the aspect of distinctive semiotic resources as well as methods of things that create meaning, which we format, so we can manufacture the social worlds that we live in and construct through current processes of action (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004, p. 6-7). Several of these are not visual themselves, although, the visual material can not be justly analyzed without them. The central point in a visual analysis is not the visual itself, it is rather what part the visual acts as in the manufacturing of meaningful action (p. 6-7).
Within visual analysis, denotations and connotations are two useful approaches to view visual images. Denotations showcases what the visual image depicts, and connotations depicts the values and ideas that are expressed through what is represented. The analysis will draw on parts from Barthian visual semiotics, which Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2004) write about in their book "The handbook of visual analysis". Two fundamental questions are asked within the visual semiotics of Roland Barthes: There is the question of representation (what images represent and how) as well as the question of hidden implications of images. The primary idea within Barthian visual semiotics is the layer of meaning.

The first layer is denotations. According to Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2004) denotations describe what the viewer sees in an image (p. 93). No "encoding" exists in the sense that the visual must be studied before the information can be interpreted. However, when it comes to denotations, we can only describe what we recognize and what we know. And at some points, we might not know all the information. For example, if we see a uniform, we might understand that it is a uniform, but we might not know where it comes from or what kind of uniform it is. This is not a problem though, because we are not even aware of our ignorance until we have to describe the visual thing in front of us (p. 94). If we lack information about something, we put it on a category of things mentally in which we do not need any detailed information. Denotations cannot be counted as completely up to the viewer. It all depends on the context. There are contexts where certain readings of the visual thing are granted or encouraged. There are also contexts where the creator of the visual wants its audience to interpret what he or she sees in a certain way. If this is the case, there will be hints pointing us towards the sight that the creator wants us to see (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004, p. 94-95).

The second layer of meaning is connotation. Unlike denotations, connotations is the layer of more expansive concepts, values and ideas which the represented places, people and things “stand for” or “are a sign of”. Connotations are a natural continuation of the denotative meaning. The denotative meaning has been established and now a second meaning is stored over it. The meaning can come from cultural associations that are connected to the represented people, things or places in the picture or through certain “connotators”, which can be for example specific photography techniques (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004, 96-97).
The reason visual analysis was chosen as a method for this thesis is to showcase how the civilians political identities in Russia are shaped and constructed. Since censorship is an immense part of traditional Russian media (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018, p. 3), preventing the citizens to express their different political identities through it (or censoring it), social media has become a very important factor for the Russian citizens to express their opinions, as social media has grown as a tool against censorship and as a tool for the oppositional voices in Russia (Enikolopov et al., 2016, p. 8). Through social media, civilians may express their political identities and partake in political activity and showcase this political activity. Since media (especially the internet) are such important agents of socialization, it felt relevant to look at what opportunity media gives civilians to express their opinions (German, 2014, p. 21).

The visual analysis showcases a practical example of how the Telegram protest looks, but it also showcases both how the offline protest looked and how the online protest looks. That is why I chose to analyze figure 1 and 2, since figure 1 showcases a picture from the offline and figure 2 showcases Pavel Durovs (the creator of Telegram) participation in the protest (which he participated in online). This will be a good basic for the analysis that will be presented later on in this thesis.

6. 4 Limitations - Visual analysis

Even though visual analysis includes context, culture and representation and questions what and how images represent, as well as what ideas and values the representing in the visual image stands for (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004, p. 6-7), the visual analysis does not include attributes that may be important in some cases, for example, some attributes when studying Instagram posts. The number of likes is one of these attributes. Young people on Instagram are especially focused on getting attention or affirmation through the shape of “likes”. Instagram even offers several features that may increase the number of “likes”, features such as users being able to add filters to their pictures to make them more alluring and users being able to add hashtags and by that, reaching a wider audience. Some users even use specific methods, such as the “likes-for-likes” method, where one Instagram user likes the other user’s
photo to increase the likelihood of getting a like back. Some users take it a step further and buy likes or followers (Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Davis & Giulietti, 2017, p. 2). Therefore, not including important attributes like these, can weaken a study where a visual analysis over Instagram posts is made.

6.5 - The connection between the methodology and the theoretical framework

Mazzoleni and Shulz identify mediatization as the dubious consequences of modern mass media’s development and mention the use of television in the Brazilian election campaign in 1989 by Fernando Collar de Mello as an example that shows the increasing impact mass media has over political power. Mediatized politics, as the example mentioned above, are politics where the autonomy has elapsed. These politics have developed a need for mass media and are incessantly constructed by interactions with mass media (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 107). This does not however signify that media has taken over politics. Political institutions still manage and control politics, however, they have developed to rely heavily on media and have to accustom to the rationality of media (p.107). Since political socialization is the development by which different orientations toward the political system are evolved through generations (German, 2014, p. 17), it can be argued that political socialization has been affected by mediatization. Mediatization analyzes the relations between the developments within media and communication and culture and society (Couldry & Hepp, as cited in Michelsen & Krogh, 2017, p. 523). Political socialization may be argued to be a development within both of these, with the Brazilian election campaign mentioned above as an example of this.

Visual communication is, just as verbal and written communication, powerful and distributes its own directive (De Landtsheer, Krasnoboka & Neuner, 2014, p. 134). Visuals play a significant part within politics, as is shown for example in De Landtsheer, Krasnoboka & Neuners (2014) empirical evaluation of governments and their websites. The evaluation shows that the visual allure and language is considered to be just as important, if not more important than the written language for politicians in Eastern Europe (p. 150). Fernando Collar de Mellos use of television in the Brazilian election campaign in 1989 is another
evidence of the importance and power of the visual within politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 107). Since visuals play such an important part in politics, it is very appropriate to use visual analysis as a method when working with political socialization. Visual analysis is not only a method for analyzing the visuals in our world, it also provides assistance in analyzing human action, language and cognition (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004, p. 6-7). Since there are orientations within political socialization that shape an individual (German, 2014, p. 17) it is of great assistance to use a method where the focus partly lies on analyzing human action, language and cognition. By using a method that does this, a better understanding of how the orientations within political socialization affect the individual may be gained.

Today, our conceptions are essentially always mediated. All types of mediation are evenly important. Simultaneously, the visual is an important mean for conveying messages. Pictures are often used to persuade us and any visual things can help to envision a problem as well as make complex connections clearer (De Landtsheer, et al., 2014, p. 134). Visuals are also a vast part of mediatization. Media representation of our world and reality has gained such power in our world that our understandings and constructions of our world are first and formally based on their representation in media. In this representation, visual things such as images and symbols, play an immense role (Baudrillard, as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 111). That is why it is advantageous to work with a method such as visual analysis, when working with mediatization. Visual analysis provides assistance in analyzing human action, language and cognition (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004, p. 6-7), which may contribute to a better understanding of how mediatization has come to play such an important part in our lives.

Political socialization is the development by which different orientations toward the political system are evolved through generations. The different orientations that exists shapes us as individuals (German, 2014, p. 17). Interviews give the interviewee admittance to the world of the interviewee and their emotions, perspectives, understandings, reactions and so on. They also have the possibility to manufacture the invisible visible (Kvale, as cited in Skinner, 2012, p. 8). Using interviews as a method, it is possible to gain understanding of an individuals political socialization and by that, obtain a more profound picture of the general one that the
visual analysis presents of the Russian peoples political socialization.

While Mediatization analyses the relation between the developments within media and communication and society and culture (Couldry & Hepp, as cited in Michelsen & Krogh, 2017, p. 523), it does not analyze the development between media and the individual. Therefore, it is valuable to use interview as a method to gain a broader perspective of the development between media and the individual. The advantage of looking at the development between media and the individual, is that it gives a broader view of what the opinions about the case are. Whilst analyzing the mediatization of Russia (more specifically social media in Russia) gives a comprehensive view of the situation, it does not depict everyones opinion about the case. There are several perspectives to it and therefore it is good to lift at least one individuals perspective and see the development of media and communication and the individual and what the consequences of this are (as well as how they may differ from the general picture).

The relation between the development of media and communication and the individual shows how media has developed opportunities for the Russian civilians to express themselves in relation to the development of their society and culture. These have developed the country into one which is filled with more and more direct and self-censorship (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018, p. 3). The Yarovaya laws, which dictates that internet and mobile companies have to store data for at least six months and give it to the state if asked, are one example of how the state has gained more control over the media (The Moscow Times, 2018b). The censorship can also be noticed in cases where media companies are either under direct or indirect state control. If they are not owned by the state, they are either financially dependent on a state company or have a personal connection to the state (Johansson & Nygren, 2014, p. 3).

Censorship has made it harder for people in Russia to make their voices heard. Simultaneously, social media has grown immensely. Popular messaging applications like VKontakte have outgrown applications like Facebook and social media has grown as a tool against censorship and as a tool for the oppositional voices in Russia (Enikolopov et al., 2016, p. 8). It can therefore be argued that the development in the society and culture has driven the
development of media in Russia. The common civilian in Russia may now, thanks to the development of media in relation to society, express their opinions on social media.

Can this be done without any danger? Large groups in Russia (the society) often manage to find ways to make their voices heard, whilst individuals are often silenced. The society keeps their voices heard by for example running independent media, like the liberal radio station "Echo Moskvy" which is not afraid to raise debates between people with different political views (Strovsky, 2015, p. 136), or organizing protests. However, the individual has repeatedly been punished for expressing their views. When an individual criticizes the state in Russia, they are very likely to end up fined or jailed, due to a new law that states that if someone disrespects anything related to the country, they get fined or jailed (The Moscow Times, 2019a).

Even though people are detained during protests (for example, in the protests that have been ongoing during the summer of 2019, where people are protesting for the right for oppositional candidates to participate in the Duma elections in Moscow), there is a disadvantage in numbers between protesters and police officers (on the fifth consecutive weekend of the protests during summer 2019, nearly 50 000 protesters attended) (The Moscow Times, 2019c). It creates a challenge to detain all protesters and therefore, the protesters have an advantage in expressing their opinions as a group (society).

However, the police can stop and silence individuals at isolated places, as the case with activist Alexei Navalny, who was arrested when out on a jog in the city by himself (Reuters, 2019). If the development between media and communication and the individual is studied more (a study where interviews might be of great assistance) it might help contribute to a solution to the danger of expressing ones opinion as an individual.
7. Ethics

7.1 Ethics regarding visual analysis

The ethical problems within visual analysis lies within the social categories that we as humans construct. Rose (2001) mentions Fyfe and Law who state that “a depiction is never just an illustration… It is the site for the construction and depiction of social difference” (as cited in Rose, 2001, p. 10). Constructions may take a visual form and in her book, Rose (2001) posts an example of this, referring to Paul Gilroy’s discussion of a political poster. This poster was produced by the Conservative party in the General Election in Great Britain in 1983. The poster features a young man with dark skin, dressed in a suit. The text on the poster goes as follows: “LABOUR SAYS HE’S BLACK. TORIES SAY HE’S BRITISH”. From this, Gilroy talks about the problematics in the complexity that this poster has. In a way, the poster tells the viewer that a choice exists, a choice between being either black or British. It tells the viewer that black people need to diminish their cultural differences before they can truly become British (p. 11).

At the same time as the visual picture tells the viewer this, it can also tell the viewer not to notice the blackness. The connotations of a suit on a person, who the audience of that time in that geographical space might not have directly connected to it, can create a unison and a sense of unity instead of separateness (Rose, 2001, p. 11). The picture can also be seen as something drawing on stereotypical images of young black men at the time, where one stereotype was that they were muggers and by putting the young man in a suit, it is showcasing the acceptability of the man. In a way, it becomes an exploitation of stereotypes, not to mention that it strengthens them and their role in society. This complexity comes from a play with the visible visuals and the invisible visuals as signs of racial difference. Indeed, this is something to keep in mind while looking at visuals, to think about how they put up very distinct and specific visions of social categories such as race, sexuality, class, gender and so on (p. 11).
7.2 Ethics regarding the research

One main concern regarding this research is privacy on social media and social networks. It is not only the main topic of discussion with the case of Telegram, it is also a question that affects the material used in this research. Such and Criado (2018) talk about how privacy on social media and networks does not only regard what the individual user posts or exposes about themselves (p. 75). Rather, privacy regards what others expose or disclose about an individual. The boundaries of privacy have become difficult to maintain. This is on account of the extensive growth of social media. However, it is also on account of the question of ownership. Content on social media does not merely belong to the individual that uploads it, rather, it is co-owned. One example that showcases this, is images uploaded on Facebook. If an individual uploads a photograph of themselves with another person on their account (which in this case obtains private settings), the individuals desideratum will be satisfied. The other individual on the other hand, may not wish for the friends of the account holder to have the possibility to view this photograph. This is a clear example of Multiparty privacy conflicts (MPC) (Such & Criado, 2018, p. 75).

MPC naturally becomes an ethical concern when using posts from people’s social media. Therefore, the posts that have been chosen for this particular research do not include clear pictures of individuals faces. Whilst there are people present in some of the pictures, no clear details that may disclose the person’s identities are displayed. Privacy of course regards my informant as well. In order to preserve her privacy, I have chosen to not mention her real name in this paper. Since the topic is political and very much regards a highly controversial and complex topic, I believe that it is better to remain the informant’s identity private.

Another ethical concern regards the authenticity of the research. Whilst numerous literary works have been written about the Russian state and its relation to the usage of social media, it is only fair to stay somewhat critical towards all sources. Especially when writing about topics that can be very sensitive. A 2005 report, using material compiled by the Levada Center, concluded that 47% of the Russian population trust the country’s president, Vladimir Putin. It also showcased that the church trust rate was 41% and that of the Russian army was
31% (Lonkila, 2008, p. 1127). All of these factors, the president to say the least, are connected and a part of the Russian state. Whilst claiming that the Telegram protest was held in order to criticize the ban that the state had put on it and to showcase a stand against anti-censorship (The Moscow Times, 2018a) is fair, it is important to present objective information from both parties involved in the complex issue.

8. Data analysis

This chapter will present the result of the two methods that were used in this essay. It will first present the interview that was made with Vasilisa Simonova and then it will present the visual analysis.

8.1 Interview - Vasilisa Simonova

This part will present the interview made with Vasilisa Simonova, who has several years of experience within the field of marketing and advertising on the internet. Simonova is currently working as a digital strategist at an advertising agency, which is a partner to a global advertising holding company. The interview was conducted through Skype on April 25.

The reason that this particular interviewee was chosen for the interview has to do with several reasons. Primarily, it has to do with the fact that it is very challenging to find someone who has the courage to speak freely about anything related to media and politics in Russia, especially when it comes to such a startling case like Telegram, where the contrast between the state and Telegram is very clear. This is due to the fact that freedom of speech in Russia is not a right for its citizens. As stated in Petkova (2018) Russia is not a safe space for workers, primarily journalists, to speak opinions about politics where one does not agree with the state. The country has been rated as one of the top 10 countries on earth with the largest amount of killed journalists since 1992 (p. 2).

Petkova (2018) mentions Azhgikhina, who states that one of the reasons for this is the absence of political will to examine the murders and the shortage of collaboration between
investigators, law enforcement officers and judicial structures (as cited in Petkova, 2018, p. 2-3). Non-governmental organisations (for example Freedom House) have ranked the country as "not free" and critics have pointed out that even though freedom of speech was the earliest and maybe even the only authentic accomplishment of Perestroika (A list of economical and political amendments that were made in 1985, in the Soviet Union, by the former leader and president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev) (Gorbachev, 2010), the accomplishment has been both shaken and lost (Petkova, 2018, p. 3).

Petkova (2018) describes how Russian journalists that express alternative views that are not in line with the states, are put through physical attacks and threats, as well as pressure from the Russian state, including a lot of censorship (p. 3). However, civilians are at an equally high risk as journalists of being punished when expressing oppositional political opinions. Since 2012, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly especially, has become progressively worse. The Russian authorities showcase a very meager amount of tolerance towards any public assembly that blatantly defies them, express political oppositional views or occur without explicit approval (Amnesty International, 2018).

In 2019, a law regarding disrespect towards the Russian authorities and the president, Vladimir Putin, as well as "fake news", was passed. The law implicates that if anyone disrespects the authorities or the country’s president, they will be punished. Online news outlets will have to pay a fine, which can be anything between 30,000 and 1 million rubels, if they spread "false information" or fake news (The Moscow Times, 2019a). The punishment for an individual who express disrespect and gets arrested for the first time is a fine up to 100,000 rubels. Offenders that have been arrested before can face jail for up to 15 days (The Moscow Times, 2019d). One example of an arrest that has been made under the new law is the arrest of Leonid Volkov, who was arrested because of a tweet that read “Putin is an unbelievable dumb***,” together with a video showcasing a judge orally going through the first guilty verdict of the new law. This crime, together with the fact that he organized protests across Russia against another law that came into force which regards to raise the pension age, led him to a sentence of 20 days of jail (The Moscow Times, 2019b).
This showcases that it is not only the new law regarding disrespect online and fake news that creates a danger for the civilians in Russia to express political opinions. Already before the law, protesters were arrested and battered by Russian police. The protests against the law regarding the raised age for retirement showcased pictures and videos where the police sometime used physical force in order to dissolve rallies, beating the protesters with batons and then dragging them away. More than 800 people were arrested in these protests (Reuters, 2018). On protests made across Russia in 2017, an Anti-Kremlin protest which supported the oppositional politician and activist Alexei Navalny, a total of at least 271 civilians across 26 cities were arrested. In St Petersburg, the violence was at its worst. In Petersburg, 62 people were (for the most part) forcefully arrested by the police, with the police dragging them into their vans (The Moscow Times, 2017).

The violence of these protests, as well as the new law regarding disrespect and fake news that passed in 2019, showcase just how dangerous it can be for Russian citizens to speak openly about their political opinions, if they do not line with the states. The way that journalists are treated is also something that showcases the dangers of expressing oppositional opinions.

8.2. Presentation of interview

Simonova starts by stating that the development of the internet has grown immensely and that the influence it has on our lives is growing at the same, if not at a greater, rate. Communication technologies are advancing at an immense pace as well, while the rules and functions of social media are continuously changing. Social networks are not only a source of entertainment and communication today. Their usage has become much wider and today social networks have (among other things) become a source of news. Now, each global information agency is applying their news on the internet, each of them have their own social media platforms where they broadcast their content.

When asked about the blocking of Telegram, the interviewee explains that the ban truly has reached one of the most convenient messaging applications in Russia. The origins of the blockage of Telegram trade back to July 2018, when the Yarovaya law came into force.
However, the problem of blockages dates back earlier than that.

“... On April 2016 and 2018 Roskomnadzor began blocking IP address used by Telegram. During the first week, more than 18 million users were blocked but Telegram continues to work by this day.” (V. Simonova, personal communication, April 25, 2019).

When asked about the role of the state in the use of social networks, Simonova replies that in her opinion, social networks have been monitored by the state for a long time, with respect to public information, such as posts, comments, reactions and likes of photos. She continuous by mentioning that if internet users would have a huge variety of opportunities to express themselves, then the trend today is inclined to face tough and troublesome reforms in relation to it.

Furthermore, Simonova continues by explaining some of the internet restrictions that exist for Russian users of social media.

“For example, in 2014, a law was passed on criminal responsibility in the Russian Federation for calling for extremism using the internet. According to human rights organizations “Agora” and “Sova”, in 2016, 168 sentences were handed down. The following year, 205 such sentences were passed and about the same number was passed in 2018.” (V. Simonova, personal communication, April 25, 2019).

Apart from these examples, Simonova also mentions one of the newest laws that was applied by the Russian state. On April 16, 2019, a law referred to as the “sovereign internet law” was passed in Russia. The law will require internet providers to install appliances in order to filter traffic. The regulation also implies that Roskomnadzor’s power over the internet providers will increase, in the sense that the state-owned company will for example be able to control what content gets to be uploaded and what cannot. The reason for this legalization lies within all the illegal content that lies on the internet. This law can be seen as a new attempt to reach the results that the Russian state requires, since their old techniques do not seem to work as efficiently anymore. Before, one technique was to prohibit media that is “pro-Kremlin” to
write about protests, as described in Prokopenko (2019). Another one was to prevent access to
the internet in certain parts of the country. However, the independent, regional essence of the
protests taking place, makes it inaccessible to chasten a single person. Therefore, laws like the
“sovereign internet law” can be seen as a new attempt to try to take control over the internet
and media.

"... At the moment I don’t know as much about this law as I would like, but a large number of
people associate the law with the Chinese firewall.” (V. Simonova, personal communication,
April 25, 2019).

The Chinese firewall is a legislation in China that restrains the Internet users ability to reach
certain websites in the Mainland in China. Popular social networking sites, such as Youtube
and Facebook, are not available to the Chinese population. Over 18, 000 websites are
prohibited in the country, showcasing the broad sphere of Internet censorship in China (Yang
& Liu, 2014, p. 249). It is this legislation that Simonova mentions that many people compare
the restrictive action taking place on the internet in Russia to. She states that she personally
questions the creators of these laws, mentioning that neither of them are IT or Internet
specialists.

"... As I recall, Irina Yarovaya is not an expert in this area either as well.” (V. Simonova,
personal communication, April 25, 2019).

Regarding the future patterns of the development of the Russian internet, Simonova mentions
that the question is rather complex, because of all the initiatives that the Russian state
introduces. However, she states that she hopes that the internet in Russia will not fall under
the iron curtain.

To conclude, it is fair to state that the Internet and social media has both positive and negative
attributes. Social media can create negative propaganda and form disconnection, as well as it
can give people the ability to express their emotions and thoughts and be a source of
information.
8.3 The visual analysis

This part will present the visual analysis that will be conducted. For the visual analysis, I chose to include both images from the offline protest as well as the online protest. By this, I refer to the posts made about the Telegram protest that took place on April 30 2018 (The Moscow Times, 2018a) I chose to analyze posts from Instagram, since Instagram was the leading active social media platform in Russia in 2018 which mainly focuses on visuals (Statista, 2018). I also chose to analyze posts that used the hashtag #DigitalResistance as this hashtag became an expression online for the protest (MacFarquhar, 2018b). One of the posts chosen is a post made by the creator of Telegram himself, Pavel Durov. Since the creator himself participated in the protest (without being the one who initiated it) it felt very much relevant to include his reaction to it.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** A picture from the Telegram protest that took place in Moscow, Tatyana Makeyeva, May 31, 2018.

**Denotations**

In this picture, several buildings can be seen in the background, together with the dark sky. In the middle and foreground, a big group of people can be seen. Several of the peoples arms are raised in the air, holding cell phones. In the air, there are a lot of paper planes all over the place. In the left, bottom corner, the a white, blue and red flag can be seen, held up by someone on a stick. Another flag can be dimly seen to the left of the Russian flag, this one is green and white. The light is coming from the left side and it is daylight.
Connotations

Regarding the context of the protest, the paper planes can be understood as the logotype of
Telegram, which visualizes a white paper plane that lies in the centre of a blue circle
(Telegram, 2013b). Tones of paper planes are thrown in the air in all directions - this gives the
picture a sense of movement or tension, since diagonal shapes give a feeling of movement.
The paper planes thrown up in the air also give a sense of freedom, triumph and joy. This is
because the upper half of pictures are a space of these emotions and they also more often have
of a “spiritual” feel to them (Bang, 2000, p. 39). Regarding the context of the protest with
this, it is safe to say that this is what the planes were supposed to represent.

Figure 2. Instagram post retrieved from Pavel Durovs Instagram, April 17 2018

Denotations

The main focus in this picture is the man who is standing to the right in the picture. The man
covers about 50% of the picture. The picture showcases his face, which is partly painted in
blue. The man appears to be glancing at an object far away, not looking into the camera. His
lips are slightly bent down and his long, brown hair is blowing in the wind. The light is
coming from the right side of the man, lighting up his face, whilst the background remains
relatively dark. However, a flag can still be seen in the left corner of the picture, though
somewhat blurred. Above the flag, an illustrated paper can be seen. The paper is shaped in the
form of a triangle and the sharp edge of it is pointing towards the sky. Under the paper, a text
can be read: “they can take our IPs, but they will never take our freedom”. In the bottom and
top of the picture, there are two black, rectangular squares.
Connotations

The picture is clearly taken directly from the movie Braveheart. Aside from the picture that tells the audience where it is from, the quote also tells us that it is from the movie, since the line in the movie goes: “They may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom!” (Gibson, 1995). The quote is thus a little bit modified, with the word “lives” being taken away and replaced by “IPs”, but otherwise, it is the same as in the movie.

The paper plane, which can be seen in Telegrams logotype, is to be found yet again. However, in this post, it only showcases the white paper plane and not the blue circle that is a part of the logotype (Telegram, 2013b). However, since the color blue is present in the picture, in the man’s face, the user might think that the viewers seeing the picture make a connection to the full logotype of the company. As well as in the previous image, the paper plane is placed in the upper part of the picture, which also gives the viewer a sense of freedom, triumph and joy.

It can be argued that the logotype is somewhat isolated from the rest of the picture, in the sense that it is the only illustration in the picture and that it stands up in the left corner by itself with only a dark background as a contrast. An isolation of an object like this, gives the figure a sense of vulnerability, freedom and loneliness (Bang, 2000, p. 39). Whilst Telegram has plenty of supporters in the conflict against the Russian state, it can be argued that this is a symbol for the vulnerability that the application faces, due to the state’s actions. Even though the support is large and Telegram came back and started working again, Roskomnadzor still managed to block over 18 million I.P. addresses on Telegram (MacFarquhar, 2018b). The meaning of the placement of the logotype can therefore be seen as a statement from the user, who wants to bring up the consequences of the state’s work against Telegram.
9. Analysis & Discussion

The following chapter will present a discussion regarding the findings from the visual analysis as well as the interview presented in this thesis. The discussion will aim to focus on the three research questions previously presented:

*How is Telegram used as a tool for online protests in Russia? What is the connection between offline and online protests? How does this connection manifest itself in the case of Telegram?*

There is no doubt that Telegram plays a part in the context of online protests in Russia. The fact that a protest was created as a stand against the ban that the Russian state put on the application (a protest which was organized by the Libertarian political party in Russia which thousands of Russian citizens attended) showcases just how immense Telegram is in Russia and what it means to the citizens (MacFarquhar, 2018b).

The importance of Telegram does not only lead it to playing a part in the context of online protests, but indirectly, it makes them agents of socialization. Media as agents of socialization reconstruct and affect both individuals, families and nations. It also contributes to an increased political awareness and awareness of democracy (German, 2014, p. 21).

Whilst the main aim of Telegram may not be political and whilst the application may not take a direct political stand, it implicitly becomes an opponent to the state, for instance by supporting the protests. Whether it is their wish or not to be a part of politics, it is undoubtedly hard to step away from taking a political stance as a social media platform, since younger generations are more and more getting their political information from sources on the internet (German, 2014, p. 22) and when Telegram writes about their political struggles with the Russian state, it can be argued that they become one of these sources.

At the moment, Telegram has an immense influence as a platform for a networked protest. Whilst the application gives individuals the possibility to speak their minds about decisions and is a platform with great impact today - Is it safe to believe that this is how it will stay? Networked protests often miss several steps that are conducted when offline protests take place. The organization of a offline protests is often skipped, which results in challenges such
as the decision-making capabilities not being as strong as within offline protests and the participants in the protests to go against the spokesperson. The spokesperson often become the individuals with high followings on social media. They usually become informal spokespersons off the protest and pose a strong dominance. However, these individuals often lack a proper legitimacy which is eligible for a spokesperson. This can result in a problem, as the participants in the protest may object to the spokesperson and start to express these opinions online. If challenges as these cannot be properly solved, the movement is bound to fall (Tüfekçi, 2017, p. xxiii-xxiv).

Whilst Telegram does not have an official spokesperson, Pavel Durov, the creator of the application, may be seen as one. However, even though Durov participated in the protest (online) he did not establish it. Instead, it was the Russian Libertarian Party who organized the protest (The Moscow Times, 2018a). Therefore, it can be said that they are the informal spokespersons of it. Especially when people from the party start to make their voices heard more in the protests. A member of the Russian Libertarian Party, Sergei Smirnov, who is the editor in chief of the online magazine Medizona, created by two members of the music group Pussy Riot (Shevchenko, 2019) spoke to the audience:

"Telegram is just the first step…” “If they block Telegram, it will be worse later. They will block everything. They want to block our future and the future of our children.” - Sergei Smirnov, April 30, 2018 (The Moscow Times, 2018a)

Whilst it is understandable that people speak at the protest, statements like these only add to the picture of what political side Telegram stands on. A political party with a very specific and clear political view organizing such a huge protest and then talking to the audience might very well give people a picture of what political view, if not Telegram, then the users of it at least, have. The content of the political view might not create a problem, however - If it adds to a certain connotation of what political view Telegram might stand for, it is fair to assume that Telegram might lose potential supporters, who might have another political view and do not want to participate or feel like it is their place to do so, due to political differences.
Another factor that might make Telegram loose supporters, is different agents of socializations. Whilst media are agents off socialization with a lot of influence (German, 2014, p. 21), other agents of socialization exist that affect an individuals political socialization and political activity. Whilst Telegram has an immense influence on individuals as a agent of socialization today, it can be argued that if the censorship would reach the application as it has reached other media in Russia (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018, p. 3) the other agents of socialization (such as family and the social positions of individuals) would gain a larger impact on individuals than Telegram. As Vasilisa Simonova (2019) mentions in her interview, the Russian state has already managed to block Telegram once before, blocking more than 18 million users within a week (V. Simonova, personal communication, April 25, 2019). If the Russian state would be able to repeat a blockage, Telegrams ability to reach out and affect individuals might fall. Their impact as agents of socialization might fall and with that, raise the impact of other agents of socialization.

Can Telegram ever distance themselves from politics? The entire case revolves around politics. It was after all the state owned company Rozkomnadzor who blocked the site. The FSB even became involved, in the sense that they were the ones who demanded access to Telegrams encryption keys, in order to get access to potential messages shared by criminals and terrorists (BBC News, 2018).

Media in Russia has a hard time staying away from politics. As previously mentioned, a large majority of media companies are directly or indirectly influenced or owned by the Russian state (Johansson & Nygren, 2014, p. 3). Many of the biggest radio stations, magazines and television networks are owned and governed by the state. Several of these are the Russian populations main source of information. For example, 88% of the population in Russia consider television their primary source of information. Although propaganda has showed itself clearer in Russian television, 51% of the Russian population still consider television to be a legitimate source of information (Schimpfoss & Yablokov, 2014, p. 296). When these big media outlets are considered to be a fair source of information (despite the propaganda being showcased in them), it is not weird that social media, such as Telegram, cannot stay away from politics. Whether it is desirable or not, media does become a part of politics in Russia.
In the case of Telegram and the protest - can it be stated which of the two parts is right? The state or Telegram? While the state’s intentions are to block potential messages shared by criminals and terrorists (BBC News, 2018), is it fair of them to create legislations and blockings like the ones targeted at Telegram? In her interview, Vasilisa Simonova (2019) mentions that she questions the originators of these laws, arguing that neither of them are specialists on the subjects linked to the laws. In addition to activists, agreeing with the criticism of these laws are several big, Russian companies. Roskomsvoboda and Megafon are only two major company that heavily criticized the Yarovaya laws. The companies state that the requirements that were made are impossible to meet and that it will create a lot of challenges for them (The Moscow Times, 2018b). With clear criticism coming from the oppositional side as well as from big companies, it seems fair to claim that the state does not fully understand or care for the consequences of the legislations that they establish. This leads to the question - is it fair of the state, with that lack of knowledge, to establish these kinds of laws?

While it is fair to discuss the states responsibility in this case - It is also important to look at Telegrams responsibility in the case. Whilst Telegram is of course allowed to create and follow any privacy policies, such as “secret chats” where no one but the recipients are able to see the content shared between them (Telegram, 2013c), what is the responsibility of the application, if they have any?

In August 2018, several months after the Telegram protest had taken place and after a court order was filed against the application, Telegram agreed to some of the state’s requirements, by changing their policy, which now states:

"If Telegram receives a court order that confirms you're a terror suspect, we may disclose your IP address and phone number to the relevant authorities." - 8.3 Law enforcement authorities (Telegram, 2013c)

Whilst Pavel Durov states that he does not believe that these changes will end the conflict between the Russian state and Telegram (The Moscow Times, 2018c), Telegram has acted and given the Russian state partly what they want. The current question lies within if this will be enough for the state, or if the Russian citizens will see another legislation such as the
Yarovaya laws or such as the lawsuit against Telegram. According to Vasilisa Simonova, if the variety of opportunities keep developing for the Russian social media users to express themselves, the troublesome reforms and legislations will not go away anytime soon.

Another relevant question regards the future of Telegram. Telegram is a great example of the mediatization of protests, having not only moved the activity of protests online but also connected online and offline protests. Mazzoleni and Shulz talk about how the impact that media has on politics has increased over the years. The autonomy has vanished within several cases of mediatized politics and the politics have developed a need for mass media. They are incessantly constructed by interactions with mass media and have adapted to the rationality of mass media (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008, p. 107).

Whilst Telegram itself is not political, the complex situation that has accrued has made it political. In a sense, Telegram can be seen as a part of mediatized politics or at least be viewed as a platform that will face similar outcomes that mediatized politics encounter.

Telegram is already partly dependent on mass media, in the sense that the platform does not do any marketing. Whilst the creator of Telegram seems confident in that the applications users have the power to increase the amount of users immensely, stating that if every Telegram user influences three of their friends to move from the application WhatsApp to Telegram permanently, Telegram will exceed WhatsApp in popularity (Durov, 2019). It is fair to claim that the attention that Telegram has received in mass media has played a big part in the application gaining more users. The impact of mass media can clearly be seen especially after the application was approached by the Russian state and demanded to hand over encryption keys. A great amount of articles were written about how the creator of the application refused to agree to the states requirements. Only a few weeks after articles started to be published about the situation (and only one month before the Telegram protest took place), Telegram reached a new peek with 200 million monthly active users (Telegram, 2018). Whilst the creator claims that this increase is on account of the users, it is very likely that the attention mass media has brought to it has played a big part in the increase of monthly active users.
Regardless of the reason behind Telegram’s increasing attention, it can be argued that the attention that Telegram gets is not the only reason that their popularity is at such a peak. Telegram has become a social network that has become a part of offline protests and has followed a common pattern for online to offline protests. Telegram has experienced offline situations that have triggered activity online (the controversy with the ban of the application). Secondly, the application (as a part of the objects and subjects of the mobilization) has had a communication online (partly by the creator, Pavel Durov, writing about the offline situation on social media). Lastly, the application has made the transition from ”virtual” to ”actual” by the protest that took place on April 30, 2018 (MacFarquhar, 2018b). This pattern that Telegram has followed is a pattern described by Lou and Liu (as cited in Bu, 2017, p. 209-210). It may be fair to state that by following this recognizable pattern that people might be drawn too (since it is something recognizable for them), Telegram has attracted more followers and supporters.

Just like the pattern of offline to online protests that Telegram follows, the applications visual language in various social media might be another factor that makes them successful. The two Instagram posts analyzed in this thesis, showcase that the applications visuals try to symbolize a picture of freedom and triumph, partly by placing isolated objects in the upper half of the picture (Bang, 2000, p. 39). Whilst these two Instagram post do not reflect the entire visual language of Telegram, it does give an insight to what it might look like and what it might be that attracts new followers.

### 10. Conclusion

This study aimed to look at how the application Telegram is used as a tool for online protests in Russia, what the connection between offline and online protests are and how this connection manifests itself in the case of Telegram. The interview that was made showcases that Telegram has a big impact on the everyday lives of Russian citizens and that the Russian state has for a long time had a great focus on social networks in the country. The visual analysis showcased that Telegram becomes a tool for showcasing freedom.
With other media being censored and controlled by the state, social media remains among the few media that the citizens of Russia have to express themselves and their opinions freely. Whilst Telegram was shut down by the state, it was quickly up and running again and approximately one month before the Telegram protest took place, the platform had 200,000,000 monthly active users (Telegram, 2018). In March 2019, 3 million new users registered a Telegram account within 24 hours (Telegram, 2019). These numbers show that Telegram is here to stay and that even though efforts are made, the state cannot seem to completely gain control over the application. However, the question whether Telegram will be able to keep up the activism and support arises here. Since it is an online movement with online activism, it lacks the strength of a traditional protest movement. However, since there are no other places to turn - the narrow scene in which Telegram supporters can express their opinions may just be what holds them together. If these individuals do not have another platform to express themselves, they together with Telegram might be able to uphold the application’s status as a platform for freedom of speech.

What does it take for Telegram to uphold the application’s status as a platform for freedom of speech? Partly, it can be argued that it will rely heavily on the social positions of the Russian citizens. With legislations such as the one about a higher age for retirement in Russia, these laws change the economic situation for a lot of people (among other things) which affect their social positions (Miranda et al., 2018, p. 104-105). If more laws like these keep being made (where it is clear that the Russian citizens do not agree with the state), the more displeased the citizens will be. One could argue that Telegram may capitalize on this dissatisfaction of the Russian people’s dissatisfaction with their new social positions, which comes from their dissatisfaction with the new laws. The situation can of course turn. Legislations that please the Russian citizens might come up, which may affect Telegram in the sense that the application will lose users, since there is no more need for a platform to express their displeasure. However, with recent laws (such as the Yarovaya laws, the one about retirement, the one about “discrimination online” etc.) it does not seem like the Russian state will present a law that pleases the country’s citizens anytime soon. Hence, people’s social positions will keep on changing, and it is fair to state that it will keep on changing in to the advantage of both Telegram and offline and online protests in general, since this will make people want to
express their displease over the laws (which in Russia’s case includes the lack of freedom of speech), which will increase the political activity, by people participating more in online protests (Especially in Russia, since the citizens do not have anywhere else to turn, since the majority of media is heavily influenced and censored by the state (Johansson & Nygren, 2014, p. 3). This may also increase the connection between online and offline protest, since, as we have seen evidence of, online protest (at least with Telegram) have a big connection to and include offline protests.

For future research, it would be interesting to look at the future of offline and online protests through an international perspective. As offline and online protests seem to increase in Russia due to the censorship and heavy influence of the state (Johansson & Nygren, 2014, p. 3), it would be interesting to look at the relationship between offline and online protest in another country, where the media is not as influenced by the authorities. Would offline and online protests increase in a country with less censorship? Or would the endless possibilities to share ones opinions online in a democratic country result in a polarization of the citizens? Since people tend to seek themselves to areas where they can connect with users who share similar views and opinions (Wojcik, as cited in Dogaru-Tulică, 2019, p. 108) and since this is easier to do when media is not censored - Could this result in a polarization of the users and can this trigger a wave of protests?
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