

Blogosphere of Russian Internet

Based on Yandex Blog Search data
Autumn 2006

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1. Structure of Blogosphere, or Where Internet Users Write

The term blogosphere – the corpus of all weblogs – first appeared in 1999. Brad Graham, the author of the new word, coined it as a joke: at the time, the whole blogosphere consisted of a hundred sites. Five years later, in 2004 Merriam-Webster, the publisher of the most complete dictionary of the English language, named “blog” – an online personal journal – the word of the year. By that time, the global blogosphere became huge: according to Technorati.com, one of the leading English-language blog search engines, in September 2006 there were more than **54 million** blogs **in the world**.

According to Yandex Blog Search (Blogs.yandex.ru), the Russian-language blogosphere currently contains more than **1,150,000** weblogs and over **80 million** entries. Three new entries (on average) are posted every second. Certainly, not all weblogs are regularly updated, some of them have been abandoned. Of more than a million weblogs, in the last three months **540,000** blogs had updates. Therefore, in the Russian blogosphere **46%** blogs are **active**. According to Technorati.com, 1.6 million new posts are made daily over the world. The data of Yandex Blog Search show that in the Russian language blogosphere this figure exceeds **106,000**. Consequently, although Russian blogs only take 2% of the total world amount, 7% of all new entries in all languages are made in Russian. On average, Russian-language bloggers write three times more often as compared to western bloggers.

Starting from 2003, the number of weblogs in the global blogosphere **doubled** every **six months**. The Russian blogosphere is growing apace. In the first nine month of 2006, Russian-speaking Internet users registered twice as many journals as in the whole of 2005. In 2006, **100** new blogs are created **every hour** in the Russian Internet (only 20 in 2005).

The key features that made such social services popular are simplicity and easy access. Blog hosting sites carry the burden of publishing entries and provide a convenient technology for publication of journals. Owners of blogs at public blog hosting servers have no need in any special technical knowledge. The “how?” question is already answered, leaving the blogger to answer the “what?” question.

Russian-language blogs are, for the most part, kept at **14 blog hosting servers** (the number includes sites that host more than 200 weblogs). Blog hosting websites housing between **50 and 350 thousand** journals make up the Big Four (**Livejournal.com, LiveInternet.ru, Blogs.mail.ru, Diary.ru**). At the moment, the most popular hosting in Russia is still Livejournal.com (US). Foreign blog hosting servers hold a total of 38% of Russian-language weblogs (in Figure 1, US hosting servers are marked with a flag). **Russian servers** already host **62%** of the blogs, and their share is continuously growing.

Figure 1. Distribution of Russian-language blogs by hosting servers

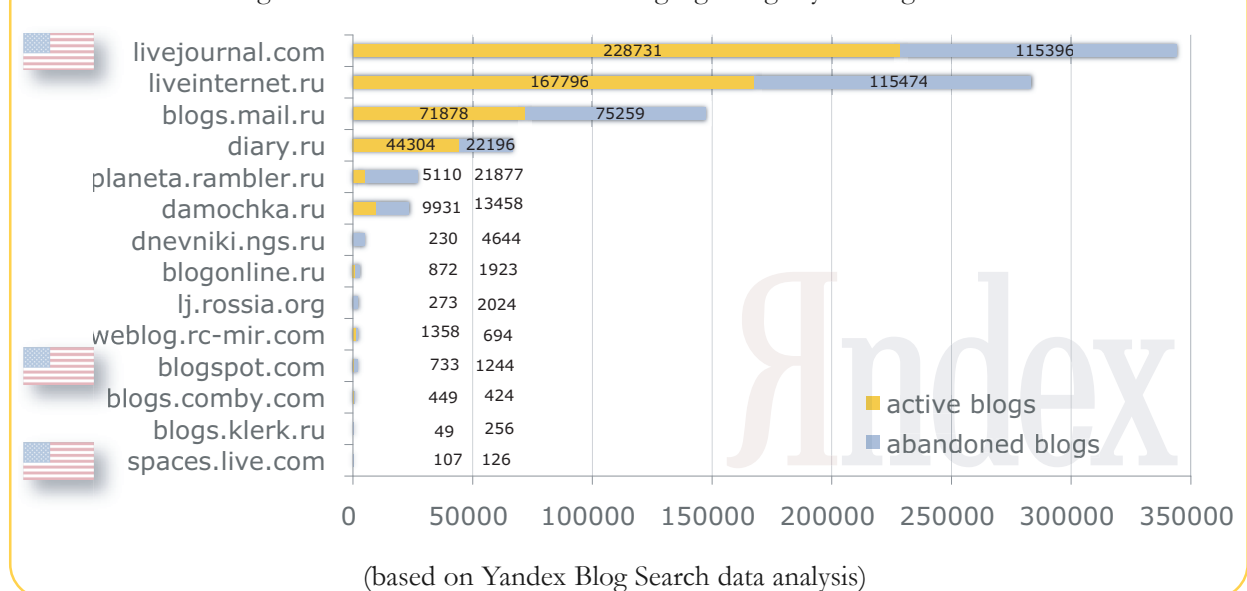
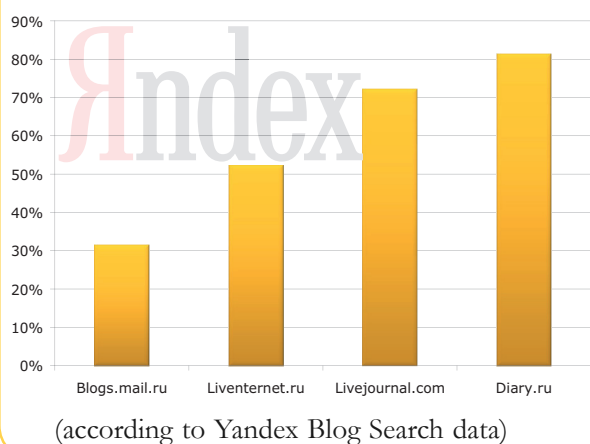


Figure 2. Proportion of blogs with five and more entries in total number of posts at hosting sites



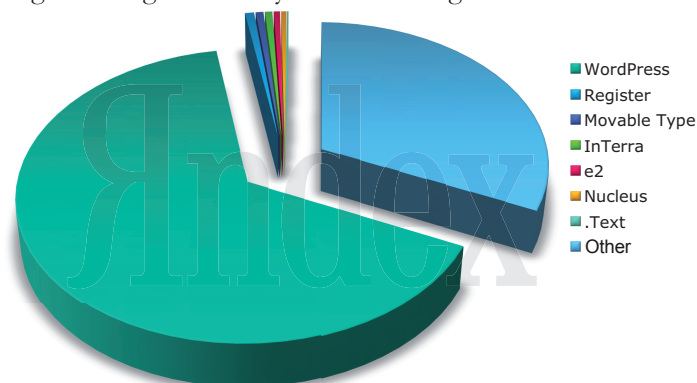
We ranked blog hosting servers by the total number of registered blogs. However, if we perform the ranking by the share of active weblogs (that were updated in the last quarter), the picture will be somewhat different. For Livejournal.com and Diary.ru, the proportion of active blogs is close to 40%, while for LiveInternet.ru and Blogs.mail.ru their share is 21% and 18%, respectively. We should note that users often abandon newly created journals after just a couple of entries.

By share of weblogs with five and more entries, the Russian Diary.ru is at the lead with 81% of total number of blogs at the site. At Blogs.mail.ru they account for only a third of the total.

Along with blogs kept at open hosting sites, the amount of the so-called standalone blogs in Russia is also rising: in September, their number reached 4,500. Similarly to standard sites, standalone blogs need a domain, hosting, and publishing software (engine). The majority of standalone bloggers (**3,032, or 67%**) use **WordPress** as an engine. Another 1% use Movable Type; all other engines take less than 1% each.

A standalone blogger makes **four times as many** entries as an average journal owner at the Big Four hosting sites.

Figure 3. Engines used by standalone blogs in Russian Internet



(according to Yandex Blog Search data)

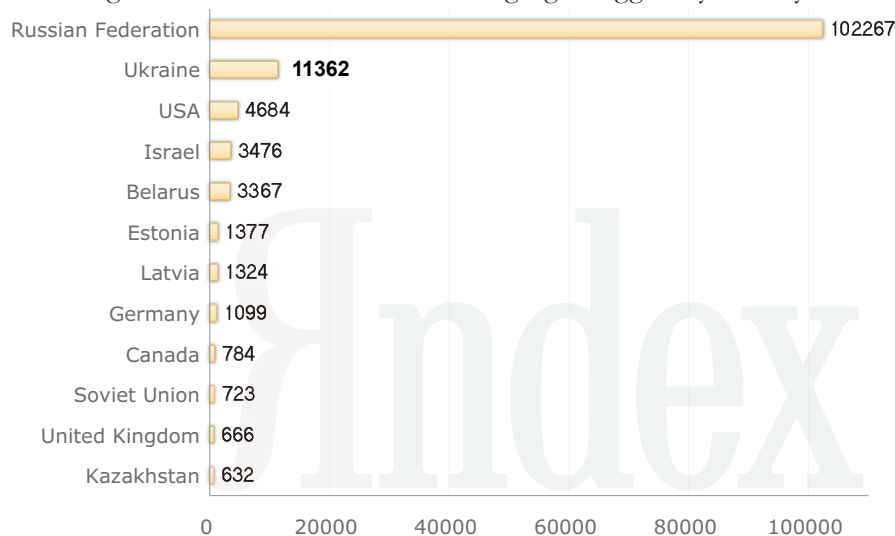
2. Who Bloggers Are

An average Russian blogger is a 21-year old female student from Moscow. Her regular readers are 24 other bloggers.

2.1. Geography of Russian-Language Blogosphere

Russian-language blogosphere is transnational: people in more than 90 countries keep their online journals in Russian. Like the Internet as a whole, the blogosphere knows no state borders. Naturally, the largest number of Russian-language bloggers specified the Russian Federation as their country of residence. Apart from Russia, the post-Soviet space has more Russian-speaking bloggers

Figure 4. Distribution of Russian-language bloggers by country



(based on analysis of user profiles at Livejournal.com and LiveInternet.ru)

than other foreign countries. The former Soviet Union takes the tenth place in the ranking of Russian-speaking bloggers' home countries. 723 users of Livejournal.com named the USSR as their place of residence. It is remarkable that the country selection menu at one of the blog hosting servers, beside the "former Soviet Union", has an option of the "future Soviet Union".

The overwhelming majority (**95%**) of Russian bloggers live in 12 cities (the list of cities is shown in Figure 5). In ten of these cities, population exceeds one million people. **79%** of all Russian-language bloggers live in Moscow and Saint Petersburg (even though the two capitals account for only a third of all Russian Internet users).

Vladivostok and Irkutsk made it to the top twelve blogger cities, despite the fact that they are not among the leading dozen cities by the total number of Internet users. Vladivostok and Irkutsk have the largest proportion of bloggers per Internet capita.

Figure 5. Distribution of Russian-language bloggers by city



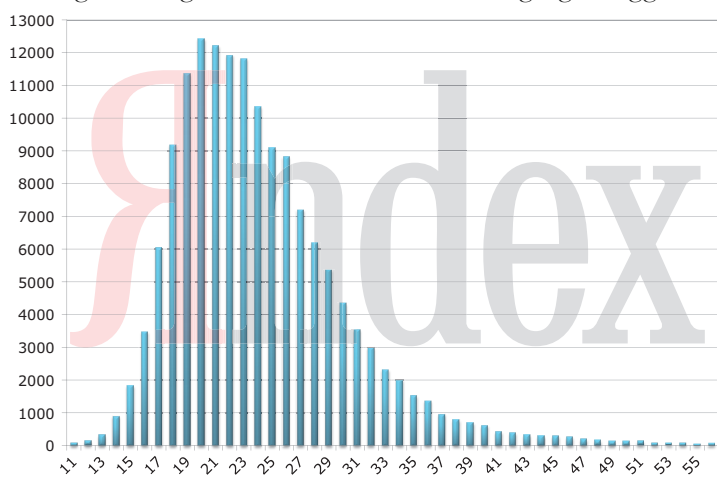
(based on Yandex Blog Search data on users of LiveJournal.com and LiveInternet.ru)

2.2 Gender Structure

Apparently, in Russia women are more inclined to run online journals and participate in community networks. Statistically, per **140,000 female users** of the largest Russian blog hosting LiveInternet.ru there are **90,000 male users**. For comparison, 54% of the US bloggers are male and 46% are female (according to Pew Internet research, June 19, 2006). And according to the publicly available user data of the world's largest blog hosting MySpace, the gender ratio is approximately 50/50.

2.3 Age Distribution

Figure 6. Age distribution of Russian-language bloggers

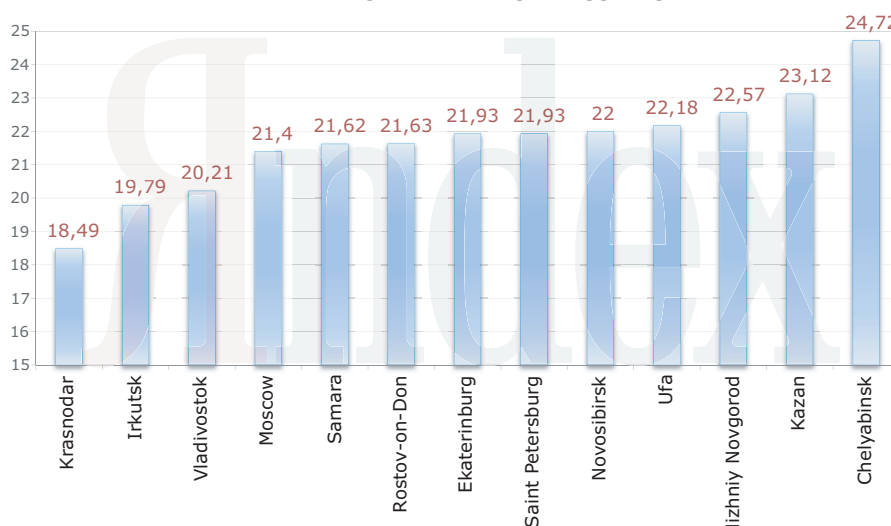


(based on Yandex Blog Search data on users of LiveJournal.com and LiveInternet.ru)

The average age of Russian bloggers is 21, **several years less than the average age of a Russian Internet user. More than 80%** of Russian bloggers are in **15-35** age category. The proportion of bloggers **above 40** is still small (slightly more than **2%**). In the US, by comparison, the most senior blogger category (50-64) takes a sizeable 14% (according to Pew Internet). The share of bloggers above 40 in the total number of users of Livejournal.com across the world is 2.4% (110,974).

Bloggers' average age differs between regions. Of the 13 Russian cities where the largest number of users stipulated their age in their profiles, the “most senior” users live in Chelyabinsk, and the “youngest” are in Krasnodar. However, for bloggers in different Russian cities there is no meaningful age gap to talk about. Regional bloggers are on average half a year older than bloggers in Moscow.

Figure 7. Average blogger age in Russian cities



(based on Yandex Blog Search data on users of LiveJournal.com and LiveInternet.ru)

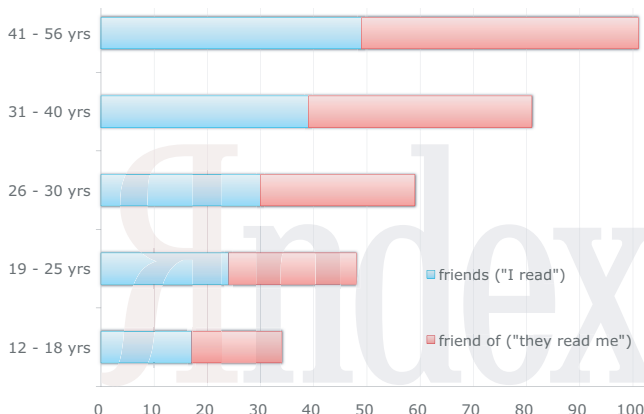
2.4 Education

At Livejournal.com, 177,000 users (51% of the Russian-language audience of the site) specified their level of education. Of the schools they named, **47% are higher educational establishments** (academies, institutes, and universities). The number of students exceeds that of graduates – another difference of bloggers compared to Russian Internet users in general. If we consider all Internet users, the proportion of people with higher education is notably larger than the share of students.

2.5 Correlation between blogger age and popularity

The number of friends at a blog host site is one of the indicators of the blogger's popularity among the users. Users who added a blog to their friends list are its primary readers. The analysis of Livejournal.com data demonstrates that bloggers in 41-56 age category have twice as many regular readers (on average) than those aged 19-25. Consequently, today the interest in a blog is proportional to the owner's age.

Figure 8. Correlation between age and number of friends



(based on Yandex Blog Search data on users of LiveJournal.com)

In contrast to the English-language blogosphere, we do not yet have any “professional” bloggers living off their blogs and making money from advertising. At the same time, we see an increasing number of corporate blogs, “officially” run by company employees. Corporate blogs are characterized by an informal, often ironic style of describing a company’s life. There are currently several dozens of such blogs (according to Yandex Blog Search). For example, companies like Stardog’s, Yandex, and Mail.ru keep their own corporate weblogs.

3. Multimedia Content in Blogs

An online journal makes a person’s life open to the public, and allows the author to address a potentially unlimited audience. It is a perfect opportunity to speak about one’s life and express oneself. The options are not limited to text only. When bloggers lack words to recount their lives, they make use of other means of self-expression, including audio and visual ones.

3.1. Photos

The most widely used multimedia objects in weblogs are images, and the majority of them are photos. Virtually any owner of an online journal with at least a couple entries has illustrated a post with a photo at least once. Availability of digital equipment coupled with a possibility of immediate publication made photography a truly universal hobby. A **quarter (26%)** of all blog entries contain images. In 2006, the highest number of new photos and pictures were posted on the Women’s Day, March 8: almost **40%** of all the day’s entries had pictures. According to Yandex Blog Search, one of the most popular tags (keywords or categories) in the Russian blogosphere all the year round is “photo”.

3.2. Podcasting

Podcasting (also referred to as netcasting) is a compound of the words “iPod” (a popular digital music player) and “broadcasting”. In place of text entries and photos, podcasters create sound files with total playing time between 5 and 30 minutes. These recordings are usually composed of music, sound effects, and the author’s speech. They are a sort of personal radio broadcasts that can be played at any time.

Podcasting can be considered a type of blogging, and new entries – podcasts – can be monitored using RSS technology, similarly to standard blog entries.

In Russia, podcasting is gradually becoming more popular. Users add several dozens of new podcasts daily to the thousands of existing ones. The most popular subjects of Russian podcasts are humor, bloggers’ everyday life, news, and culture events.

4. Bloggers' Interests

4.1 Subjects

Almost all blog owners at Livejournal.com specified their interests in their user profiles. As in real life, in the blogosphere people of every age category have their own preferences. We have separately identified ten most popular interests for bloggers aged 20-29 and 40-49.

It turned out that there is an 80% overlap in the interests of twenty- and forty-year-olds. For both generations, **music** takes the first place by popularity. However, forty-year-olds' interests in "books" and "literature" added together would come before their interest in music.

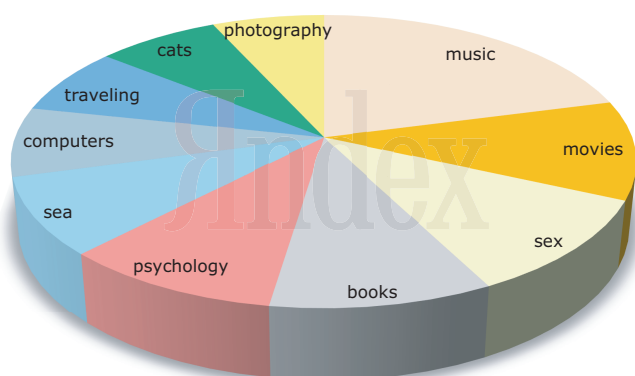


Figure 9. Interests of 20-year-olds

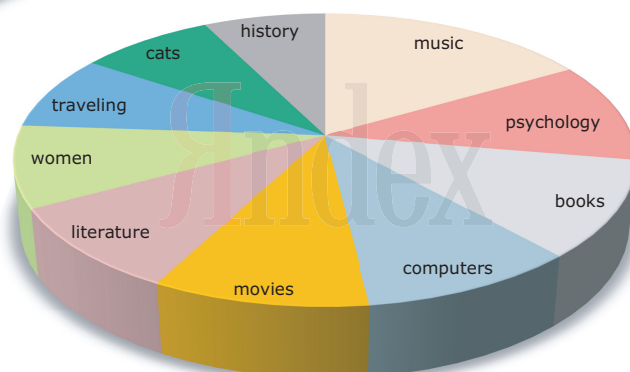


Figure 10. Interests of 40-year-olds

(according to Yandex Blog Search data on users of Livejournal.com and LiveInternet.ru)

Movies are equally entertaining at 20 and at 40, and the keyword was used by **11%** and **10%** of bloggers, respectively. Both at 20 and at 40 people are interested in psychology and computers. **Cats** and **traveling** occupy the eighth and ninth place in rankings for both age groups.

In the interests of twenty-year-olds, the third place is taken by "sex", whereas the blogger audience aged between 40 and 49 (predominantly male) stipulates "women" in their interests. Possibly, the appeal of the "process" is later replaced by the appeal of the partner. On the other hand, it could be purely a matter of different terminology.

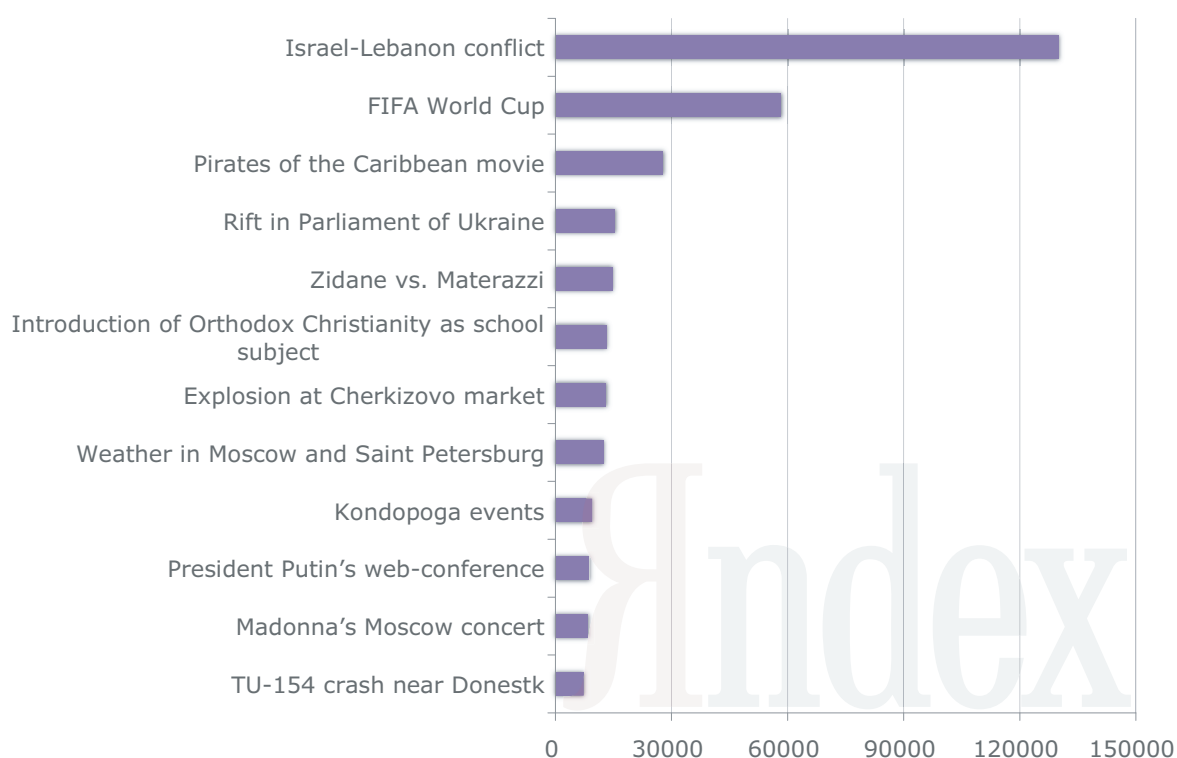
The assumption that older people become more interested in others is supported by "**psychology**", taking the fifth rank at 20 and the second at 40. We can conclude that it is not the interests that change with age, but rather the priorities and the words that people use to designate their preferences.

4.2 Events

Sometimes blogs are pompously called “new mass media” or even “a threat to traditional journalism”. According to polls conducted by Pew Internet, 34% of US bloggers consider their weblogs a kind of journalism. There were instances when the world’s top media quoted entries of “ordinary” bloggers that found themselves in the midst of noteworthy events or had unique information. Certainly, a blog owner may at some point suddenly turn into a journalist; however, the probability of that is very low.

Quite often, blog entries are triggered by events covered by newswires. The ranking of the most widely discussed events in summer of 2006 is shown in Figure 11:

Figure 11. News most widely discussed in blogs in summer 2006



(according to Yandex.News and Blog Search data)

It is interesting to note that the top five of most prominent events does not include any Russia’s internal affairs. The ranking includes roughly the same amount of political and public events as those not related to politics whatsoever. However, despite the fact that “politics” did not make it to the top ten user interests, a political development (involving countries not bordering the Russian Federation) took the first place in the ranking with a wide margin.

5. Conclusions

The Russian-language blogosphere is growing exponentially. In 2005, only 20 new blogs were created every hour; in 2006, this figure exceeds 100. Three new entries (on average) are posted every second.

According to Yandex Blog Search data, there are more than 1,150,000 weblogs in the Russian Internet as of September 2006.

A year ago, Livejournal.com had more users than all Russian blog hosting sites together. Today, over 60% of bloggers have their weblogs at Russian servers. Around 1,400 new blogs are created daily at the Russian blog hosting websites, and only 750 at Livejournal.com.

Top four most popular blog hosting servers are LiveJournal.com (44.78% of all Russian language blog entries daily), LiveInternet.ru (19.98%), Diary.ru (13.15%), and Blogs.mail.ru (7.34%). 60% of Russian bloggers are female, 40% are male. Their average age is 21, several years less than the average age of a Russian Internet user. A vast majority of bloggers (95%) live in cities, where population exceeds one million people. Nearly 80% are from Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The blogosphere covers cultural and political events as well as internal happenings that are of interest mostly to bloggers themselves. The public events that were most widely discussed in weblogs in summer 2006 were Israel-Lebanon conflict, FIFA World Cup 2006, and the rift in the Ukrainian Parliament. The most popular culture event in Russian-language blogosphere that season was Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest movie (3,391 entry).

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Glossary of Blogging Terms

Blog — a journal kept by one or several users, hosted on the Web. Technically, a *blog* is a type of website where new messages (see *entry*) are displayed ahead of older ones.

Blog hosting — a website providing services for creating and managing *blogs* (usually free of charge).

Blogger — a person who posts to a *blog*.

Blogosphere — the global informational space formed by the collective content of all *blogs*.

Blog engine — publishing software required to run standalone *blogs*.

Comments — *blog* readers' responses to an *entry*, added to an *entry* via a special form. An *entry* can be followed by *comments*.

Entry — a single unit of content in a *blog*. Usually contains a subject, body content, date, and a permanent link. Can also contain *tags* and links to *comments*.

Friends — regular readers of a *blog*.

Online journal — see *blog*.

Podcasting (also known as **netcasting**) — a type of blogging where *posts* contain voice recordings rather than text.

Post — see *entry*.

Standalone blog — a *blog* that is an independent website with its own domain and customized publishing platform (engine).

Tag — keyword or textual label, also called category. *Tags* are used in *blogs* to organize *entries* by type of content.