

## The observers of Moscow election: online discourse in social media

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The aim of the proposed article is to answer the question what are the features of online discourse about observers and observation on the Moscow election. For that purpose we have collected 3 777 mentions<sup>1</sup> related observation during Moscow election<sup>2</sup> (1800 unique mentions) on 127 online resources including twitter.com (48%), vk.com (32%), livejournal.com (8%) and other (12%). The greatest number of reference was on the polling day (350).

This research is made within the theoretical framework of coexistence two main participants of election process: the candidates and the audience (Franklin 1991). Observers became not ordinary but mostly important person which role is very significant now, especially during the democratization in the world. Their existence improves the basic standards of elections (Carothers 1997).

The analysis includes qualitative topic coding and network analysis. Topic coding was made manually by HSE students according to a code list consisting of 15 main topics (see Figure 1). As a result we have a traditional for quantitative analysis database where one mention (post) is a unit of analysis and 15 topics and meta-data (time, date, source, author etc) are variables. The leaders of mentions among region were Moscow and Saint Petersburg. More active internet users concerning this topic were men (about 78%) and people of age from 21 to 32<sup>3</sup>.

A third part of all mentions are concerned to control procedures (organization of observation, web-cameras etc). A quarter of posts are call to action (“became an observer!” or statements “I’m going to be an observer, join!”). Other discussed the lack of young people in election, the procedure of home election, the rewriting of protocols after the closure of polling stations, change of borders and New Moscow.

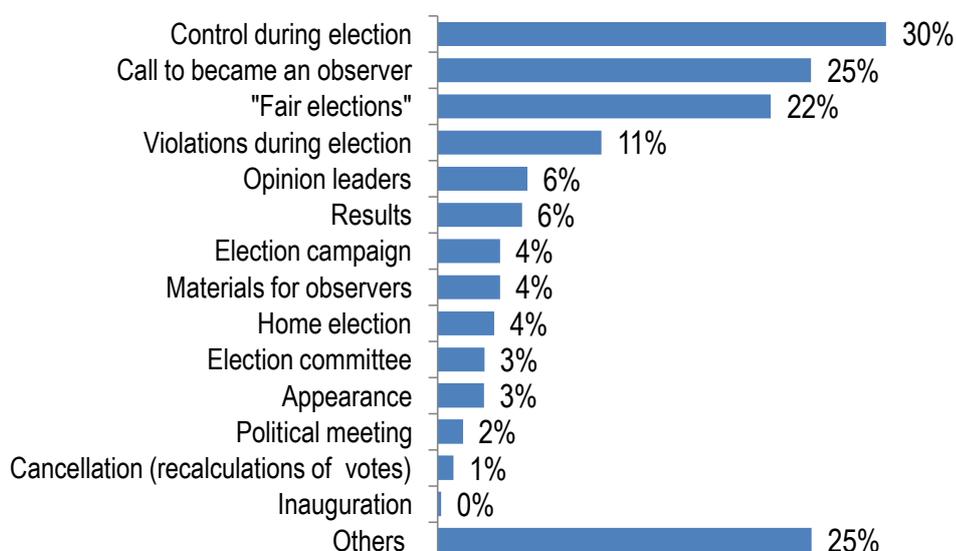


Figure №1 Frequency of topic mentions

Two main candidates – Sergey Sobyenin (acting mayor at the moment of election and the

<sup>1</sup> Data collection was conducted by Wobot - a social media listening platform.

<sup>2</sup> The search query dealt only with observation and not elections in general.

<sup>3</sup> The data collected from open accounts

winner) and Alexey Navalny (popular blogger, one of opposition leaders who started an active usage of the Internet and social media in election campaign) appears in 15% and 18% of mentions. The correspondence analysis shows that social media users were more likely to mention Navalny in connection with election campaign, calls to become an observer and make fair elections. Contrarily Sobyanin was mentioned in connection to control procedures, opinion leaders (experts, politicians etc.). Four other candidates were discussed in social media principally in terms of results of voting.

The sentiment of mention is separately methodological case for study. It turns out that students differently understand negative and positive mentions (according their political preferences). Moreover it was difficult to determinate what the object of assessment in our research is. For instance, what post have negative tones: about the violations at the election, negative communication observers with the election committee or attacks on the candidates. Thus we excluded sentiment analysis from the research.

The discourse significantly differs between the resources (see Figure 2). Twitter is used principally for reposting news about organization and control during the election. At VK.com people have published call to action. LiveJournal remain as an opposition resource for discussing election fraud, issues related to home-based voting, etc.

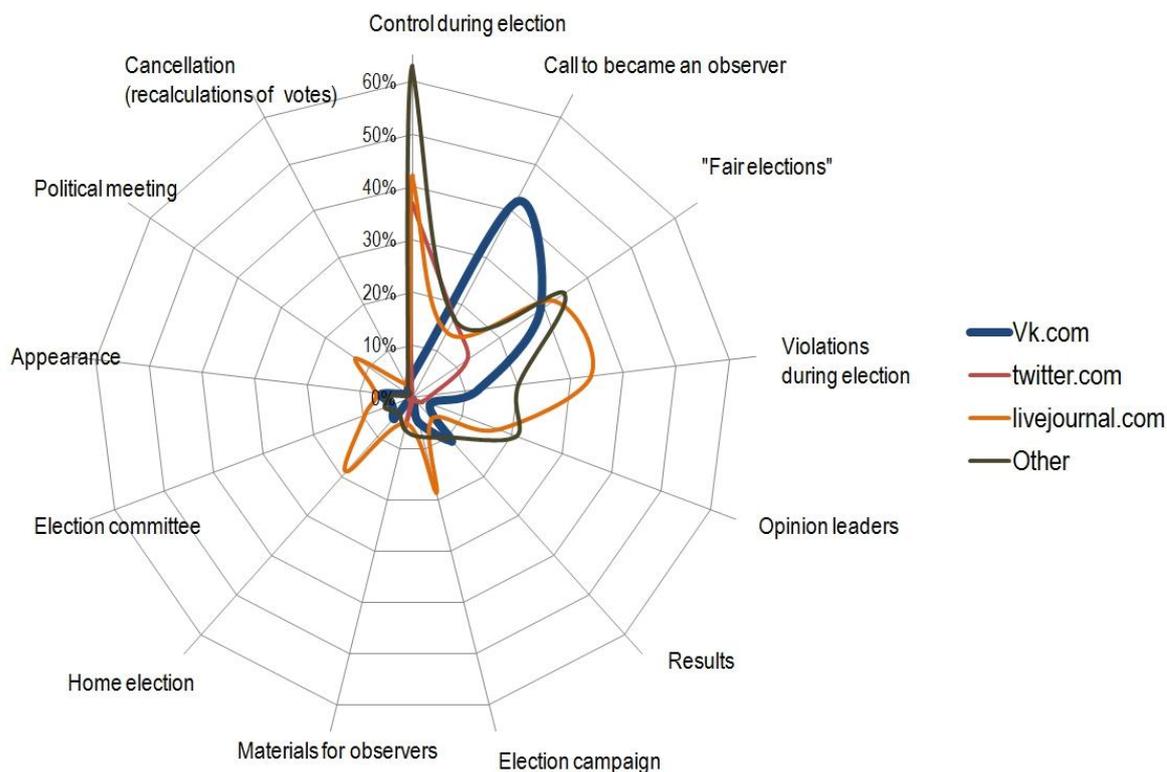


Figure №2 Topics on different resources

More than half of all mentions (52%) in analyzed dataset are reposts or retweets of unique mentions. The analysis of links between original post and repost can be represented as a bimodal network there nodes are post and authors that repost mentions; edges are links between authors and post.

Table №2 Repost (retweet) network characteristics

Number of nodes	1 834
Number of edges	1 966
Network diameter	15
Network density	0,001

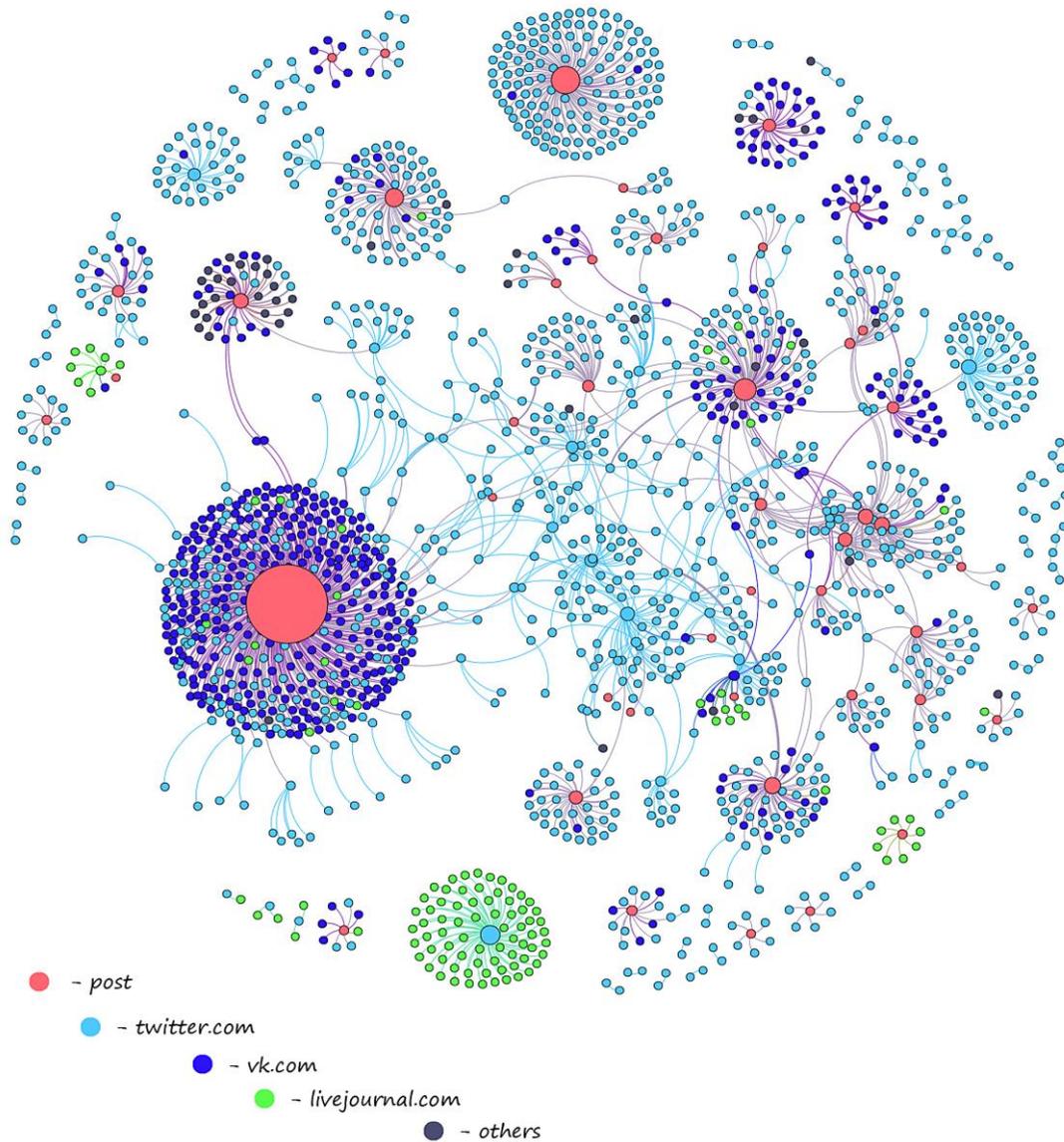


Figure №3. The reposts network

The most frequent repeated posts were published in VKontakte and Livejournal (see Figure 2). For instance, the most popular post was a call to action “I’m going to be an observer at the election of the mayor of Moscow. Make the fair election together! Join us!”

Graph structure demonstrates the role of social media in the process of information and mobilization aspects on Moscow mayoral election, help to find out key influences and main news spreading in social media. Despite a large number of posts, the graph density and diameter are quite low, so the network depends on small number of opinion leader, that shapes it.