

Book Review

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Sofya Glazunova, *Digital Activism in Russia: The Communication Tactics of Political Outsiders*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022; 210 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-93502-3, €99.99

The book aims to tell a story of communication strategies and digital activism by political outsiders in Russia, mainly based on the activities of Alexey Navalny and his team in 2016–2019. Political outsiders in this book are defined as persons acting outside of formal political parties and structures but with goals in politics. Thus, the book is a welcome addition to the literature on political communication and digital activism in Russia.

In the book, Glazunova analyzes Navalny's and his follower's political performance, discussing their core elements and practices. This empirical study shows how these political outsiders are blending the roles of politicians, journalists, bloggers, and activists. Before these case studies, the author goes through key developments of non-systemic opposition, media and journalism, and social media in Russia. The description of media and journalism developments in Russia in the 1990s and the 2000s is mostly already told in earlier research (e.g. Arutunyan 2009), but the author nicely connects this history to the development of Navalny's movement, which makes this section relevant for the book. Although the author does not use the concept of interloper (e.g. Eldridge, 2019), Navalny's team could fit this description: they mimic journalistic practices when publishing their inquiries about the corruption of Russian officials. As Glazunova points out, Navalny and his colleagues cannot be attributed to professional journalists, but nevertheless, their investigative documentaries are located on the boundary of journalism.


While the text in parts largely consists of summarizing events and incidents, it, fortunately, adds a lot of analytical observations. Some chapters also bring in theoretical discussions, for example, chapter 6 on populism and investigative reporting. Here, Glazunova presents categorizations of populism (superficial, urging, investigative, and advocacy) and discusses in later chapters how these categories are and were used in digital activism and investigative projects by Russian political outsiders such as Navalny. The analysis shows how the populist political performance helped resonate among the public.


In the conclusion, Glazunova points out the effects of Navalny's imprisonment in 2021 and the series of restrictive measures in the Russian media sphere and the Internet and concludes that the period in Russian political history she analyzed in the volume may be coming to the end. This observation is regrettably true—after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the possibilities for activism and independent reporting in Russia have further diminished.

The book is relevant reading for researchers and students who are interested in political movements and digital campaigning in authoritarian contexts, and for everyone seeking more

background on Navalny's story. While the book's focus is mostly on Russia, it also discusses examples of digital activism in other countries under an authoritarian rule which brings additional value. Since the chapters discuss digital activism and Navalny's case from different angles, the book structure allows for both using the volume as a course literature, but also chapter-by-chapter.

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