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# Social networks and cellphone use in Russia: local consequences of global communication technology

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## Abstract

Despite the rapid expansion of cellphone use, academic research has paid little attention to mobile telecommunications in Russia. This article examines the adoption and use of cellphones among young Russian adults through social network data and qualitative interviews conducted in St Petersburg in 2003. The study describes the role of personal networks in the purchasing decision, depicts the practices and social rules of cellphone use and investigates the differences between cellphone and landline phone connections. The results are discussed with reference to social consequences such as the individualizing and controlling effects of cellphone use in post-Soviet Russia.

## Key words

cellphones • mobile telecommunications • post-Soviet Russia • social networks

## INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the adoption and use of cellphones among young Russian adults through social network data and qualitative interviews conducted in St Petersburg in 2003. It examines the role of personal networks in the purchasing decision and choice of operator, depicts the practices and social rules of cellphone use and compares the differences between cellphone and landline phone connections. Particular attention is paid to the impact of the Soviet-era legacy on Russian mobile telecommunications. Finally, it discusses social consequences such as increasing individualization and social control of cellphone use in post-Soviet Russia.

Until recently, academic research has paid little attention to the question of Russian information and communication technology (ICT) in general, and to the role and use of cellphones in particular. While there is a growing body of research on cellphone use in western countries (e.g. Geser, 2004; Humphreys, 2005; Katz, 2003; Katz and Aakhus, 2002; Ling, 2000, 2004; Ling and Yttri, 2005; Mäenpää, 2001; Oksman and Turtiainen, 2004; Roos, 1993; Smoreda and Thomas, 2001), the studies of cellphone use in Russia that the present authors are aware of are usually either chargeable marketing research reports or reserved for the internal use of firms (for exceptions on cellphone use in Russia, see Gladarev 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Vershinskaya, 2002; and on Russian telecommunication markets, see Dobrovolskaya and Saluëna, 2004).

The background to this study is the 'social shaping of technology' (SST) perspective which Williams and Edge (1996:866) define as 'a broad church of approaches', seeking the middle road between technological and social determinism (see also Lenert, 2004; Mackenzie and Wajcman, 1999). The cellphone, for example, belongs to a larger socio-technological web consisting of technological infrastructure, a billing system for telecommunications, competing modes of communication, etc., rather than being an isolated and fixed technological object whose adoption 'changes' social structures. Instead, the nature and the potential uses of the cellphone are being reinterpreted constantly by relevant social groups such as end-users, designers and mobile operators, all of whom are struggling to stabilize their interpretation (see Lenert, 2004). One example of this 'interpretive flexibility' of the cellphone is the Short Messaging Service (SMS) function, which was quickly adopted by young people as a distinct and cheap way of communicating.

Within the broader SST frame, this study will focus on the social networks of cellphone users, one of the most relevant social groups in mobile telecommunications. The central assumption is that the users' social networks affect the adoption and use of cellphones in significant ways but are also moulded by their use. Moreover, these networks are conditioned by the local social, historical and cultural context and analysis has to pay attention to these cultural or 'qualitative' aspects (see Emirbayer, 1997; Emirbayer and Goodwin,

The post-socialist condition forms a specific context for this study, since cellphone use in Russia is marked not only by the Soviet-era 'structural' legacies such as deteriorating quality and, until recently, fixed charges for landline calls, but also by the particularities of social networks in Russian daily life, such as the general importance of networks, specificity of friendship relations, ties within the Russian extended family and gender relations (Castrén and Lonkila, 2004; Lonkila, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2006; Lonkila and Salmi, 2005; Rotkirch, 2000; Salmi, 2000, 2003).

The article is structured as follows. The next section briefly describes the historical development of Soviet and Russian telecommunications. Russian and St Petersburg mobile communication markets are then depicted, characterized by extremely rapid expansion. Following this, the methods and procedures of data collection are described. The process of cellphone purchase and the choice of operator are discussed, then the practices and social rules of cellphone use among the respondents are described. The differences between cellphone and landline phone connections and the segregation between discussion partners are investigated. Finally, the article concludes by considering these differences as possible indicators of the changes in Russian communication patterns.

The facts and figures below, which form a background to the network and interview data, apply to 2003, the year of data collection. This period was marked by an enormous increase in cellphone use in Russia. Occasional updates have been made when necessary.

## USE OF THE TELEPHONE IN THE SOVIET UNION AND RUSSIA

The city of St Petersburg, the site of data collection, was the birthplace of the whole field of Russian telecommunications. The first telephone line was built between St Petersburg and Gatchina in 1882 for the calls of 'the most famous people' and for listening to operas at the Mariinsky Theatre (Sokolov, 1992: 66). At the beginning of the 20th century, the telephone network started to expand and the number of subscribers in the Petersburg phone network grew from 3800 in 1901 to 49,860 in 1914. In 1917 the Moscow and Petersburg networks accounted for half of the 232,000 subscribers in Russia (see <http://com-network.narod.ru/>).

In addition to the setbacks caused by the revolution and the Second World War, the development of telecommunications in the Soviet Union suffered from serious under-investment because of distorted statistics, the preference given to heavy industry and official policy, which favoured public access to telephones (Regli, 1997, cited in Rantanen, 2001). Consequently, in the first half of the 1980s, the Soviet Union had approximately 28 million phones while the USA, with about the same population, had 170 million (Ganley, 1996; see also Rantanen, 2001).

Since a social history of telephone use in Soviet Union is not within the

the Soviet era and particularly the impact of the Soviet legacy on present-day Russian telecommunications. To begin with, the fixed-line telephone in the Soviet Union was, sometimes, literally fixed. Unlike its western counterparts, some Soviet telephones (e.g. in hotels or student dormitories) did not have a detachable plug and were permanently connected to the telephone network. This may be one of the reasons why the telephone was considered by the population to be at least potentially an instrument of surveillance and control. Although local calls were very cheap, trunk calls in the USSR were more expensive. Having a friend or a friend of a friend working as telephonist (*telefonistka*) was a way to economise on phone bills, since through such an acquaintance one could telephone free anywhere within the Soviet Union and abroad.

Having one's own landline phone is still not a given for all Russians. In the early 1990s, telephone penetration in Russia was approximately 15 telephone sets per 100 inhabitants<sup>1</sup> and 9.9 million people were waiting to get their telephone installed (Sokolov and Mikov, 1995). According to Leonid Reiman, the minister of communications, this wait had been practically abolished by 2007 (North-West Information Portal, 2007). Representative surveys carried out by the Levada Centre (2007) during the 2000s reveal that 46 percent of Russians had a landline phone at home in 2001 and 2003, and 57 percent in 2007. This modest increase suggests that instead of landline, the cellphone is becoming an increasingly popular option.

The legacy of the Soviet era is audible in the modest quality of the landline phone connections in St Petersburg. Even in the central regions of the city, the quality of landline calls may vary markedly. The overloaded lines sometimes make it difficult to make intercity calls or to connect to the internet, particularly during the evening hours.

Still another important example of the Soviet legacy is the Russian tariff system for landline phone calls. Unlike trunk calls, landline phone calls in 2003 were not generally time-charged in Russia, with the exception of a few cities such as Samara or Nizhny Novgorod. Thus a monthly payment of 100 roubles (just over US\$3) allows the subscriber to use the landline as much as they like. As will be shown later in this article, this low charge for landline calls greatly affected many aspects of cellphone use. A new tariff system, where the subscriber can choose between time-charged and fixed monthly payments from 350 to 400 roubles (US\$ 12–13), came into force in February 2007. Finally, the phone directory system remains underdeveloped. There are phone directories of organizations and firms in St Petersburg, but none listing private individuals. In November 2007 there was a payable enquiry service for cellphone numbers. However, many Russians consider cellphone numbers to be private information, not to be openly distributed. Consequently, phone users' personal notebooks on phone numbers acquire particular significance.

problems which may be solved in western countries through an institution are solved in Russia using personal relations, the cellphone notebook is both a necessary coping resource in everyday life as well as a manifestation of one's 'social capital' in terms of numbers accumulated in the notebook (for an analysis of phone notebook networks, see Lonkila, 2003).

## MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS MARKETS IN RUSSIA AND ST PETERSBURG

As with landline telecommunications, St Petersburg was the cradle of Russian mobile communications. On 9 September 1991, mayor Anatoly Sobchak made the first Russian cellphone call in the city through the operator Delta Telecom. However, prior to 1998, cellphones were considered largely symbols of belonging to a group of 'new Russians' (*новые русские*). The elite character of mobile communication was indicated by exorbitant charges (US\$1–2 per minute) and the price of cellphones (US\$200–500), which only a few wealthy Russians could afford. According to Vadim Volkov (2002: 90), the cellphone became especially popular in the early 1990s among the Russian 'violent entrepreneurs' (often called the Russian mafia by other writers), since they were a handy tool in organizing and coordinating 'business meetings' (*strelokas*).

The Russian domestic telecommunication market began to grow rapidly after the 1998 financial crisis. Tariffs declined, the cellphone lost its symbolic value and became accessible to more of the population. While the number of cellphone subscribers in Russia was 1.3 million at the beginning of 2000, the corresponding figure three years later was 17.8, and 140.3 at the end of 2006. These figures, however, indicate the number of SIM-cards. According to Levada Centre, two per cent of Russians had a cell phone in 2001, nine per cent in 2003 and 61 per cent in 2007 (Levada Centre, 2007).

The Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) is by far the most popular standard in Russia. The biggest Russian cellphone operators in 2003 were MTS, VimpelCom (operating under the brand 'Bee Line'), and MegaFon – the biggest operator in the St Petersburg area. The quality of communication varies according to operator and region. Outside the big cities the coverage of mobile connections is modest, and in distant villages or the countryside, practically non-existent. The roaming call is charged not only between different operators, but it is also more expensive to call a geographically distant customer under the same operator.

The St Petersburg region plays a central role in Russian telecommunications and its cellphone market in the early years of the 21st century has been among the most dynamic in the country (Averin and Dudarev, 2003). The number of cellphone subscribers in the region has been rapidly increasing, from 197,300 at 1 January 2000 to 2.5 million in January 2003 and 8.06

As noted in the previous section, one of the most important aspects of the Russian tariff system is that cellphone users have had to pay for incoming calls from a landline phone or from a cellphone from other operators. In December 2003 MegaFon, Bee Line and MTS offered new tariffs where only the caller pays. By August 2005, the 'calling party pays' principle had become common practice in St Petersburg and was confirmed by legislation on 1 July 2006. The charge for one cellphone call to another within the same operator's network in St Petersburg varied between US\$0.01 and US\$0.13 in June 2003. A call to another network cost between US\$0.11 and US\$0.18, and a call from a fixed-line phone to a cellphone between US\$0.11 and US\$0.16. Because of the complexity of the tariff system, these charges are indicative and change constantly. They are published here only in order to illustrate the approximate cost of using the cellphone at the time of data collection in summer to autumn 2003 and can be compared to the 6633 roubles (US\$220) average monthly salary in the city in May 2003.

## METHOD

### Data collection and sample

Fourteen cellphone users between 19 and 30 years of age residing in St Petersburg participated in the study. Half were females and three (R3, R8, R13) had children. The average length of the respondents' cellphone use was two years, with a range of between one month (R1, R12) and seven years (R7). One of the respondents (R13) did not have a landline phone. Because the sample was constructed through the interviewer's personal connections, R1, R3, R4 and R5 were members of the same circle of friends. In addition, R9 and R10 were a cohabiting couple who kept their diaries simultaneously.

The sample contained, save four students, one professional athlete and one housewife, representatives of varying white-collar occupations such as a translator, an assistant editor in a publishing house and a designer. Their monthly income varied between nil (R2, a housewife dependent on her husband) and US\$1000 (R5). Seven respondents were natives of the city and another seven had migrated to St Petersburg. Of the seven migrants, six had moved fewer than five years ago, while R2 had lived in the city for 19 years.

The study uses the network method developed in the course of an international comparative study coordinated by Maurizio Gribaudo at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (see Gribaudo, 1998; Lonkila, 1999a). The core of the network method is a structured diary of significant encounters (including face-to-face meetings, phone calls, SMS messages, email and fax messages, letters and other kinds of personal contact), which the respondents kept daily for a week. The people encountered during the study week form the 'one-week social network' of the respondents. Since during an average day an individual respondent may have hundreds of contacts, for

which the respondent considered to be 'significant'. Therefore, respondents were instructed to leave out such things as routine work meetings.<sup>2</sup>

Because a one-week study period is clearly too short to gain an adequate image of the respondent's social life, the data on the network members (henceforth: alters) encountered during the study week was complemented by asking the respondents first to name the people they considered important but whom they did not encounter during the study week; second, to retrieve the names recorded in the notebook of their cellphones. All in all, the complete network data ('total network') is supposed to cover the significant social ties of the respondents as well as part of the network of 'weak' ties adequately (see Lonkila, 2003).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the network data collected contains a wealth of information both on the encounters as well as the alters encountered. The data on the encounters comprises the mode of communication, date and time, content, place and duration of the encounter. The data on alters includes gender, age, profession, place of residence and birth, length of the relationship, emotional closeness between respondent and alter, the context of the first meeting between respondent and alter and the type of relationship between them. Finally, the respondent was asked to measure the emotional closeness between themselves and each alter on a scale from 1 = 'very close' to 7 = 'not close at all', thereby to construct concentric 'proximity zones' around the respondent. The data were complemented by a thematic interview focusing on the various modes of communication and particularly the use of cellphones. In addition, the basic socioeconomic information (age, gender, education, profession and work status) of the respondent and their background (parents' profession, migrant status and length of stay in St Petersburg) was covered. The network data contain a wide variety of daily life contacts, from face-to-face meetings to telephone calls, email messages and ICQ chatting ('I-Seek-You', a form of instant messaging). However, this article will focus mainly on the use of landlines and cellphones (including SMS) as reported by the respondents in the one-week networks.

Since the data are not statistically representative, the analysis has to employ case-oriented qualitative methods. Quantitative data will be used to point out interesting patterns to be examined qualitatively in more detail. However, despite the modest number of respondents, the network data collected contain a wealth of information on 710 alters and 775 encounters, offering a rare opportunity to study the daily communication practices of young adults in St Petersburg in 2003.

## RESULTS

### Becoming a cellphone user

In this section, cellphone use is investigated mainly through the interview

mobile telecommunications, special attention is paid to the process of becoming a cellphone user.

### Purchasing a cellphone

The purchasing decision among the respondents was strongly influenced by their personal networks – a phenomenon well known from western studies of consumption. Some cellphone owners tried actively to persuade their friends to buy one by giving away their own used cellphones to friends, or trying to convince them of the advantages of having one:

My friend bought herself a cellphone and started to persuade me to buy one. I said that I don't really need one. But she took pains to convince me and because a mutual acquaintance was purchasing a new cellphone and wanted to sell his old one at quite a cheap price ... Anyway, my friend persuaded me, or rather my husband, who gave this mechanical toy [*mechanical toy*] to me as a New Year's Eve present. (R3)

Some of the respondents received their cellphone from their superiors at work (e.g. R4), but more often they either bought them or received them as presents (R2, R3, R9, R11, R12, R14). Except for R11, a professional athlete whose mother gave him the cellphone as a present, the recipients were all women who received theirs either from their husband or boyfriend. These observations emphasize the symbolic value of cellphones and the importance of the Russian gender system as well as the social ritual of gift-giving.

For the respondents, buying a cellphone was not a simple act of purchasing any consumer good but rather an important event which was sometimes preceded by a lengthy period of reflection. Almost all the respondents who bought the phone themselves (R1, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10, R13) consulted their friends, relatives, acquaintances and colleagues about the choice of model and details of services offered by the various operators. For example, R7 consulted his girlfriend who was working as a telephone salesperson, and R10's purchase decision was preceded by visits to several different shops, during which he consulted the salespeople about the pros and cons of various models.

### Choosing the cellphone operator

Particular attention was paid to the choice of operator. Four of the respondents used MTS and the rest mainly MegaFon. The most frequent and interrelated criteria for choice reported by respondents were call charges, the quality of connections and 'network impact'. The respondents mainly selected the operator to which their social circle was connected. This aspect is illustrated in R3's reply: 'Except [for] one person, my friends are clients of the same operator'.

The same effect was illustrated well by R9, who connected to the same

with the same operator. The respondents, whose friends were connected to different operators, had to choose between different sectors of their network. R4, for example, chose the MTS operator of her husband and her husband's friends, 'sacrificing' her own friends who used MegaFon. One respondent (R7) solved this dilemma by simultaneously using two cellphones connected to two different operators.

Users mostly remain loyal to the operator that they have chosen, since changing operator would increase the charge for calls to the friends connected to the previous network. However, in cases of particularly tempting offers from another operator, the whole network could change operator together (e.g. R7, R11). In these two cases, both respondents continued with the previous operator either by having two cellphones (R7), or two SIM cards for the same cellphone (R11).

The pros and cons of different operators were discussed often by the users. The sometimes heated debates were usually related to the operators' aggressive advertising campaigns and mostly revolved around fees charged and services offered. The respondents were very aware of both the details of different models and the services offered. Some had accumulated this knowledge through discussions with more experienced friends and acquaintances, while others gathered the information themselves, for example, from internet sites.

In sum, the adoption of cellphones among the respondents was clearly a network phenomenon. They devoted a lot of time and energy to reflecting on and discussing the purchase of a cellphone and the choice of operator with members of their personal networks.

### Practices and rules of cellphone use

*Social rules of cellphone use* The cellphone had become a necessary part of the daily life of all the respondents. Nobody would leave their home or workplace without it. Generally the phone was used outside the home or office when there was no access to a landline phone. There were only a few places where the phone was not used either for technical or social reasons (whether in the metro, theatre, lectures and similar public events). However, the social rules are about to change because of the diffusion of cellphones among the general public. There are also rules for regulating the distribution of one's cellphone number to third persons. In the opinion of many respondents (R2, R3, R5, R8, R10), the number should be given to others only with the permission of the owner, while others were more flexible on this matter.

The Russian tariff system described above meant that there was one rule which was agreed upon by all respondents in 2003: one should not phone a cellphone from a landline phone.

Interviewer: I guess that at home you never phone from the cellphone?

R1: Because if I phone someone [someone's cellphone] from a landline phone, then this person [receiving the call] has to pay for the call. But if he receives a call from another cellphone, it is free for him.

Interviewer: And in this case it is you who pays?

R1: Yes, of course. It is me who needed to call. I phone, I pay.

Interviewer: So there is this kind of rule?

R1: Well, it is really not a rule, it is an elementary form of behavior. There might be people who do otherwise but I think it is best this way.

**Strategies for saving money** Despite the recent expansion of cellphone use, it still remains an expensive mode of communication for the majority of Russians in 2003. Consequently, the respondents had developed several strategies to save on costs. The average amount spent monthly on cellphone calls by the respondents was US\$20 (the extreme example being R8, a computer specialist who spent US\$45 monthly). Curiously, this amount was not directly related to the level of income: those with a monthly income of US\$200 spent as much as those earning five times as much. On the other hand, R5, a well-paid computer programmer with a high and stable income of US\$1000 in the Russian context, noted that when at home, he would rather get up from his chair and walk to the landline phone to make a cheaper call.

Switching to a landline phone was a usual way to save money among other respondents. When the respondents phoned their alters from their cellphone but had simultaneous access to a fixed-line phone, they usually asked if their interlocutor was in the vicinity of a landline phone. In the case of a positive reply, the conversation was continued through the landline. Another way of saving money was to use the 'phone for free for the first five seconds' tariff offered by MTS and MegaFon, just for a brief message. These flash calls were then possibly repeated several times (R7, R9, R10, R12):

R10: Because there are five seconds free of charge, and as I said, most of the calls are for coordinating events and five seconds is enough to say where I am and where I go to.

Interviewer: So you use this free-of-charge option?

R10: Definitely. Yes.

Another popular method of saving money was the use of SMS. One message is not only twice as cheap as a one-minute call but, unlike cellphone calls, does not include any roaming charge between foreign or regional Russian operators. Therefore, SMS was used particularly by migrants when contacting distant alters abroad (R1, R2, R3, R11) or family and kin in other Russian towns (R6, R9, R10, R12, R13). For those using SMS for economic reasons, such as R9, the decreasing charges for cellphone calls also diminished their use of SMS.

In addition to these cost-saving strategies, R7 used two cellphones with two SIM cards to save money when phoning outside his own operator while

## Comparing cellphone and landline phone contacts

In this section, the nature of the reported landline and cellphone contacts (including SMS) as well as the character of the discussion partners are described, based on both the network and interview data. However, in order to contextualize the phone contacts, it will begin with a comparison of the frequency of the cellphone and landline phone calls with other forms of ICT contact reported by the respondents, such as email and ICQ. Table 1 presents these frequencies by respondent.

Beside the considerable variation between individual respondents due to the several variables involved, Table 1 shows how the landline and cellphone are in general the most frequent modes of ICT communication among the respondents. Although these figures are in no way representative, it pays to note that six respondents (R2, R6, R8, R11, R12, R13) made more cellphone calls than landline calls. Moreover, together the SMS messages and cellphone calls were the most frequent type of contact for 10 out of 14 respondents – a sign of a recent change which will probably accelerate in Russia.

## The style and content of cellphone calls

Although less frequent, the landline calls were clearly longer on average than cellphone calls. The average length of a cellphone call was 1.5 minutes, while an average landline call took almost 10 minutes. Some respondents also made use of the 'free first five seconds' offers by some operators. Despite the frequency of ICT contact, respondents strongly emphasized in the interviews

Table 1 The number and percentage of different kinds of ICT contact in the one-week networks

	LANDLINE PHONE RESPONDENT		CELLPHONE (214)	SMS(96)	EMAIL (43)	ICQ, ETC. (27)	TOTAL NUMBER OF ICT CONTACTS(558)
	(178)	(178)					
1	15 (43%)*	7 (20%)	6 (17%)	6 (17%)	6 (17%)	1 (3%)	35 (100%)
2	23 (26%)	50 (58%)	14 (16%)	0	0	0	87 (100%)
3	26 (55%)	13 (28%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)	0	0	47 (100%)
4	21 (57%)	15 (41%)	1 (3%)	0	0	0	37 (100%)
5	17 (43%)	8 (20%)	11 (28%)	4 (10%)	0	0	40 (100%)
6	2 (7%)	12 (43%)	1 (4%)	5 (18%)	8 (28%)	0	28 (100%)
7	30 (50%)	24 (40%)	5 (8%)	1 (2%)	0	0	60 (100%)
8	6 (14%)	13 (30%)	5 (11%)	4 (9%)	0	0	44 (100%)
9	11 (31%)	9 (25%)	9 (25%)	7 (19%)	0	0	36 (100%)
10	6 (20%)	5 (17%)	8 (27%)	11 (37)	0	0	30 (100%)
11	7 (27%)	13 (50%)	6 (23%)	0	0	0	26 (100%)
12	4 (10%)	21 (51%)	16 (39%)	0	0	0	41 (100%)
13	1 (4%)	17 (68%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	0	25 (100%)
14	9 (41%)	7 (32%)	5 (23%)	1 (5%)	0	0	22 (100%)
mean	12.7 (31%)	15.3(37%)	6.9 (18%)	3.1 (9%)	1.9 (5%)	0	40 (100%)

their preference for socializing face-to-face with their network members. For the respondents the cellphone remains an auxiliary channel for quick contact, lacking the time or resources to meet face-to-face:

I consider the cellphone as an instrument to agree upon meeting, to put something straight immediately or the like. It is really not for socializing with friends. (R3)

Compared to landline calls, cellphone calls were more planned and regulated by different principles. This was particularly apparent with the student respondents, who were struggling to make ends meet:

The cellphone calls are planned in advance: whom I want to call, what I want to find out. These are usually concrete questions. It is seldom that a question arises during the conversation. This is probably the biggest difference between phoning from a cellphone and a landline phone. The latter allows you to carry on a conversation which will evolve by itself, that is, during the call new questions emerge and are being dealt with. But as a rule, on the cellphone you already know prior to the discussion what questions will be discussed. The discussion is oriented to getting the answers. (R10)

The respondents described the content of the calls and SMS in their own words in the diaries. Analysis of these qualitative descriptions shows that the most frequent content of the cellphone call was the coordination of common actions in the future, such as agreeing upon the time or place of face-to-face meetings. Coordination accounted for 57 percent of cellphone calls and 50 percent of SMS messages but only 29 percent of landline phone calls (Gladarew 2004a, 2005). These results give credence to western studies (e.g. Ling, 2004; Mäenpää, 2001), according to which an important function of cellphone calls is coordinating common actions and preparing for future face-to-face encounters rather than replacing them. This also seems to be the case in the Russian data. As one of the female respondents described this function in her own words (see also Gladarew, 2005):

Coordination. Yes, I think this is the most important function. Because we phone ... or I phone my husband and we'll agree upon where we'll meet during the day, if we cannot fix it in the morning. But this happens quite often; we leave for study or work at different times and we might not talk at all in the morning. For example, I go out while he is still asleep or he leaves while I am sleeping. This happens quite often and as a rule, our first contact of the day occurs by phone, by cellphone. (R9)

The same function dominates the very short cellphone calls between another female respondent (R9) and her husband, accounting for most of the cellphone calls reported in her diary:

- We agreed to meet in Sadovaya street about my being late for our rendezvous

- He phoned to explain why he could not get the book by Kolosov [from the library].
- We agreed to meet near the shop to buy some food.
- A series of short, coordinating calls.
- I said that I would not go to the lectures, but would go home.
- He explained where he is, whether he met the Americans, and will he meet me.

The second most frequent content of the cellphone and SMS contact was relationship maintenance (e.g. 'how are you', congratulations on celebrations, and so forth). These contacts accounted for 22 percent of cellphone calls, 39 percent of SMS and 19 percent of landline calls. Their frequency is in line with the general importance given to personal networks and their maintenance in Russian society (Castrén and Lonkila, 2004; Ledeneva, 1998; Lonkila, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2006; Lonkila and Salmi, 2005; Salmi, 2000, 2003). In addition, the special importance of congratulating one's network members on celebrations such as Women's day, New Year's Eve, the Day of the Defenders of the Fatherland or birthdays in Russia needs to be mentioned. Birthday congratulations, for example, to one's family members and other relatives, colleagues, friends, and close acquaintances, form an important part of Russian sociability (see Salmi, 2000), not to mention the preparations related to one's birthday party. This feature of Russian sociability seems to accord well with the more flexible nature of cellphone communication: unlike the landline, the cellphone allows congratulations either through a more intimate (and intrusive) call or more neutral SMS message.

### The difference between landline and cellphone discussion partners

With whom did people converse by landline and cellphone? Table 2 shows the distribution of cellphone, landline phone and SMS contact by type of network members.

Because of the focus on 'significant encounters' dictated by practical considerations, the respondents were asked to leave out routine encounters at work (or study), which is one reason for the low proportion of reported contact with colleagues or fellow students. The role of colleagues in the 'significant social life' of Russian businesspeople, for example, probably would be much greater. However, Table 2 and the interviews seem to suggest that both cell and landline phones are mainly used by the respondents for maintaining strong family, kin and friendship ties.

The respondents' cellphone discussion partners were not only emotionally close but also lived in the vicinity. This tendency was clearly stronger with cellphone than landline calls. The majority of both landline and cellphone calls took place between alters living in St Petersburg, but while 13 percent of landline phone calls were to alters residing outside the city, this proportion of cellphone calls was only 3 percent. However, of all SMS

