



New news media in Russia: What is new?

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To cite this article: Svetlana Pasti, Dmitry Gavra & Maria Anikina (2015) New news media in Russia: What is new?, African Journalism Studies, 36:3, 33-60, DOI: [10.1080/23743670.2015.1073931](https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1073931)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1073931>



Published online: 30 Sep 2015.



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Keywords: capital city, online media, political values, professionalism, regional city, Russian journalists, traditional media

INTRODUCTION

Russia is the world's largest country in terms of territory, spanning 11 time zones and bordering 14 countries (Figure 1). Its population as of January 1, 2015, was 146 million of which 108 million live in urban and 38 million in rural areas (Rosstat 2015). The country is divided into 85 regions and nine federal districts (Okrug).

The media system is characterised by three historical contexts: 'post-Soviet, post-modern and post-empire' (Vartanova 2015). It does not fit into the framework of Western typologies, not being a purely Western system but a hybrid, with features of the West and the East. It demonstrates 'the rise of television as the core medium of the Russian media system, paralleled by the decline of print media, especially daily newspapers, the growing role of the new media as a reflection of the information society's revolution, and the widening divergence of regional media systems as a reflection of Russia's regional diversity' (ibid, 130). Empirical studies conducted during the past 15 years reveal the hybrid character of the media system, with elements of both a Western libertarian and an Eastern communitarian system, referred to as 'Eurasian'. Its hybrid nature conceals several paradoxes in terms of the profession itself, the media market, the liberal-authoritarian role of the state, and the political adaptation of journalists (Pasti and Nordenstreng 2013). Earlier research had imagined its transformation in conceptual frameworks of a 'Eurasian model' (De Smaele 1999), 'Neo-Authoritarian model' (Becker 2004), 'Transitional model' (Jakubowicz 2008), 'Neo-Soviet model' (Oates 2009), 'Authoritarian corporatist model' (Sparks 2010) and 'Statist commercialised model' (Vartanova 2012).

However, the current media system is properly understood only in the context of the addition of online media to the traditional print and electronic media; the Internet has given rise to alternative agendas and created new relations of integration and solidarity with society. In particular, new online media together with social media played an important role in the rise of the 'snow revolution' in the winter of 2011 and 2012. The Internet's role in forming public opinion and organising the masses has also become significant (FARMC 2012, 43). A November 2011 VCIOM poll showed that 60 per cent of the population used the Internet as an information source. The popularity of the Internet is catching up with that of the press, but not of television, which still remains the principal source of information (73%) (ibid, 87). However, if the credibility of the Internet as a source of information continues to grow, elections to the State Duma in the 2016 and 2018 presidential elections will take place in completely new information realities, where the Internet will play a major role (Civil Society Development Foundation 2012, 4).

clichéd. Such thinking holds that traditional media are ‘bastions’ to outsiders (non-professionals, public) and leads to the assessment of new media as less professional because they are newly established (emerging since the 2000s), less institutionalised (optional registration for new media), less coopted into self-regulatory bodies, and more likely to be open to amateurs. This thinking further holds that professionals prefer to work in traditional media (understood as valid institutions of journalism), whereas non-professionals and active citizens go online to do citizen journalism and activism, and that often these are not professional journalists but bloggers who have become opinion leaders. Given such thinking, and within the framework of the overarching goals of comparison between online and offline and capital and regions, this study’s first research question was: Are online news media mostly staffed by non-professionals?

Press freedom ratings indicate that in democratic countries, the level of press freedom does not differ between offline and online media, unlike Russia where traditional media are rated as not-free and online media as partly free (Freedom House 2013). Thus, the second research question was: Are online media striving for political independence of the profession (the Western ideal) as an alternative to the old order, and traditional media supporting the traditional values of statism and paternalism of the authorities (as a part of the old thinking and deep conformity in the national mentality)?

Recent research has shown that in Russia, independent online media presented a much more complete and even sympathetic picture of the protesters than did the state media (Freedom House 2012, 461; Motorin 2011). Social media networks played a critical role in galvanising massive public protests that began in December 2011 (Freedom on the net 2012, 13). Taking this scenario into account, the third research question was: Are online media and their journalists more integrated with civil society and protests than traditional media?

SAMPLE

The survey of journalists was carried out in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and Petrozavodsk. These cities are important geopolitical points on the map of the country: Moscow is the capital of Russia; St. Petersburg is the former capital of Tsarist Russia and the center of the North-West Federal District; Yekaterinburg is the center of the Urals Federal District, located in the central part of Eurasia; and Petrozavodsk is the capital of the Republic of Karelia, bordering the European Union (Finland) (Figure 1). Sample media outlets in these four cities were selected based on the advice of local experts – representatives of the media, a professional community of journalists, and journalism lecturers at local universities. Using the common method outlined in the editorial note, 144 journalists from 72 media outlets (traditional = 74 journalists; pure online = 70 journalists) were interviewed (Table 1).

apparent at a deeper level. In Moscow, offline journalists valued the opportunity to learn new things, communicate with people and write stories that are impactful, whereas online journalists valued important work well done, measured not only in terms of personal feeling and professional reflection, but by the number of 'likes' they received. In St. Petersburg, both groups most valued *'thanks and feedback from the audience and interaction with them'*; in online, they valued *'respect and acknowledgment from colleagues'* (22%), which was unimportant in old media (4%). A likely reason for this is the younger age of online media journalists and their claim for recognition by members of the professional community (Table 3).

Political orientation

In Moscow, the majority (88% online and 63% offline) were against blocking access to the Internet; however, their responses concerning control over political issues and entertainment showed a gap between the views of the two groups. While 12 per cent of online journalists were tolerant of control over political issues, 42 per cent of traditional media journalists considered this control possible. In opinions about control over entertainment, the gap was larger: 21 and 83 per cent of respondents respectively supported this idea. In St. Petersburg two thirds (equally online and old media) rejected the very idea of any kind of control over political materials. In the old media, one fifth supported it, however none of them named any state institution as an actor controlling the media. The most popular answers for institutions of control were self-control by the journalist (6 answers), editorial control (3), and control by the public (3) (Table 5).

In Moscow, journalists engaged in social movements only moderately; many of them did not want to discuss the subject of protests. Some interviews showed that protests could split journalists on political preferences in the office. Journalists clearly distinguished between their personal and professional positions: *'... in 2011/12, during the planning meetings, people divided; patriots sat at one side of the table, liberals at the other side, and they did not shake hands. But we understand that politics is superficial issue. There are the things which fasten us stronger'* (R. 25. M, old media). Those who often described the protests stressed the professional aspect of journalists' participation in the campaigns. Online journalists (83%) compared to old media journalists (54%) expressed stronger positive support for protests. In St. Petersburg, both groups were critical and skeptical about the protests because of the small number of protesters, although support for protests was higher in online than in old media (Table 5).

In both capitals, journalists viewed democracy as the best social system for the development of journalism as a profession in Russia, and online journalists stressed that freedom of speech was the most important characteristic of a democratic regime (Table 10). At the same time, they differed in their perceptions of a better value system. Thus, in Moscow, traditional media journalists considered socialism to be a

in the profession. Still, at a more concrete level, the journalists often said that the role of a journalist today is to enable communication between society and those in power, to be the moderator and to help people (Table 8).

Perspectives on the future of the profession and respondents' personal futures indicated no definite view of prospects. This became evident at the dawn of the new wave of the economic crisis in 2014, with uncertainty touching both new and traditional media journalists: *'There are few good editorial boards, they live under pressure, staff is getting smaller, and salary is going down. It is hard to predict what will happen in ten years'* (R. 24. F, online, Moscow). *'Frankly speaking it looks sad to me. Good media are closing. Even the most serious quality media are cutting the staff. Probably it will be more difficult for the media which are not funded by the state to stay alive'* (R. 32. F, old media, Moscow). In St. Petersburg, online journalists were more optimistic than their colleagues from traditional media, who outlined the future pessimistically: journalism will disappear, newspapers will disappear. It meant that at least two in ten respondents from the old media did not believe the profession would survive.

Neither group saw major differences between themselves. Due to rather liberal labour laws these two communities could overlap – journalists could combine two jobs and have professional experience in both types of media. Online media respondents stressed such particular qualities as speed of work, universality, and a reduction in online media staff. Offline media journalists said that there is no principal difference between the two camps in the journalistic community, but argued that they had experience, presented higher-quality journalism, and represented the serious school of the profession (Table 9). When asked which type (old or new) is more prestigious for a journalist to work in, the majority in both groups in St. Petersburg replied that it does not depend on the type of media but on the brand, which represents prestige and status. The remaining respondents in both groups preferred to support the status of the media where they are currently employed.

Yekaterinburg – Petrozavodsk

Profile

In Yekaterinburg, the vast majority of online journalists were young, in the old media the split was 50/50. In both groups there was a gender balance; nobody noted that gender had an influence on their job or career. Everybody was highly educated; the majority in both groups were graduates of the faculty of journalism of Ural University, which is located in Yekaterinburg. In terms of social background they represented the middle class. This is different from the Soviet era, and is surprising because the city has remained Russia's leading industrial centre. What was special about this location is that journalism is a family tradition: a fifth of both old and new media respondents had parent(s) who were journalists.

In Yekaterinburg, in both groups the salaries of 50 per cent of respondents were above average for the region. More online journalists were highly paid than journalists in the traditional media. The reason for this may be that in online media only one third of respondents had second jobs (not regular incomes, but as the need arose), usually in marketing, advertising, copy writing, music teaching and other non-journalistic work. In the old media, the majority of journalists had second jobs. The highest earnings were linked to state-run television, namely between 100 and 200.000 rubles (2 000 – 4.000 euro, net, per month) and popular journalistic startups with links to the mayor and the governor paid between 150 and 200.000 rubles (3 000–4 000 euro) per month.

In Petrozavodsk, journalists had higher incomes than the average salary in the city, owing to their second jobs. Almost all online journalists had a second job – usually working for other types of media or participating in educational projects (mostly funded by Northern European grants). In the old media, only one third of respondents had a second job (mostly held by males and young females). A beginner online journalist earned anything from 15.000 rubles (300 euro), whereas an experienced male journalist, with a second job, earned between 60 and 70.000 rubles per month (1 200–1 400 euro).

In Yekaterinburg, the majority (86%) did not see any sense or benefit in joining a union. No one belonged to a political party, and only one journalist from the old media belonged to an NGO. In Petrozavodsk, by contrast, the majority belonged to the local Union of Journalists that had a strong reputation for being independent and able to defend journalists, as demonstrated in some well-known cases. It also had strong links to journalistic organisations in Scandinavia – something that is not typical for other Russian cities. No one belonged to any political party, while 25 per cent belonged to NGOs in both groups (Table 2).

The regional journalists did not differ from the capital's journalists as regards job satisfaction. The three main reasons were related to the creative component of their profession, the possibility for self-realisation and recognition for their work (readers' gratitude towards journalists) (Table 3). In Yekaterinburg, dissatisfaction came from poor-quality work and a lack of reaction from their audience, as well as routine and repetitive work. In Petrozavodsk, the main reasons for dissatisfaction for a third of online and old media journalists were lack of freedom and pressure exerted by media owners, working without results (i.e., the futility of their materials – noted amongst the old media respondents), bad editorial management and routine (old media and online), low pay (online), the internal editorial climate in the medium (old media) and ethical problems (online media). However, the overwhelming majority in both cities wanted to stay in the profession, amongst online respondents in Petrozavodsk this number dropped to about 50 per cent (Table 5).

Petrozavodsk often mentioned their colleagues as examples of professionals, federal television journalists were rarely mentioned. They had similar views on professionalism, with the capital's journalists listing technical competences, including the ability to use new technologies, high levels of education and ethical conduct (Table 6). Among the most unprofessional qualities inherent in current journalism were incompetence, ignorance of the subject matter, venality, and the desire for self-expression by profiting from human tragedy.

Social media have become a daily attribute of the profession and of the everyday life of journalists. In Yekaterinburg, all respondents had positive views about social media and used them in their work – in this respect there was no significant difference between new and old media practitioners. The difference was in how and what social media they used. As pointed out by the respondents: '*Vkontakte – for personal communication, Facebook – for work.*' Some respondents approached social media not as sources of information, but as a 'playground' for promoting their media outlets and publications. In Petrozavodsk, one in two online journalists was critical, noting the prevalence of false information on the Internet. Domestic VKontakte was the most popular in online and offline media, since this was their main target audience. Both groups used YouTube, stating that the emergence of new technologies and their impact on the journalistic profession is linked to the increasing role of video information and the general trend of reducing texts (Table 4).

Regional journalists concurred with journalists from the capital in their perceptions of the main functions of journalism, namely to 'provide news', 'enlighten' and 'entertain'. In Yekaterinburg, only the old media journalists mentioned the function of 'helping people', which implied concrete assistance from the journalist in a real-life situation. In Petrozavodsk, the majority considered shaping public opinion to be an important task (Table 7).

The most important role of a journalist was that of 'providing information'. Other normative roles were prioritised differently, depending on the type of media and the city: education, helping people, offering analyses, and entertainment (Table 8). When asked to assess what roles journalists play in reality, in Yekaterinburg the majority (80%) answered that journalists inform, help people (40%) and entertain (40%). There was no difference between the two groups. In Petrozavodsk the majority agreed that journalists inform. In the old media, they also noted the roles of entertainer, propagandist, educator and advisor to people; in the new media half criticised the new role of a journalist arranging a PR campaign in the media, or using people's problems for his/her own profit.

In both cities, journalists linked future changes in journalism to the Internet. In Yekaterinburg, old media journalists predicted that journalism will move to the web (Internet-based newspapers and TV). Online journalists believed greater speed and increased access to even more information would affect the work of journalists, who would become more versatile as professionals. In Petrozavodsk, in the old media, the

wanted greater democracy in their country, although some differences in what is necessary for the full functioning of journalism were noted (depending on the city and the type of media). With regard to the Internet and media regulation, online journalists were more opposed to government interference than reporters from traditional media were. Many respondents moved from traditional to online media, because they no longer wanted to work under tacit political censorship.

How can we explain this homogeneity of journalists in the new and old media, regardless of their place of residence? What is the 'new' in the new news media? Journalists themselves did not see striking differences between themselves and colleagues, but there are three possible interpretations: the first two are concerned with journalists' mobility; the third with the technology of labour – all three factors have led to a blurring of the lines between online and offline journalism.

The first explanation concerns journalists' job(s): the majority (although this varies by city) combine their main job (being a member of staff) with a second job as a market freelancer, and do not differentiate for whom to work – old media, new media or both. Each journalist's employment history is unique and stems from his/her professional biography. For example, some who work in online media continued to write articles for the old media institutions where they worked before; some from the traditional media produced articles for new media; some combined their position as a staff member of a local media institution (both groups) with providing freelance services to the federal media in Moscow.

Having a second job is not only common among journalists, but also among other specialists such as physicians, teachers and scientists, where it became a generally accepted norm in the post-Soviet economy in cities. In journalism, the second job emerged as a strategy for survival during the 1990s (a period of transition from a state-planned to a market economy), when journalists earned low salaries or media houses were unable to pay salaries, with delays in salary pay-outs lasting from a few months to one or two years. Journalists needed to find additional earnings to survive, and used their free time to earn money where they could: working in post offices, shops or schools. In the economically successful 2000s, journalists began to receive stable and good salaries, but kept their second jobs, thus mutating from following a survival strategy into a strategy of self-realisation, gaining social capital and extra earnings. Today's journalists, as distinct from those of the 1990s, find the additional earnings in their professional sphere in the media market, but also in PR and advertising agencies. A second job can bring substantial income on top of an official salary and can help to advance an individual's career.

The second reason why journalists may not differentiate between working in online or offline media is associated with mobility in the profession (Pasti 2014). Surprisingly, every one of them, regardless of age, had rich experience in both forms of media. The interviews revealed that young journalists enter the profession by already beginning to contribute to various media during the first years of their

2011/12 was less harsh; they were thinking in terms of what could be done by the opposition to make protests more efficient.

Today we encounter fewer journalists who wish to be controlled by the state. As demonstrated by this study, journalists want freedom for their profession, emphasising especially the need to be responsible towards their readers. But the past decade has seen a reversal in trends related to the growing role of the state in journalism and other professions. In response, journalists, in their quest for political independence for their profession, look for islands of freedom by going to the Internet and creating new media there.

The prestige of the media in the views of both groups was not associated with the type of media (traditional or online, which cannot even be registered as media), but with the reputation of the media outlet, its popularity or the media 'brand'. For journalists, the formal institutionalisation of the media was not as important, because it is outdated and does not match their ambitions and new values in exercising their profession, namely 1) freedom of creativity, knowledge and communication; 2) direct contact with the audience as newsmakers and experts, but also as their target audience; and 3) their natural accountability to their readers through quality work and quality relationships with the audience. This tension between the old media (dominated by yesterday's methods and fears, i.e., (in)direct state control, funding and propaganda, rather than public interest) and new, independent online media, is seen as the future logic of journalistic development in Russia, where new media and journalists are looking forward, not backward.

CONCLUSION

Russian journalists from both new and old media earned above-average salaries. Most were satisfied with the opportunities for creativity and self-expression in the profession, but also with the feedback from the audience and their gratitude for the journalists' work. No major differences were found in their professional and political orientations. Journalists valued independence and freedom in the profession, and extolled the role of the Internet and new technologies in making their work easier and faster, while expanding their possibilities. They were almost unanimous in their view of the three main functions of journalism, namely to inform, enlighten and entertain. Their perceptions of professionalism were surprisingly similar, and were based on the skills of writing and using communications technologies, being generally erudite, and showing scholarly and ethical conduct. They saw no difference between themselves and their colleagues, except in two respects – speed as an attribute of the new online media, and quality journalism as an attribute of the old media. The differences between the capital and regional cities were in terms of economics (wages and purchasing power), media markets and the job markets for

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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St. Petersburg: (N=49) 13 old + 12 new media, among them 7 JS	<i>Nevskoe Vremya</i> <i>Komsomol'skaya</i> <i>Pravda</i> <i>RBK</i> <i>Gorod 812</i> <i>Ekspert Severo-</i> <i>Zapad</i> <i>Darja</i>	Radio Zenit Radio Baltika Radio Svoboda Radio Rossia TV-5 th Channel LOT TV Sankt-Peterburg TV	Peterburgskii dnevnik Rbc.ru Fontanka.ru Firstnews.ru Lenizdat.ru Karpovka.net Bumaga.ru Zaks.ru Obshestvennyi control Dozhdj internet TV Politgramota.ru <i>V kypce</i>
Yekaterinburg: (N=24) 6 old + 6 new media, among them 2 JS	<i>Oblastnaya gazeta</i> <i>Biznes i zhiznj</i> <i>Ekspert Urala</i>	Ekho Moskvy– Yekaterinburg 4 th Channel Studia 41	Ura.ru Znak.com EAN Novyi region Just media Internet TV Malina
Petrozavodsk: (N=23) 6 old + 6 new media, among them 2 JS	<i>Karelia</i> <i>Moi Petrozavodsk</i> <i>TVR Panorama</i>	Radio/GTRK Karelia Television/ GTRK Karelia Nika TV Sampo TV	Respublika Karelia Internet zhurnal Litsei politika.karelia.ru Vesti Karelii Stolitsa na Onego Vedomosti Karelii

Table 3: The three most important reasons for journalists' job satisfaction

	Reasons		
Moscow: old media	Creative work and new knowledge	Communication with people	Effectiveness of materials and thanks from audience
new media	Creative work and working process	Awareness of well-done work	Feedback from audience, 'likes' of users
St. Petersburg: old media	Creative work and self-realisation	Thanks and feedback from audience and interaction with them	Materials of high quality
new media	Thanks and feedback from audience and interaction with them	Creative work and self-realisation	Respect and acknowledgement from colleagues
Yekaterinburg: old media	Creative work and self-realisation	Thanks and feedback from audience and interaction with them	New knowledge and new people
new media	Creative work and self-realisation	Thanks and feedback from audience and interaction with them	Effectiveness of materials and new knowledge, people
Petrozavodsk: old media	Thanks and feedback from audience and interaction with them	Materials of high quality	Creative work and self-realisation
new media	Creative work and self-realisation	Materials of high quality	Thanks and feedback from audience and interaction with them

Table 5: Professional orientation in numbers of journalists and percentages (in brackets)

City	Moscow		St Petersburg		Yekaterinburg		Petrozavodsk		All	
Media/journalists	old: 24	new: 24	old: 26	new: 23	old: 12	new: 12	old: 12	new: 11	old	new
To stay in the profession	3(13)	23(96)	18(69)	16(61)	11(91)	11(91)	11(92)	6(55)	43(58)	54(77)
Journalists should not cover subjects that play into the hands of our country's enemies, yes	3(13)	2(8)	4(15)	2(8)	4(33)	2(16)	1(8)	1(9)	12(16)	6(9)
Sometimes it is necessary to block access to the Internet, no, in no event	15(63)	21(88)	4(15)	12(48)	9(75)	7(58)	2(17)	2(18)	30(41)	40(57)
Control of political issues, no	14(58)	21(88)	17(66)	16(61)	7(58)	5(42)	2(17)	5(45)	41(55)	46(65)
Control of entertainment in media, no	4(17)	19(79)	9(34)	12(52)	9(75)	6(50)	7(58)	4(36)	29(39)	40(58)
Approach to corruption in journalism, negative	16(67)	17(71)	13(50)	7(30)	7(58)	2(16)	3(25)	7(64)	39(53)	35(47)
Produced corrupt articles past 12 months	4(17)	1(4)	3(11)	4(18)	4(33)	8(63)	3(25)	5(45)	14(19)	19(25)
Rating journalism education, negative	12(50)	15(63)	8(31)	5(21)	8(66)	7(58)	2(16)	10(90)	30(41)	38(51)
Attitude to protest in your city/country, positive	13(54)	20(83)	9(35)	11(48)	4(33)	2(16)	4(33)	5(45)	30(41)	38(51)

Table 7: The three most important functions which journalism should pursue

	Functions		
Moscow: old media	Provide information	Educate and Enlighten	Entertain
new media	Provide information	Educate and Enlighten	Entertain
St. Petersburg: old media	Provide information	Enlighten	Entertain
new media	Provide information	Entertain	Make audience think
Yekaterinburg media: old media	Provide information	Entertain	Promote objectivity
new media	Provide information	Enlighten	Educate
Petrozavodsk: old media	Provide information	Entertain	Form opinions
new media	Provide information	Entertain	Form opinions

Table 8: The three most important roles which journalists should perform

	Roles		
Moscow: old media	Report news	Enlighten	Entertain
new media	Report news	To provide communication between society and power, to be moderator	Enlighten
St. Petersburg: old media	Report news	Enlighten	Help people
new media	Report news	Provide analysis	Entertain
Yekaterinburg: old media	Report news	Enlighten	Help people
new media	Report news	Provide analysis	Teach
Petrozavodsk: old media	Report news	Report objectively	Entertain
new media	Report news	Enlighten	Help people

Table 10: The three most important needs for journalism in Russia to perform its functions

	Needs		
Moscow: old media	Have more democracy	Socialism	Developed and civilised society
new media	Have more democracy	Liberal values	Deliberative society with developed culture of mutual respect
St. Petersburg: old media	Ensure media and economic independence	Nothing to change	Greater democracy
new media	Greater democracy	Ensure media and economic independence	
Yekaterinburg: old media	Greater democracy	Russia with its problems is ideal country	Nothing to change
new media	Russia with its problems is ideal country	Ensure media and economic independence	Have more democracy
Petrozavodsk: old media	Greater democracy	Nothing to change	Ensure media and economic independence
new media	Greater democracy	Nothing to change	Ensure media and economic independence