



RUSSIAN MASS MEDIA AND CHANGING VALUES

Edited by Arja Rosenholm, Kaarle Nordenstreng
and Elena Trubina

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Introduction

*Arja Rosenholm, Kaarle Nordenstreng
and Elena Trubina*

This volume includes analyses that emerged during co-operation between two Finnish-Russian scholarly teams, located at the University of Tampere and their Russian counterpart projects at the State University of Moscow and the University of Ural in Ekaterinburg. Each team had a record of earlier projects with joint publications (Nordenstreng *et al.* 2002; Litovskaia *et al.* 2008). The research reported in the present volume was funded both by the Academy of Finland and its special programme 'Russia in Flux' during the period 2005–8, and by the Russian Fund for Humanitarian Sciences.

This volume gives a multifaceted picture of the complex process taking place in the contemporary Russian media and popular culture, inseparable from the changes in society. The authors, from a variety of fields of study, analyse latest developments in the Russian mass media, adopting different perspectives and methodological approaches that help to reveal the complex processes at work. The multiplicity of perspectives and approaches includes surveys, interviews and cultural studies-oriented readings, as well as various sources of material such as major Russian newspapers and lifestyle magazines cultivating a special Russian flavour of 'glamour' for the new consumer culture.

Overall, the volume focuses on the structural and cultural changes taking place in the Russian media industry and the political and economic spheres of the Russian media landscape. Some chapters, especially those in Parts Two and Three, using a more cultural studies viewpoint, suggest that within the media and popular culture and inseparable from social and cultural processes, changes have a decisive impact on how the identities associated with these social changes are re-formulated. Thus, the study of 'glamour' and lifestyle magazines is relevant, inviting us to consider various cultural products of entertainment and how they construct new identities and 'imagined communities', lifestyles, etc. This link – we contend – should not be underestimated or seen as isolated from the political, but rather inextricably linked with politics as 'one of the constitutive parts of culture and [...] itself a subject to culturological analysis and justification', as Epstein (1995: 284–5) argues.

While following the changes taking place in the Russian media and society in the last few years, the chapters raise questions and topics exemplifying the ambiguity of the historical situation, namely, how the post-socialist transformations

and the global media market offer readers a new kind of pluralism combined with a fragmentation of knowledge, norms and values. This requires of the individual reader new skills and media literacy in order to navigate the plethora of fragmented messages, new genres and media formats. Beyond the audience, journalists, too, are concerned over the new situation, some articles showing the professional ethos and responsibility of journalism as a field of challenge. In the markedly individualised situation that characterises Russian social and cultural life today, the reader is offered innumerable options and alternatives, but simultaneously, this freedom also involves a conflict originating in the new technologies of control and normalisation inseparable from the new market.

What the chapters also bring out is that the Russian media are far from being homogeneous, and that the mass media are – not unlike the ‘Western’ media – a powerful, albeit not primary, social agent appealing to readers of different social strata in developing different social, political and cultural interests and classifications of the habitual capital. The chapters illustrate how the issue of widening social inequalities in society goes hand in hand with new forms of classification and division throughout the cultural and media field. In this differentiating function the media re-produce new audiences according to class, gender and lifestyle.

As a field of study the mass media can provide us with a profound knowledge of Russian society and culture, especially if we aim – as is the ambition of this volume – to draw a picture of reality that challenges binary paradigms by listening to people’s collective voices and popular attitudes ranging from grass-roots level to beyond the political authorities (Borenstein 2008: 3).

The book is structured in three parts that highlight the contemporary Russian media from different angles.

Part one: Mapping the media landscape

This section provides a structural contextualisation to the rest of the volume by presenting a map of the media industries and their consumption in contemporary Russia, with a separate look at the changing profession of the journalist.

Elena Vartanova and Sergei Smirnov focus on the economic structures of the media industry. They demonstrate, first of all, the impressive size and diversity of the current industry in terms of numbers and their growth rate, especially for advertising, which, during the first decade of the new millennium, has reached the level of the Western industrial countries (typically 1 per cent of the gross domestic product). Actually Russia has become the 10th-largest media market in the world (Pankin 2010). Ownership of this industry is divided between governmentally controlled state capital and privately controlled commercial capital, the latter comprising both domestic and foreign ownership. The trend in the 2000s has been a decrease in commercial capital and a relative increase of state capital as the basis for media enterprises, notably through mixed forms of ownership. This trend has been accompanied by a concentration of the media industry, with three main players in the arena: a state enterprise (VGTRK) operating in TV, radio and the Internet; a mixed conglomerate (Gazprom-Media) running TV, radio, press,

cinema and advertising agencies; and a purely commercial structure (Prof-Media) in TV, radio, press, cinema and the internet. The Russian media system is also characterised by a trend towards regional agencies in co-ordination with the central players. Regionalisation and convergence of different media, including the Internet, are key aspects of the dynamically developing system.

This chapter is based on the situation until 2008. However, in 2009, it became obvious that the media market in Russia had significantly suffered from the economic crisis – the global crisis, which was particularly felt in countries of ‘transition economy’ such as Russia. The Russian media as a whole lost about one third of their income, mostly because of reduction in advertising revenues. Media and radio suffered most, while television found itself in a more advantageous position while the on-line sector had turned out to be the safest. However, the structure of the media market remained more or less unchanged: the key players did not leave the market and, in spite of the uneasy economic situation, chose not to give up their prospective media projects. Accordingly, this chapter duly represents the contemporary structure of the Russian media industry.

Jukka Pietiläinen, Irina Fomicheva and Ludmila Resnianskaia offer basic data on the use and consumption of different media in light of recent research. They show with national survey data (over 2,000 interviews throughout Russia in 2007) how television continues to be the most important medium among the Russian people at large. Practically every Russian is a regular TV viewer, whereas two-thirds of the population read newspapers and about half listen to the radio. Newspaper readership is in decline, whereas the electronic media and magazines are gaining in following. High exposure figures do not guarantee great appreciation: trust in them is on the decline. As the authors summarise, the Russian media today are typically ‘tolerated rather than liked’. No doubt this is related to the fact that the stereotype media have changed over the past two decades from advocates for democratic change to soft instruments in the power struggle among the political and business elites, not far removed from their role during the Soviet era.

Svetlana Pasti summarises case studies on how journalists, particularly those of the younger generation, view their profession amid changing media structures and political conditions. She begins with a paradox in journalism in contemporary Russia: the profession is particularly popular as measured by the large numbers of young people applying for places in journalism schools, but journalism is one of the least trusted professions in the eyes of the general public. Commercialism, with entertainment and public relations, has occupied more and more ground as opposed to quality journalism, replacing its critical function in society by what is understood to be a ‘polit.PR contract’ between media and government. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 journalists in St. Petersburg in 2005, Pasti demonstrates how the younger generation of journalists is no longer inspired by the public interest but rather by self-interest. Nonetheless, there are differences, such as types of professionals whom the author calls ‘mercenaries’ (in government-oriented media), ‘artists’ (in commercial-popular media) and ‘experts’ (in quality media). Two-thirds of those interviewed said that they did not produce corrupt materials or hidden advertising, although most of them admitted that these practices

do indeed exist among journalists. Moreover, practically all associated corruption with professionalism, thus legitimising such doubtful practices. As one respondent put it: 'A journalist is not from another planet, he takes bribes just like a doctor and a pedagogue'. Under these circumstances the old Soviet journalists are viewed by the young with greater respect than ten years ago, when the younger generation distanced themselves sharply from the recent past. Such discoveries give rise to paradoxes and reflections, but show nevertheless how the profession is domesticated by the industry and the market with all its political implications. Yet, despite generally gloomy prospects for the future, Pasti offers a brighter perspective in counting on those outsiders who are not integrated into the present system and who one day could unite and fight for the profession.

These three chapters remind us of the drastic change that the Russian media system has undergone during the past two decades. As summarised by Elena Vartanova:

today the market-driven media, increasingly dependent on new information technologies, take into account interests of advertisers and audiences more than ever. The structure of national and regional/local media markets is being increasingly shaped by wants and needs of these players in the media market, and this process seems to minimize the traditional impact of politics on Russian media performance and activities.

(Vartanova 2009: 283)

However, the change is complex and fraught with contradictions, as is Russian society at large. Accordingly, the contemporary media landscape also reveals 'a replacement of information with opinions, self-censorship and the large role of the state in the public space' (ibid.: 297).

The changing Russian media landscape is dominated by the 'old' media – print (newspapers and magazines) and electronic (radio and television), as well as the 'cultural' media of books, records and films. However, like other countries, Russia is experiencing an expansion of 'new' media based on video, cable and Internet technologies. Today Russians – especially young Russians – are playing the same kind of video games, listening to music with the same MP3 portable devices and interacting with the same kind of 'social media' as their Western counterparts. Most of these new media applications are not merely imported copies but genuinely adapted to Russia by the use of Russian language. For example, Russian blogging already has its own institutional history (Dragileva 2009).

This notwithstanding, the new media do not yet dominate the media field except in relatively small metropolitan elite circles. For the majority of the population it is the traditional media that continue to constitute the media environment. This is also the case in general in most Western industrialised countries, and especially in Russia, where most of the population resides outside the metropolitan centres of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, etc. Internet access has undoubtedly burgeoned, attracting ever more advertising even during the recession years

of 2008–9, and this while the rest of the media has experienced a decrease in volume as well as in advertising revenue. Nevertheless, the Internet in late 2009 regularly reached some 40 million Russians out of a population of 143 million – about a quarter.

Russian media professionals continue discussing the digital revolution, which is taking place in journalism. One of the difficulties involved is that many business models, which used to work well in journalism for decades now, collapsed everywhere. However, given the current rapid growth in the number of the social network users and, in general, increasing popularity of opportunities that the Web 2.0 offers in Russia, most journalists understand that it is better to embrace the change brought along by the convergence of off-line and on-line media than to try to avoid it.

Part two: Biopolitics of the media

The four chapters in this section address the physical and psychological health of Russian citizens, their well-being and personal growth. Of special interest is the question of how the consumers of the Russian media, of newspapers, special magazines and popular literature are expected to construct their understanding of welfare policies, of crises such as the ‘health crisis’ and the ‘demographic crisis’, raised and widely discussed due to the National Projects (2006–7) announced by the Russian government in 2005 and 2006, advocating positive programmes to overcome the problems of transition.

The point of departure for the chapter by **Arja Rosenholm** and **Irina Savkina** is the speech delivered by the former president, Vladimir Putin, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2006. This topic was the ‘crisis’ in the demographic situation in the country, the main focus being childcare policies, which were to stimulate population growth, and in particular to encourage having a second child. The speech, especially the exhortation to ‘have children’, was vividly and broadly commented on in the Russian mass media, both the newspapers and the Internet. That the speech was so much quoted motivates the main question of *how* it was quoted and the way in which the media negotiated themselves into competing political positions. The authors are interested in the rhetorical practices of the media discourse. Accordingly, they explore how the Russian mass media reacted to the speech, and what kind of a speech was re-constructed by the media discourse. Of special interest is how the implications of gender and nation are involved in other current discourses, and what kinds of positions are offered to the reader in the public discourse, who will be addressed and with what kind of rhetoric?

Marina Bondarik’s chapter focuses on the Priority National Project ‘Health’, which was by far the largest of the four projects announced by the government in 2005 and 2006. Bondarik examines how the federal health policy was being addressed in the most widely circulated newspapers. She inquires as to what were the dominant cultural and political manifestations, as well as what differences prevailed among interests related to the development of the Russian healthcare system

as expressed by the newspapers reporting on the National Project? Bondarik's analysis of the mass media as the main source from which people learn about health issues is significant in that there are very few studies available on how the post-Soviet media have presented health matters. Consequently, the study contributes to new knowledge regarding health communication.

The chapter by **Ilkka Pietilä** is devoted to the question of how the Russian edition of *Men's Health* magazine, while combining topics of lifestyle, gender and health issues, constructs its male readership by re-formulating ideal masculine characteristics in the context of a 'health crisis', and especially of what is called 'stressful life'. Pietilä is interested in the assumptions made concerning the new Russian middle-class and upper-class male readers, the main focus being on how the discourse on stress, as the only permanent health-related topic in the magazine, is conceptualised in the reader's social and cultural environment, his particular context of the masculine self. Pietilä finds that stress is a 'prism through which several and different kinds of issues are projected onto the public screen'. Accordingly, stress is more an element of the young, urban professional's *habitus*, making the model reader, than an element to be considered in social relations. Social references, writes Pietilä, particularly those addressing the topic of stress, are strikingly vague and trivial, but, as he puts it, do not contradict the genre of a lifestyle magazine, being less oriented towards social problems than focusing on the individual.

Gender and lifestyle are also the keywords for **Suvi Salmenniemi**, who looks at the contemporary 'self-help literature' as part of the mass media. The main focus is on two famous authors, N. Pravdina and V. Malakhov, whose advice books belong to this popular self-help genre assumed to wield important cultural power in re-defining the gendered ideals, values and lifestyles prevailing in society. Self-help literature is particularly popular in Russia today, but is still, according to Salmenniemi, an unexplored terrain in academic research. For this reason, Salmenniemi's chapter will give us important information concerning 'technologies of the self', i.e. how do individuals in contemporary Russian everyday life work on their bodies, souls and conduct, and how are representations of gender (re-)produced and offered as individual ideals? The chapter deals with the questions of why this genre is so popular today, what kind of advice is given to strengthen personal growth, how gender and sexuality are signified in this literature and in what contexts, and how they operate within the discourse on individual happiness and harmony as important elements by which the ideal subject – happy and healthy – will be depicted?

The common methodological approach to the media adopted in these different chapters shows how the modern media are seen as part of the operating principle of what Michel Foucault has called bio-power and bio-politics (Foucault 1998: 102). The media's rationality is shaped not only through the media's role as a mediator of information and meanings repeating cultural rituals, or as an arena of public debate, but also, and perhaps even more strongly, different media are seen to emerge as technologies of power that generate, adapt, cultivate and control life. They actually reveal life by bringing it into the area of transparency and of

knowledge. Instead of being secret and 'private', life has been made visible and audible; accordingly, an object for public observation, control and normalisation.

The chapters quite clearly show how the media, as one of the central technologies of bio-power, are present in people's everyday lives, in multiple ways capturing the social body that is newly re-produced along the lines of the ideals, values and patterns of the new post-socialist consumer culture. Scholars do not pinpoint bodies and sexuality by chance in the focus of their articles: social reality is made visible in the bodies, in gestures and appearance, with how symbolical meanings are articulated by bodies being the very intersectional point and object of bio-power. It is the aim of the demographic discourse, health reforms and various lifestyle discourses to guide and manipulate individuals through their bodies. This takes place not only overtly, but also discretely, imbuing the individual with a desire for a healthy and happy lifestyle. It is to be represented by 'normal' bodies, which follow the hetero-normative ideology of dual gender patterns, by that of a new self-made (business)man with a healthy, self-reliant, independent and virile body, which learns to master 'stressful' moments as symbolic signs of the new efficient lifestyle, and by that of a female individual whose body is the very battleground between medicalised, religious and nationally idealised imagery. If the male body and lifestyle, as the chapters claim, still seems to be defined along the lines of the public and without any of the caring obligations or rights in the private domain quite explicit in demographic discourse, women, as the audience, are addressed with a view to being persuaded into the roles of mothers, forming the core of the Russian family. Whereas men totally fail to play the role of father in the future family unity, the Russian female body is challenged by various and contradictory needs; both in the roles of maternal caregiver and as a career woman independent, although not inseparable, from the family, as Salmenniemi takes the advice books to imply.

The object of control is a new individual who – surprisingly not very different from *Homo Sovieticus* – is to be taken over by society to be normalised, now, however, through a process of differentiation into classes and gender, by national categories, age and professional status. Individuals themselves are expected to enjoy the mastering of various technologies of self; they are offered discourses on how to master one's life, being healthy and harmonious, being simultaneously themselves re-produced as the objects of the very discourses that the media run for them bottom-up. In view of this mode of working, of bio-power, it is important to study the contemporary Russian media as the central technologies that reproduce the object of their discourses. The mass media, in close connection with popular culture, have assumed a core role in providing readers with tools to work on their bodies, souls, conduct and ways of being. For there is no longer any single or dominant discourse giving the Russian reader clear-cut answers, nor one single elite culture to pass judgement on what is 'right' or 'wrong', it is the media and popular culture that assume the status of mentor (Barker 1999: 30). They offer the individual various, often ambiguous, eclectic and quite contradictory patterns of life, yet, or perhaps because of this, they are so well-liked; one can pick out any advice that seems to suit one's own lifestyle.

The advice the cultural entrepreneurs give the public may often sound authoritative and dictatorial. For instance, 'They will follow whatever we say' is the slogan of the popular *Afisha* magazine (Moscow's equivalent of *TimeOut*). Rhetorically, authoritativeness expresses itself in the ease with which the word 'right' figures in the reviews, as in the 'right length of a blouse', or the 'right place for a girl to be seen at'. Their position as experts in the community of 'right shoppers' is thus sustained by phenomena already described in the 1950s by the American anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner, who emphasised that striving for the 'right car' or the 'right area to live in' comprises important expression of one's status in the community (Warner *et al.* 1949: 23). However, by virtue of being involved in innovative activities, the trend-setters are free from any association with authoritarian pressure. In this sense, our argument comes closer to the insights of the American philosopher Barbara Hernstein Smith regarding that certain inevitability with which the conflict takes place between, on the one hand, conservative 'practices of the relevant community' and, on the other, 'destabilizing practices' of those 'who stand to gain from a reclassification, circulation, and redistribution of commodities and cultural goods and, thereby, of social power – including the profit and power to be had just from *mediating* their circulation' (Smith 1988: 131). These 'new cultural intermediaries', as Pierre Bourdieu calls them, help consumers to traverse the confusing realm of goods and services, strive to improve their taste and, surely, translate the producers' need into the consumer market. The significance, and even prestige, that their activities achieve have to do with lifestyle as the major constituent in a new understanding of culture.

It is enough to take even a brief, passing look at the crowd in central Moscow to be struck by the variety of appearances, from 'respectable' to bohemian, from low-key to flamboyantly ostentatious, from unassertive to overtly kitschy. The social and cultural differences in the patterns of consumption are there but, rather than being related directly to one's class or status, they express innovative forms of personal and group identity, new kinds of social experiences. Describing the Americans' stylistic preoccupations, James Twitchell has pointed out that 'Your lifestyle is not related to what you do for a living but to what you buy [...]. No one wants to be middle class, for instance. You want to be cool, hip, with it, with the "in" crowd, instead' (Twitchell 2000: 288–9). With the only reservation being that, apparently, for many Russians, to define themselves as belonging to the middle-class comprises an important component of 'coolness' or 'chic', this observation explains the growing popularity of the expertise the above-mentioned cultural entrepreneurs offer – through consulting, specialised editions and general interest magazines. One is increasingly valued not on the basis of one's consumption per se, but on how cleverly and adeptly one does it.

Consumer appetites, those which began to build up under socialism and remained ever-unfulfilled, have led to rather intimate consumer attitudes towards things that are perceived as not just goods capable of satisfying basic needs but as everything one can have dreamt of aesthetically. Middle-class consumption styles have been absorbed and imitated through fashion magazines, advertising and the very