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# The Global Journalist in the 21st Century

Edited by

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## 21 Russian Journalists and Their Profession

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Russian journalism has seen many changes in the post-Soviet era. Beginning in the 1990s, with their newfound political freedoms media outlets celebrated in triumph after the collapse of communism and continued what began during *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the late 1980s. These unprecedented developments led to the journalism job market opening to anyone who wished to enter. New media laws adopted by the Russian Federation's reformist government freed news outlets from state control and made it possible for market-based media to emerge.

However, by the turn of the millennium, these positive reforms were partially reversed by several changes that impinged on those initial freedoms. A depressed economy and falling living standards reduced the buying power of Russians along with their information demand to a basic minimum. Readership of most papers and magazines declined, with their roles taken over by free televised programming and the Internet. In most cases, outlets had to seek financial support either from wealthy groups looking to use media to promote business interests, or from the state.

Within the past decade, the political freedoms of Russian media have gradually diminished in the face of increasing centralization of authority and state regulation (Nordenstreng & Pietiläinen 2010; Zassoursky 2004). Government authorities introduced their own media, created mixed-ownership alliances with commercial capital, and bought journalistic services by contract to ensure positive coverage. As a result, journalism leaned toward pro-state service in collaboration with market forces. The state and big business shared a strong media presence by combining their political and commercial interests of social control and profit. The result was a drift by Russian media toward an "etatist" ideology.

Although modern Russian journalism has transformed from being a state job (Soviet era) to a market freelance position (post-Soviet era), it is mostly unchanged in its political subordination. This paradox of market freedom and political non-freedom is a consequence of "guided democracy" or "simulation democracy" in which, as Dmitry Furman (2010: 11) explains, "democratic institutions and rules of law play a role of (fake) veneer, camouflage to hide the authoritarian system." This guided democracy prevails with the backing of a national consensus that became commonly approved after the social trauma of the 1990s—a social contract of stability and economic prosperity in exchange for political freedoms. By the end of 2010, half of Russia's population was disappointed with the market reforms, but conceded they should continue in order to strengthen the state's role in the economy and provide social security for the population (Levada Centre 2010a).

The fact that Russian media today directly or indirectly are in the hands of the government or government-controlled entities, negatively affects both the development of the market and the quality of its journalism. Nearly 80% of the press consists of non-market publications that are affiliated closely with financial-industrial groups and partially serve as a cloak for business, or state-owned organizations with financing from regional and local budgets. This is true even for

St. Petersburg, the second and so-called European capital of Russia. Among the 900 publications issued there, only 150 covered their expenses in business terms. The remaining 750 relied on various subsidies from the state, corporations, and solvent clients (Massmedia 2009: 269–272).

When journalists are forced to operate under such conditions, they cannot meet the public needs and lose its trust. Erosion of credibility is evident in the media's slide in public opinion from Russia's fourth-most important social institution in 2001 and 2005 to eighth in 2010. Meanwhile, the president, government, financial institutions, and presidential administration retained the top positions. Political parties, intelligentsia, and trade unions have remained the most unimportant institutions throughout the 2000s (Levinson 2010). According to a recent survey by the Levada Centre (2010b), half of the Russian public thinks that contemporary news media are propaganda tools, and 66% of Russians say that government authorities or big business control the media.

Amid this financial chaos and struggle for credibility, the state is urging the media to adopt new technologies and promote the idea of "modernization." Journalists are asked to aid the growth of new communication technologies and become the "spearhead of modernization" (Medvedev 2009). In today's Russia, journalists must play conflicting roles while being placed in difficult positions, hence the need to study them and their profession.

This chapter uses data from a national survey of 800 Russian journalists in 2008 to explore who they are, how they operate, and how they perceive the current conflicted conditions of state political control and the welcoming neo-liberal approach of the market economy.

## The Media in Russia

Russia's media market, ranked 10th largest in the world by economic indicators (Pankin 2010), operates at the intersection of state and business interests. In the past decade, Russian media have grown into a fashionable industry of entertainment, information, and advertising. Its rapid development has been triggered by societal changes, particularly increased consumption when incomes began to grow and public interest drifted from politics to private life.

The national media register Reestr SMI ([www.reestrsmi.info](http://www.reestrsmi.info)) reported in 2010 that there were 66,032 print and electronic mass media outlets. This included 5,254 television stations, 3,769 radio stations, 28,449 newspapers, 21,572 magazines, 1,378 digests, and 5,610 other media. The sheer amount and diversity are amazing when compared to Soviet media of the mid-1980s, when Gorbachev began his political reform of *glasnost* and *perestroika* with five Central Radio services and eight Central Television services (Ovsepyan 1996).

Television remains the only really national mass medium and the most popular: 85% of the population watches TV every day with about 60% watching to keep track of events and relax (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communication of the Russian Federation [FARMC] 2010: 50). People do not have to pay to watch. Major national TV channels are transmitted from Moscow via terrestrial networks and satellites. The state operates the All-Russian State Television and Radio Company (VGTRK) including six television channels and more than 80 regional television and radio stations (GTRK). Another important player, Gazprom Media, owns the NTV and TNT channels. It is an affiliate of the state-commercial mixed owned Gazprom Company, which helps the state informally control private TV channels.

Radio is second in popularity. About half of the population listens to it at least once a week, and 77% of listeners prefer music (FARMC 2010). Radio comprises national networks and local radio stations. Two major national channels belong to the state (VGTRK): Radio Rossia, available for 66% of the population, and Mayak (55%).

Print journalism is third: 61% of the population read traditional newspapers, and 37% read magazines at least once a week. One-fifth of Russians do not read newspapers, and one-third do not read magazines. Among readers, 63% prefer information and analysis, and 32% of readers choose glossy entertainment magazines.

Finally, 39% of the population uses the Internet, and most users are young. Although the Internet is Russia's fastest-growing media segment, experts predict full national penetration only by 2040. In the global ranking of new information technology development for 2009, Russia ranked 74th among 134 countries, alongside Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, and the Dominican Republic (FARMC 2010: 52). There is a big gap in Internet development (from 32% to 600%) between the urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg and the regions. The Russian language sector RuNet has grown rapidly. In 2009, it had 3,957 media sites (Rumetrika 2010). Mostly, users prefer news about sports, accidents, and social events.

The economic crisis of 2008 brought big losses among media. Almost a third of Russian journalists lost their jobs, and wages were reduced or frozen. The advertising market fell by more than 25% according to data from ZenithOptimedia, compared to more than 10.2% worldwide (FARMC 2010: 60–61). The crisis reduced consumer activity, which adversely affected the press—especially expensive glossy magazines, business, and advertising publications. People turned to cheaper periodicals and free press. Other changes included the closure of hundreds of unprofitable publications nationwide; revised structures, approaches, and methods of doing business; the training of new personnel; regular monitoring; and more attention to consumers than advertisers.

The crisis contributed to corporate mergers and takeovers with the trend of further market monopolization and redistribution in favor of leaders. As a whole, the Russian media market consists of 50 national media companies and about 100 inter-regional or regional media companies (FARMC 2010). Among them are three national leaders: VGTRK, the state company; Gazprom-Media, the state-commercial mixed-ownership company; and Prof-Media, a commercial company. The main trend of the last decade is the decrease of the commercial capital share and proportional increase of state capital and mixed (state and commercial) capital shares.

Lack of reliable statistics remains a problem as “no government agency today possesses exhaustive statistical data on the condition and dynamic of the national media market as a whole” (Vartanova & Smirnov 2010: 21). That is a result of the lack of transparency of Russia's economy and the media market in particular. Over-stated circulations of newspapers and magazines are common, along with falsified ratings of broadcasting channels, a wide disparity between registered media and issued media, and confusion over who really owns Russia's media.

## Previous Studies

The first sociological studies of Soviet editorial offices appeared in the early 1920s with the aim of obtaining information on the social characteristics of post-revolutionary journalists. The Bolshevik party tried to dramatically increase the number of proletarian journalists who were party members (Svitich 1973). In 1929, a large-scale survey sampled 5,000 journalists at 374 editorial offices (Gus 1930). It found an increased number of journalists from working-class backgrounds. At first, labor specialization was studied, with researchers defining the following categories: literary, editorial, mass (worker-peasant correspondents and bureau of investigations), and printing.

During Khrushchev's thaw in the 1960s, sociologists gained more opportunities to study media, and new research on journalism and journalistic personalities appeared in Leningrad (Kuzin 1968) and Novosibirsk (Parfenov 1969). In 1968, a study headed by Grushin (Grushin & Onikov 1980)



in the southern city of Taganrog explored information flow and public opinion in a midsized industrial city. Based on in-depth interviews, the findings showed that journalists mostly were interested in forming public opinion, but not expressing it (Shiryaeva 1969). From 1969 to 1972, the journalism faculty at Moscow State University studied local press (*rayonnaya*). Party officials, readers, and journalists were interviewed and a content analysis of newspapers was conducted. The study confirmed that journalists, like party leaders, saw newspapers' primary task as helping the party develop industry and collective farming goals (*Rayonnaya gazeta* 1977). These findings were confirmed in surveys between 1983 and 1986 in five regions with a sample of 700 journalists, publishers' representatives, and the audience (Svitich 1986).

Research at the end of the 1980s found changes in journalistic orientations that were related to Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. For example, a 1988–1989 study on the multilingual press in Kirgizia (Tishin, Svitich, Tarasov, & Akulov 1990) found that Soviet journalists tried to better meet the needs of a wider audience, especially ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, government propaganda and limited topics that failed to account for ethnic minorities' interests dominated most Soviet journalists' minds. For the first time, this study also collected statistical data about the economic conditions of Soviet media and their employees.

By the early 1990s, dramatic political changes in the country and its journalism became obvious. A 1990 survey by Central Television and All-U.S.S.R. Radio journalists revealed the readiness of Soviet journalists for outlets to be economically independent and have more professional contact with foreign colleagues (Svitich & Shiryaeva 2007).

Economic factors and decentralization that occurred during the Soviet Union's final years gradually reoriented audiences to the regional press. A study of the regional press in 1991 and 1992 (Svitich & Shiryaeva 1994) found that most journalists (60%) felt fairly independent in their work. This was not too surprising, given the end of censorship and party control brought about by new media laws in 1991 (Richter 2002). Yet these newfound freedoms did not safeguard against new problems that emerged in the transitional period, such as excessive bias and political engagement of the press, vague concepts of newspapers, and economic dependence on new owners.

The first Russian–American comparative study of journalists occurred in 1991. The Russian survey included 1,000 journalists representing 34 national media outlets and 99 local media outlets in 10 geographic regions (Svitich, Shiryaeva, & Kolesnik 1995). It revealed similarities in the socio-demographic characteristics of journalists and their professional motivations, along with some differences. Russian journalists, for example, rated the creative character of their profession higher, whereas Americans mostly viewed journalism as an informational service. For Russian journalists, 1991 was a peak of unlimited freedom. Most had almost complete freedom to choose topics, and their work saw less editing by superiors. By contrast, American journalists described their working conditions as being more regulated. Yet both groups considered informing audiences quickly as the media's most important function. While this was nothing new for American journalists, it represented a radical reorientation for Russians.

The second Russian–U.S. project examined 610 journalists, again in 10 geographic regions (Zassoursky, Kolesnik, Svitich, & Shiryaeva 1997). It explored perceptions of controversial political and ethical activities within newsrooms. The study found that Russian journalists were oriented more toward regulation to address ethically complex problems, while American journalists preferred self-regulation and internal corporate ethical norms.

By the mid-1990s, the Russian press experienced successful journalistic reforms without censorship and ideological pressures. This was characterized by a diversity of media founders and an increased variety of publications and content. Yet surveys in 1994 and 1995 (Dzyaloshin,

1996; Glasnost Defense Foundation [GDF] 1995) revealed serious economic problems, new forms of restrictions by local authorities and political groups, difficulties with information access, and a decline in professionalism. As a result, the early "euphoria" among professional journalists was slowly replaced by a greater degree of pessimism. Sociological centers and schools in St. Petersburg, Minsk, Kiev, Ljvov, Vladivostok, Rostov, Ekaterinburg, and other cities accumulated much knowledge and expertise in this area of research (Koltsova 2001; Korkonosenko 1997; Lozovsky 2001; Pasti 2007).

## Method

The survey featured in this chapter was carried out as part of the "Media in a Changing Russia" project financed by the Academy of Finland (2006–2008) headed by Kaarle Nordenstreng. Data were collected in two stages. The first incorporated cases from the All-Russian Congress of Journalists organized by the Russian Union of Journalists in September 2008. Of the 620 journalists who attended the meeting, 260 participated in the survey. The second consisted of a nationwide survey of 536 journalists carried out in October and November of 2008 by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The study's preparatory stage made it obvious that there was very limited information available from which to draw a random sample of Russian journalists. Official statistics cite figures for the entire community of media workers without reference to journalists as a distinct group. Available data on professional organizations such as the Union of Journalists reflected a membership that covered only about 20% of the entire community. Since primary data were lacking, the sample was spread across Russia to reach big-city journalists as well as those in smaller cities. The regional sample was drawn from 36 cities in three categories: large cities with 1 million or more people (319 respondents), mid-sized cities with 200,000 to 999,999 people (359 respondents), and small cities with fewer than 200,000 people (118 respondents). These cities represented all of Russia's six socio-economic zones (*okrug*) together with the metropolitan areas of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Previous surveys of Russian journalists showed that a regular home-based interview might not always be possible. So interviewers were instructed to use any opportunity for an interview and seek breaks in journalists' schedules to accomplish the task. Interviews also had to be discreet, as some sensitive questions were involved. Journalists were asked to reveal their views on topics such as the level of editorial control, plagiarism, colleagues' illegal commercial activities, and censorship. The questionnaire's design was based on prior international research (Weaver 1998; Weaver & Wilhoit 1996; Wu, Weaver, & Johnson 1996).

The precondition of anonymity demanded that questionnaires had to be self-administered. However, the interviewers monitored the distribution of the questionnaires, checked them for omissions, and collected them after completion. If the respondents found it more convenient to meet in a public place such as a café, restaurant, or park, interviewers were asked to do face-to-face interviews.

Overall, 317 questionnaires were self-administered, 46 were based on personal interviews, 82 were telephone-based, and 91 were done through locally administered e-mail. For e-mail, respondents were first reached by telephone, agreed to participate in the study, gave their e-mail address, and received and returned the questionnaire online. To check data reliability, each questionnaire included a special request for respondents to be contacted later for verification purposes. This method produced few irregularities: seven cases were excluded because the respondent could not

be reached for verification. In the end, 536 cases from the regular survey were merged with 260 cases from the study's first stage. Altogether, the data set includes interviews with 796 Russian journalists.

## Findings

### *Demographic Background*

Results are broken down by city size (large, mid-sized, or small), generation of journalists (Soviet: 1991 and earlier; transitional: 1992–1999; or post-Soviet: 2000 and later), and media type.

In the Soviet Union, journalism was an elite career. It was common for the political and economic elite to provide their children with an education and an opportunity to seek employment in the media. So it is not surprising that among journalists from large cities, more than one-third come from managerial families. In mid-sized cities, the number drops to about one-fourth, and in small cities it slips further to about one-fifth. While Russian journalists from large and mid-sized cities often have parents who are professionals, this was only the case for about 4% of journalists in this survey.

Table 21.1 shows that few journalists hail from the working class. Despite “affirmative action” for workers’ sons and daughters during the Soviet era, only 16% of large-city journalists had such backgrounds. Apparently, working-class sons and daughters had better chances in smaller cities where they accounted for about half of all journalists.

In the last 20 years, significant changes have taken place in the social background of Russian journalists. For this analysis, journalists were split into generational groups depending on when they entered the profession. The first generation began prior to 1992, the second generation entered between 1992 and 1999, and the third generation began work in 2000 or later. While younger journalists tend to come from families of professionals, Table 21.2 shows that the proportion of journalists from managerial families did not change significantly through the generations. Yet journalists whose parents were professionals (not journalists) increased dramatically among those who entered the profession after 1992.

At present, 41% of Russian journalists are members of a journalist union. But there is a huge generation gap among the ranks. While about three-quarters of those who entered the profession

Table 21.1 Parents' Job by City Size (in %)

	<i>Large city</i> ( <i>&lt;1 million</i> )	<i>Midsized city</i> ( <i>200,000–999,000</i> )	<i>Small city</i> ( <i>&gt;200,000</i> )	<i>All Journalists</i>
Top manager	8.4	7.2	4.3	7.2
Middle manager	25.3	18.2	17.2	20.8
Supervisor	3.4	6.1	4.3	4.7
Journalist or editor	4.4	4.3	0.9	3.8
Other professional	27.3	28.8	11.2	25.5
Clerk	8.8	8.6	9.5	8.8
Urban worker	12.1	17.9	27.6	17.1
Rural worker	4.0	5.2	20.7	7.1
Other	6.4	3.7	4.3	4.9

21.2 Social Background of Journalists by Generation (in %)

	<i>Soviet 1991 or earlier</i>	<i>Transitional 1992–1999</i>	<i>Post-Soviet 2000 or later</i>	<i>All Journalists</i>
Top manager	7.4	6.3	8.4	7.4
Middle manager	22.3	20.4	19.5	20.7
Supervisor	5.5	6.3	3.1	4.9
Journalist or editor	3.1	4.2	3.8	3.7
Other professional	18.4	25.0	33.2	25.6
Clerk	10.2	8.8	7.6	8.8
Urban worker	19.5	19.6	12.2	17.0
Rural worker	10.2	5.0	5.3	6.9
Other	3.5	4.6	6.9	5.0
Females	50.2	61.5	67.4	59.7
Second job	42.3	47.8	47.1	44.3
Union membership	75.6	33.1	16.7	40.8
Journalistic education	50.5	37.1	44.1	43.1

before 1992 are union members, membership drops significantly for those who entered between 1992 and 1999 (33%) and those who did so afterward (17%).

The typical Russian journalist is female (60%), has a college degree (90%), and tends to be middle-aged (41 years). The dominance of women in Russian journalism seems to be generational. While women are about equally represented among journalists who entered the profession during the Soviet era (1991 or earlier), those who entered in the transitional generation (1992–1999) increases to about 62%, and then jumps to 67% in the post-communist generation (2000 or later).

As Table 21.3 shows, the percentage of female journalists is especially high in news agencies (75%), press services (68%), and weekly newspapers (66%). While females represent the majority of Russian news workers, almost half the journalists at daily newspapers (46%), radio stations (44%), and online media (45%) are male.

Table 21.3 Proportion of Male and Female Journalists by News Medium (in %)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
News Agency	25.0	75.0
Press Service	32.0	68.0
Weekly Newspaper	34.5	65.5
Television	40.0	60.0
Weekly Magazine	41.7	58.3
Other Newspapers	42.1	57.9
Monthly Magazine	43.0	57.0
Radio	43.8	56.3
Online Media	44.7	55.3
Daily Newspaper	45.5	54.5
Other Media	46.7	53.2

Other findings show that younger journalists are more likely to hold a journalism diploma. In the youngest group (30 and under), 54% have a journalism diploma or are close to getting such a degree (three years or more of study via a journalism department). In the oldest group, 42% hold such a degree, while the smallest number can be found in the 40 to 49 age group (31%).

This composition reflects the volatile character of the labor market in the early 1990s. The expansion and liberalization of the media attracted men and women with a higher education regardless of their major. Among them, there were some who previously could not enter the profession because of their social or ethnic background, and were dissatisfied with the income, career prospects, and creative opportunities of their former jobs (Pasti 2005). The present media prefers to employ graduates of journalism schools.

### *Income*

Although Russian journalists belong to a privileged professional group, many hold a second job. This tendency is especially high among journalists from large (51%) and mid-sized cities (47%), but even in small cities about one-third (30%) of the journalists have more than one job. In most cases, these moonlighters work in print media: 36% for weekly papers, 21% for daily papers, and 14% for monthlies. Broadcast journalists are much less likely to hold second jobs (12% among TV journalists and 6% among radio journalists).

The difference between print and electronic journalists in this respect is largely due to the number of relevant outlets and the level of competition between them. TV and radio stations insist upon exclusive commitments from journalists, while print media, which are often affiliated with larger corporations do not object to employees "honing" their talents with friendly publication. Another reason is that print journalists in Russia typically work alone and sell their materials as individual products as they see fit, whereas broadcast journalists collectively produce programs performing as co-authors of a common product.

Because Russian journalists often have several employers and income sources, assessing their total earnings is extremely difficult. Survey questions about income are especially problematic among freelancers, who often are paid in cash and might want to keep their actual income secret. A further complication is that some income could be illegal. Russian journalists are known, for example, to promote commercial products and services in exchange for cash, a practice that allows many to substantially boost their regular income.

To estimate the degree of corruption among Russian journalists, the survey asked journalists whether they had produced a news piece in return for extra payments during the past 12 months. While journalists were expected to be somewhat reluctant to answer this question, an astonishing 52% admitted to this practice. It seems to be especially prevalent among younger journalists. More than half who entered the profession after 1992 admitted to producing news for outside money (57% of those entering between 1992 and 1999, and 55% of those entering in 2000 or later), while only 44% of those who became journalists before 1991 made such an admission.

Journalists across all three generations were fairly reluctant to disapprove of such activity. Among those who entered the profession in 1991 or earlier, only 22% disapproved of producing paid-for news. Younger journalists were even less likely to disapprove (10% of those who began between 1992 and 1999, and 14% of those who began in 2000 or later)—a clear indication that ethics in Russian journalism has declined over time. Overall, such findings of fairly widespread corruption indicate that any estimates of declared income should be read with caution.

On average, a Russian journalist is better off in material terms than many other workers with a higher education: 38% had an income between R10,000 and R20,000 per month (US\$350–US\$700). This level of income is not impressive by Moscow standards, but income levels and prices vary dramatically throughout Russia. In 2008, the average income nationwide was about R9,000 per month (\$318), while in Moscow it was about R27,000 (US\$954). One quarter (25%) of all respondents enjoy a monthly income that ranges between R20,000 and R30,000 (US\$700–R3,350). However, a journalism career in Russia opens the possibility of an even higher income: 20% of the respondents have an income that exceeds R40,000 per month (US\$1,400). A small group of elite journalists can land jobs that bring more than R80,000 per month (US\$2,800). This group consists mainly of men (5%), with the proportion of highly paid women being much smaller (about 1%).

A Russian journalist's income depends largely on the type of media for which she or he works. Highly paid journalists (more than R40,000 a month) are most prevalent in TV (34%), news agencies (25%), and monthly magazines (28%) and less prevalent in daily papers (17%) and radio (13%). Higher income among TV journalists stems largely from the role they play in contemporary Russia. TV is increasingly treated by federal and local authorities as a tool to influence society and win support for their policies. Monthly journals carry privilege because of glossy magazines, which are the most prestigious segment of Russia's print media and the best vehicle for expensive advertisements.

*Job Satisfaction*

Most Russian journalists are fairly satisfied with most aspects of their jobs. As Table 21.4 shows, a clear majority of journalists are content with their independence to decide which stories to write (55%), their ability to help other people (64%), and the political orientation of the outlet for which they work (60%). Only about a third of Russian journalists are satisfied with their income (39%), their career opportunities (38%), their profession's political independence (37%), and extra privileges the job might offer (37%).

21.4 Job Satisfaction by Generation (% saying "fully" or "mostly satisfied")

<i>Reasons for satisfaction</i>	<i>Soviet 1991 or earlier</i>	<i>Transitional 1992–1999</i>	<i>Post-Soviet 2000 or later</i>	<i>All Journalists</i>
Opportunity to decide what to write	70.7	62.7	61.2	64.7
Opportunity to help people	65.3	63.5	64.9	64.2
Media's political line	60.9	61.4	58.3	60.1
Job security, social security	43.4	52.1	59.7	51.6
Opportunity for better qualifications	50.2	48.7	55.1	51.1
Opportunity to influence society	46.5	46.9	53.8	48.9
Opportunities for second job	44.8	48.0	52.8	48.4
Opportunities to grow in the post	39.8	40.9	45.5	42.1
Income	42.7	40.0	34.4	38.8
Opportunity for other career via journalism	38.6	35.8	39.0	37.7
Political independence of the profession	34.0	32.4	44.9	37.1
Extra privileges	30.5	35.9	43.9	36.7

There are also notable differences in job satisfaction between the older and younger generations. Younger journalists are more enthusiastic about moonlighting prospects and more likely to be satisfied with the profession's political independence. They also feel more secure than their older colleagues, and they are happier with career perspectives and extra privileges than the older journalists.

In general, the younger generation seems to be the happiest and the most optimistic that journalism will meet their expectations for self-realization, creativity, and wide communication.

### *Job Constraints and Censorship*

Journalists face limitations and constraints in most modern societies. In recent years, Russian journalists have faced growing government interference and instances of outright censorship. As Table 21.5 shows, threats to free speech in Russia are perceived to come from local authorities rather than the federal government—a view that seems most prevalent among Soviet-era Russian journalists (40.9%) and somewhat less so among the post-Soviet journalists (22.3%). About a quarter (23.9%) of these latter journalists also feels that significant constraints come from their editorial superiors, a concern that is shared among the post-Soviet generation as well (23.0%).

Ethics, on the other hand, seems primarily a concern among the older journalists. While about 18% of the Soviet-era and transition journalists consider ethics an important element in their profession, only 9% of the post-Soviet journalists share this sentiment. What these younger journalists consider more important than the older generations, however, are the effects of media specialization (21.5%) and advertisers (16.6%).

While censorship certainly has affected how Russian journalism is practiced it was somewhat surprising to see how much support there is for various forms of censorship. Only about one in 10 journalists (13%) thought “censorship is needed to select and ban harmful political content,” yet about one in four (25%) agreed that “journalists should be controlled by society,” and almost half (45%) said that “only editors should have the right to control content.”

Overall, most respondents reported a high degree of autonomy in their work and conceded that the depth of editing is related to the material. But it was not clear what kind of editing is applied in each case, whether political or stylistic.

Table 21.5 Journalistic Constraints by Generation (in %)

<i>Source of Constraints</i>	<i>Soviet 1991 or earlier</i>	<i>Transitional 1992–1999</i>	<i>Post-Soviet 2000 or later</i>	<i>All Journalists</i>
Local authorities	40.9	25.0	22.3	29.4
Superiors in the editorial office	23.9	21.7	23.0	23.0
Audience	20.1	19.3	18.9	19.4
Ethics of the profession	18.1	17.6	8.7	14.6
Political position of medium	16.2	11.1	14.0	13.7
Special audience of media	10.8	17.2	21.5	16.5
Influence of federal authorities	10.4	8.2	2.6	7.1
Advertisers	8.5	18.0	16.6	14.5
Owners	8.5	11.5	9.8	9.9
Opinions of colleagues	2.7	2.9	4.2	3.4
Other	4.6	5.7	1.5	3.9

One-fifth of the journalists said that they can pursue their ideas “all the time,” while 70% said they succeed in “most cases” and only about one in 10 journalists said that they are “not able to do what they want.”

However, a decline of journalistic autonomy was found concerning the selection of news, topics, and problems that required coverage. Only one-fifth of the journalists said they were “fully independent,” and one-third said they were “sometimes independent, sometimes not.” Many Russian journalists make such decisions “depending on the situation.”

Comparing these findings with the 1992 survey of Russian journalists (Svitich et al. 1995), one notices a decline in journalists’ autonomy. Freedom to select news, topics, and problems decreased from 60% in 1992 to 20% in 2008 among “fully independent” journalists. The ability to emphasize ideas journalists believe are important dropped from 54% in 1992 to 22% in 2008. Yet for staff journalists—who were somewhat independent—freedom to select news, topics, and problems requiring coverage increased from 5% in 1992 to 29% of journalists in 2008, while the ability to stress important journalistic ideas rose from 6% in 1992 to 29% by 2008. These findings indicate that contemporary Russian journalists have adapted to changing conditions and tailor their behavior according to circumstances. Their editorial autonomy during the last 16 years has significantly decreased, yet they survive with the new rules of the game.

#### Perceptions of Media Performance and Reporting Methods

Most Russian journalists believe their employers are pretty good at delivering information to their audiences. While 10% say they are confident that the media do “an excellent job,” 36% said they do “a good job,” and 46% indicated they do the job “well, though not without certain deficiencies.”

Journalists were asked who or what most affects their perception of what is newsworthy. As Table 21.6 shows, all age groups agree that professional judgment should be the chief determinant of news selection. Audiences were viewed as the third-best criterion, as some journalists believe readers and viewers have the right to guide what journalists cover. In particular, younger

Table 21.6 Acceptability of Influences on News Selection by Age (mean scores)

Age	Less than 30 years	30–39 Years	40–49 Years	50–59 Years	Total
Duration of work in the media	4.29	4.48	4.50	4.70	4.48
Professional skills, training	4.24	4.35	4.32	4.65	4.39
Audience, its preference	3.76	3.76	3.64	3.54	3.68
Other news sources	3.39	3.42	3.31	3.20	3.34
Internet	3.38	3.37	3.28	3.17	3.31
News agencies	3.45	3.38	3.20	3.10	3.30
Public opinion polls	3.29	3.34	3.08	3.34	3.28
Higher-ups	3.67	3.42	2.98	2.85	3.27
Colleagues	3.22	3.26	3.04	3.08	3.16
Competing media	3.12	2.93	2.73	2.69	2.89
Biggest players in the market	3.07	2.84	2.65	2.33	2.75
Friends, milieu	2.52	2.69	2.58	2.67	2.61

Note. Scores displayed are mean scores on the basis of a 5-point scale where “1” means the lowest possible acceptability and “5” means the highest level of acceptability.



Table 21.7 Reporting Methods by Generation (% saying "acceptable depending on circumstances")

<i>Reporting Methods</i>	<i>Soviet 1991 or earlier</i>	<i>Transitional 1992-1999</i>	<i>Post-Soviet 2000 or later</i>	<i>All Journalists</i>
Payment for confidential information	42.6	52.3	51.7	48.6
Use confidential business or government info	43.5	42.7	42.1	42.6
Claiming to be somebody else to get information	32.6	40.7	40.4	37.8
Break promise not to expose a source	7.3	7.3	11.3	8.7
Pressure unwilling sources	19.5	37.9	41.0	32.8
Use personal documents without permission	9.0	15.6	21.8	15.6
Getting employed to get inside information	51.9	51.8	45.7	49.5
Use hidden cameras and microphones	56.9	51.2	51.3	53.2
Use actors for recreation of events	34.4	43.8	38.0	38.7
Disclose names of criminals	22.2	25.0	15.4	20.5
Disclose names of rape victims	24.7	27.0	22.2	24.5
Publish facts about private life without permission	38.8	55.7	52.6	48.9

journalists were more sensitive to audience reaction and the role of bigger market players. Unlike older journalists, they more often treat their job as a business and readily admit that audience size equates to economic success. Guided by years of acquired skills and news judgment, older journalists are more inclined to rely on their own "gyrocompass" in gauging newsworthiness.

About half (53%) of Russian respondents believe that, depending on the situation, a journalist has the right to use hidden cameras or microphones without warning the interviewee, while 49% agree that disparaging personal information can be divulged without prior consultation (see Table 21.7). One-third of Russian journalists believe that interviewees can be pressured to disclose key information, while about one-quarter (21% and 25%) feel that names of detainees and the accused, respectively, can be made public before a trial (generally the names of defendants are not published before a trial opens). In other words, when information is the ultimate goal, Russian journalists generally hold that certain boundaries of ethics and decency may be disregarded.

## Conclusions

Like their country, Russian journalists are in the midst of a social and political transition. The values that are emerging seem to emphasize the need to survive in a highly competitive environment. The transition calls for a combination of mutually exclusive qualities: the ability to sustain group values, yet be an effective individual; the skill to be pragmatic and speak the language of the common good; the capacity to stay independent and adapt to the environment; and, most important, to sustain good relations with the ruling powers.

All of this separates the current form of Russian journalism from its predecessor. Soviet journalism was homogeneous, scrupulously administrated, and functioned as a well-oiled propagandist and social organization. Today, new roles are emerging from the contradictions under which Russian journalism has evolved.

On the one hand, Russian journalism is a difficult and often dangerous profession. The sad statistics of violence against journalists include more than 300 killed (Russian Union of Journalists

[RUJ] 2011). Mortality is high because the news media cover human rights and social protest in a place where local courts are not independent from the authorities. As a result, many people seek justice in editorial offices. The Glasnost Defense Foundation ([www.gdf.ru](http://www.gdf.ru)) regularly reports on violence against journalists and the numerous obstacles used to discourage their work. According to Reporters Without Borders (2010), Russia's press freedom is ranked 140 on a list of 178 countries.

On the other hand, the popularity of being a journalist has not declined, based on the growing number of journalism schools and large numbers of applicants, many from wealthy families. Young, well-educated, middle-class Russians seek media jobs because they provide opportunities for a fairly high income, along with the possibility of combining the main job with a second job in times of economic hardship (Pasti 2010). Being a journalist in Russia can bring influence and power, serve as a springboard for a political career, or can lead to fame, which can result in a higher social position or provide access to influential networks. Moreover, the technology used to produce modern media attracts young people, many of whom begin their careers in new forms of multi-media and online journalism.

Today, every third journalist in Russia belongs to the generation of news workers who started their careers in the 21st century. The profession has become younger. In 1992, every third journalist was under 35 years old. By 2008, every third journalist was under 30. However, this trend is true mostly for large cities, where journalists under 30 comprise 44% of the editorial staff. In small cities, they only account for 4% of the staff. Journalism-school graduates tend to stay in the cities where they have connections and easily find jobs in large media, public relations, and advertising markets. Small cities with under-developed media and advertising markets are unable to attract young people, so editorial offices there typically are occupied by older workers—including the local intelligentsia. Russian journalism also has become increasingly female. In the younger generation, more than two-thirds are women.

In the largest cities, most journalists hail from elite and middle-class families. In small cities, half of journalists have working-class backgrounds. In large cities, media supervisors prefer to hire newcomers with a journalism education, while in small cities only 10% have a professional education. As a result, urbanization has produced gaps in the professional structure of Russian journalism. This differs from the Soviet days, when state media were filled with young, educated journalists without regard to regions or localities.

Two-thirds of today's Russian journalists are satisfied with their profession, due mostly to editorial autonomy, the opportunity to help people, and their conformity with media politics. Satisfaction levels are especially high among young journalists because of the job's creative aspects, potential financial success, and job security.

Younger journalists are more pragmatic and apolitical than their older colleagues. They enjoy a job that brings them wide contacts and opportunities for earnings and self-expression. Older journalists are more likely to believe that journalism is not an ordinary job, but a service to the people. However, these generational differences fade against the pressures of doing their jobs, dealing with authorities (especially in the small cities), and market forces (especially in large cities). Such pressures place personal well-being and media survival as the foremost goals of professional success.

Most Russian journalists are loyal to the political line of their media, which usually does not conflict with their commercial and often illegal activity in the profession. A second job and corruption have become common among Russian journalists, although in the theory of the profession they are signs of a loss of professionalism. At the same time, political control and censorship remain the main constraints to journalistic work. Increasingly, there is a growing and dangerous

consensus in which journalism is viewed as a means of self-expression or the route to development of personal business, rather than as a public service. Given the satisfaction of most professionals with the current conditions under which they work, there is little reason to expect change.

One of the most intriguing questions concerning Russian journalism is how the impressive diversity of media outlets, their economic success, and the rise of new communication technologies will influence professional development, particularly when it comes to political independence, which is a part of Russia's overall modernization. Twenty-five years ago, Soviet journalists enthusiastically supported Gorbachev's policy of democratization. Freedom became a key value in political economy, journalism, and private life. These new freedoms favored two new types of transformative Soviet state journalism: politically independent journalism and commercial journalism.

Yet by 2010, an increasing imbalance that favored commercial journalism over politically independent journalism had become obvious. The former increasingly substitutes for the latter and gives an illusion of freedom among journalists—but it is a freedom of the market, not of journalism as a profession.

The quality of Russian journalism is declining, and its reputation in society has suffered. The head of the Russian Union of Journalists said that the present media produce “no more than 15%” of news content, with the rest outsourced to public relations and political technologies instead of journalists serving as watchdogs (Bogdanov 2010). Russia is ranked 136th—between Yemen and Chad—out of 150 countries in the World Audit of Democracy (2011). Its ranking has decreased for 13 years from 106th to 136th. Russia is ranked 130th in press freedom and 127th in corruption.

Yet Russian society has shown only a weak interest in improved performance from its news media. Problems such as rising prices, growing unemployment, and poverty have taken precedence over freedom of expression (Levada Centre 2010c). Values of private life and survival prevail over political values—including free speech. Russia's transition into a consumer society has led to a tendency toward the bestowal of prestige upon an occupation increasingly connected with profit without regard for professional respect. At least one survey suggests that the short-term future for journalism in Russia looks promising from a market demand perspective (Malahova 2007).

How does one explain the paradox between the deterioration of democracy that has eroded media freedom in Russia and the growing satisfaction of its journalists? In the post-Soviet era, journalists were dissatisfied with their profession—in particular its low salaries, lack of social guarantees, returning political pressures, new forms of corruption, and deteriorating journalism (GDF 1995; Pasti 2004). Journalists began to excuse their venal practices by claiming a need to survive. They believed that after they became richer and joined the middle class, they would begin to think about democracy, their profession, and ethics. But this has not happened. During the 2000s, when Russia's economy and its media changed for the better, journalistic salaries rose drastically. Yet having a second job as a means of survival became a privilege and opportunity for advancement. Journalists became well-to-do people with influential contacts in government and big business.

As a result, Russian journalists work and live within the confines of a liberal-oriented market, whereas the institutions of media and journalism remain locked under an authoritarian state. However, when individual freedom accelerates institutional freedom, it does not mean free-market professionals adhere to democratic values. The submissive status of their profession and its tolerance for corruption erodes journalistic principles. Many journalists had predicted that material well-being would guarantee professional democratization, but that has not been the case.

The future of Russian journalism will depend on whether there is a change in the minds and ethics of its professionals and in society as a whole. Although independent journalists and media

are not influential in Russia today, they still provide a “lifejacket” that safeguards the profession and offers hope for the possibility of true media freedom emerging in Russia.

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