

Web Technologies and Digital News Ecosystems: A Study of Russian Internet News Platforms (2008–2018)

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Abstract

Since Perestroika, Russian journalism has gone through a liberalization. However, the short lived apex of journalistic freedom that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s was followed by a setback in particular since Putin's accession to power in 2000. The situation for the freedom of the daily press has stagnated. Despite this, the findings based on qualitative text analysis of news articles in some of the most important Russian news sites, strongly indicate that during 2008–2018 readers of news sites were being addressed as active and knowledgeable citizens. The methods focussing on perspectivation and the use of sources, exploring what voices that are used to get messages through and how they are represented, are applied to four case studies casting light on the period. The findings imply that a number of Russian Internet outlets had strengthened their role as advocates of the Fourth Estate. The results further indicate a sharp distinction between news sites that are utilizing traditional Western journalistic devices, and news sites employing a traditional Russian/Soviet journalistic approach. Thus, the roles of the audiences as active citizens were to a certain extent strengthened.

Keywords: Citizen roles, discourse analysis, journalism roles, perspectivation, Russian news sites

Introduction

In the West, the concept of free media currently seems to be in a process of transformation. The role of the Fourth Estate originally was to comprise a watch-dog and source of information for the citizens vis-a-vis insitutionalized power, above all the state. Today, western media are increasingly cooperating with organs of state, big business, and other entities that are outside the reach of democratic control. In many polities, in particular leading broadcast media, make up state television outlets in tandem with governing parties.

The situation in the Russian media system has been

the focus of abundant research. At present, there is a considerable degree of interest in the propagandist role of Russian media outlets, such as RT and Sputnik, as well 'trolls' who are producing so called fake news both in Russia and abroad (Prier, 2017; Alsmadi & O'Brien, 2020). Today, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has radically changed the state of Russian media. The press and freedom of expression have been severely undercut (OECD Policy Responses 2022) and many papers and news sites have been temporarily restricted, and subject to other encroachments since. At the same time, the majority of Russians seem to be on board with the media's interpretations (Kolesnikov & Volkov, 2022).

However, it is crucial to continue focussing attention on the everyday flow of news and opinion journalism. The recurring – but shifting – elements of news discourse have an important function for citizens' perception of their places and roles in society. Through a close reading of Russian media discourse, we may ascertain what social roles and identities the news media assign to citizens as participants in politics and society at large. Citizens who gain information about the world are as an audience formed by participation and consumption of mediated communication – the specific uses of language construct certain social relations and identities (Dahlgren, 2018; Habermas, 1999).

A very limited number of studies have been carried out investigating the qualitative aspects of news output in Russia during the 2000s (Vltmer, 2000; von Seth, 2013). What happened in Russian media production during the ten year period, between 2008 and 2018, prior to the recent Ukraine war? Could the media be said to reflect the interests of the citizens? Analytical focus is Russian Internet news sites 2008–2018 that comprises the least controlled, and only growing, news medium during the period (Soldatov & Barayan, 2015). A qualitative reading of four case studies during the period comprises the empirical focus of the present study.

I start with presenting the historical perspectives on the Russian media versus state power. Then a discussion follows on the chosen theory and methods and the text samples. Thereafter a presentation of the findings, and then a discussion ensues. I will look at Internet news coverage of case studies that were widely covered, namely, the Georgian War of 2008; the parliamentary election of 2011; the Crimean Crisis of 2014, and the pension reform of 2018. The research question is: As to reported direct and indirect speech, what actors are allowed entrance to sites, and who are not? How is speech framed? The hypothesis of this study is that to a considerable extent, Russian news sites have fulfilled the role of the Fourth Estate. The four case studies are intended to produce implications to this statement.

Historical Perspectives

Perestroika and Glasnost: Loosening of Control and Rise of Media Freedom

In the Soviet Union mass communication was an instrument for the Communist Party to propagate policies (Siebert et al., 1963). Journalistic representations were to be in accordance with the Socialist perspective, with the implication that ‘truth’ in journalism had nothing to do with objectiveness (Hopkins, 1970). Instead, the press came to present an idealized view of society, showing how society ought to be (Oates, 2008).

Perestroika and Glasnost, the transformation of society that was introduced in 1985, changed the role of the media. Journalism started to address the needs and interests of the reading public (McNair, 1994). Journalists expressed personal opinions (Murray, 1994); timeliness of news items became more important as well as reporting on negative news (Schillinger & Porter, 1991); articles were audience-related and addressed the concerns of ordinary citizens (Voltmer, 2000, p. 494); and, articles critical of the authorities doubled (Roxburgh, 1987). Step by step, papers developed an independent relationship to major political actors, in particular the Communist Party. The positive developments for the Russian media culminated in the 1990 Media Law. The law stipulated the abolition of censorship; permission of private ownership of outlets and journalistic independence of editors/owners (Richter, 2001). All of this seemed to have ushered in a new era for Russian journalism.

The Russian Federation: Gradual Loss of Media Freedom

‘Shock therapy’ and the ensuing economic crisis that

set in after the dissolution of the Soviet state in 1991 resulted in a deep crisis for the media, in particular for the press. One in five dailies disappeared from the market, and circulation fell sharply. In 1998, overall circulation was only about 20% of circulation in 1990 (I. Zassurskii, 2001, p. 13).

During the first five years of the new democratized Russia, the political arena was characterized by turmoil. In the 1996 presidential election, all important media had taken a stand for the incumbent, President Yeltsin. The first decade post 1991 made the public associate the concepts of democracy, market economy and free press with economic and social hardships, as well as political chaos. Non – state media’s (NTV) coverage of the Chechen war (1994) led to strong antipathy by the authorities. The free press was being attacked. Official references to ‘permissive journalism’ were used as a pretext for legal measures intended to increase control over the media system (Cuilenburg & Wulff, 2000).

Furthermore, many thought it was simply irresponsible of the mass media to present information in a neutral way. In 2002, a survey indicated that relatively few Russians thought it was the task of the media to be objective in their reporting (White & Oates, 2003, p. 33). In fact, they apparently believed that biased reporting is appropriate (Smyth & Oates, 2015, p. 3). However, western scholars may have been prone to state too quickly that Russians wanted Soviet style journalism back. Today’s Russian newsmaking is a product of the 1990s oligarch capture and economic crisis, followed by new forms of authoritarianism (Schimpfössl & Yablokov, 2021, p. 2901). Moreover, self-censorship, which is a characteristic of Russian journalism (Bodrunova et al., 2021), depends on both political pressure and threats – but also on Russian modern-day journalists being in the making (Schimpfössl & Yablokov, 2021, p. 2900). Russian journalism is fragmented and driven by countervailing forces. As for the public, Russians have no experience of a free market and that it can regulate free speech; this might be a reason why they seemed to rely on the state to ensure it; and hence their preferences for a more ‘biased’ reporting.

Further, after Putin’s accession to power in 2000 a number of laws were introduced aimed at controlling the freedom of expression. The Law on Extremism of 2002 stipulates the right of any federal organ to close outlets if they believe media are ‘involved in extremist activities’ (Federal Law on the Prevention of Extremist Activities, 2002). Under ‘extremism’ falls a very broad range of content, including terrorism, violence – and criticism of the state: any political opposition to

the state government may be termed 'extremist'. Subsequently, the use of law enforcement procedures to bring about changes in ownership or orientation has become legion.

The Russian Internet

The traditional media have been subjected to harsh state regulation, which has severely contained their freedom of expression. Audience figures have been affected. Between 2010 and 2020, the television audience has diminished from 87% to 71%, and trust in television has diminished while trust in internet news sites has increased (Balakhonskaya 2020, p. 28). The Internet, on the other hand, is a steadily growing part of the public sphere in terms of audiences, or users (74% in 2017, 79% (World Factbook 2020).

However, the RuNet is also subjected to state control. Control is enacted by above all indirect regulation of online speech (Dunn, 2014) and transferring of media ownership (Lehtisaari & Wijermans, 2020, p. 3). Most outlets are controlled directly or indirectly by the government, through government corporations, or by regime-friendly businessmen. Russian journalists have not reported any direct Soviet time type of control, but a number of economic and legal measures, and threats (Martynov, 2018; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019). In 2008, Roskomnadzor was established, the purpose of which is to block or blacklist media, that are, allegedly, spreading unlawful materials. Roskomnadzor can also issue warnings to mass media about their content and deprive them of their licences – without court decision. Since the setting up of Roskomnadzor, state interference on the Net is more extensive. Also filtering is substantial and pervasive (Zittrain et al. 2017, p. 7). Blocked Internet sites have decidedly restricted the freedom of expression on the Net (Gainutdinov & Chikov, 2018). Since non-compliance with blocking notifications leads to liability, Roskomnadzor act as collateral censor. This problem is caused not only by vague legal definitions, for example, 'extremism', but also by the manoeuvre tactic applied by Roskomnadzor (Sivetc, 2020, p. 51, in Lehtisaari & Wijermans). A majority of content on the Net is regulated after publication and without court oversight, bringing the danger of politically motivated blocking. Since 2010, the RuNet is also controlled by 'digital vigilantes' 'reporting' on negative (unlawful) online content. The MSB (Youth Security Service) use 'citizen investigators' in cooperation with the police (Dance' et al., 2019). Persecution of citizens for sharing and liking content has also served to reinforce individuals' restraint on speaking out online (Lehtisaari & Wijermans, 2020, p. 6). In Russia, oppositional outlets such as Lenta.ru (Lenta.ru ceased

being an oppositional site in 2014, when its editorial staff, due to regime pressures, was exchanged by new personnel and became regime-friendly), Dozhd'.ru and Novaiagazeta.ru have been consistently blocked and attacked by the government on numerous occasions (Hutchings & Szostek, 2015, p. 184; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019, p. 1543). In sum, authorities can block access, prosecute and intimidate users and deflect attention from content on the Internet.

Russian Journalism: Differing Role Conceptions

According to a survey among contemporary Russian journalists, journalism often becomes a tool for propaganda in the hands of authorities and businesses (Kul'chitskaya, 2016, p. 125). Generally speaking, journalism students are not exposed to concepts of objective reporting (Obermayer, 2000) and journalism textbooks teach that news representations should not be 'solely based on truth' (Korkonosenko, 2004, p. 291). Moreover, Russian journalists believe that journalism 'should be assigned a 'higher cultural mission', rather than 'simply inform' (Kul'chitskaya, 2016, p. 126). In addition, today's Russian journalism research, as well as education, is based on Russian indigenous writings. Contemporary western research is utilized only to a very limited extent (Vyrkovsky & Smirnov, 2018). It appears that the current Russian journalist is assigned an 'instrumental' role, exclusive of 'free journalism'.

On the other hand, according to Azhgikhina (2007) journalism during Glasnost was primarily based on the traditions of Soviet journalism and was not concerned with western liberal journalism practices (Azhgikhina, 2007, p. 1250). Azhgikhina singles out the post-Soviet papers Kommersant and Novaiia gazeta stating that these papers ' [have] inherited ... the intellectual traditions of the best part of the Soviet press' (Azhgikhina, 2007, p. 1252). Was the liberalization of media discourse during Perestroika exclusively based on Soviet practices?

What is of more interest, is that in Russia there are a limited number of regime critical outlets, for example, N. gazeta, whose freedom of expression is under incessant attack by the state. Yet their activities, according to Slavtcheva-Petkova (2019), bear witness that there are journalists who 'practice the kind of ideal journalism western journalists today only pay lip service to – namely in the public interest with the aim of holding the powerful to account' (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019, p. 1543). Furthermore, other scholars find that online journalists still 'accumulate substantial popular discontent and foster cumulative formation towards authorities' (e.g. Bodrunova et al.,

2001) – attesting there are certain elements of vibrant post-Soviet public spheres. Thus, we may discern a difference as to journalism roles in Russia.

Research Overview

Comparatively little research has been dedicated to discourse analysis of Russian newspapers' role in the democratization process. While there have been important works on the politics of the Russian media – apart from those already mentioned – (e.g. works by Mickiewicz, 2000; Beumers et al., 2009; also works by Nordenstreng et al., 2001; Christians et al., 2009) the qualitative focus on press and online media text discourses exploring how democratic values are related to media output is limited. In recent decades, however, a few projects have focused on discourse studies in Russia. For example, Voltmer (2000) finds that *Izvestiia* was more audience oriented in 1988, since articles addressed the problems of ordinary citizens; but on the other hand, the range of topics in 1996 was significantly broadened (Voltmer, 2000, p. 494). On the basis of analysis of semantic roles, speech act and modality analysis, and rhetorical argumentation analysis, von Seth (2011, 2012, 2013) argues that 'a firm ground for citizen participation in Russia has been laid' in post-Soviet Russia (AUTHOR). Furthermore, a recent examination by Pasti et al. (2022), reveals that in 2017 in *Moskovskii komсомоlets* and *Rossiiskaia gazeta* half of the news in the papers used only one source. They emphasize that news had a 'preference for official sources' and were 'unbalanced and biased' (Pasti et al., 2022, p. 235). Pasti et al. also state that the 'watch-dog function' – 'monitoring those who wield political power, has failed to take root as a norm in the practice of national level journalism'. They hold out that this function was carried out only by minor 'niche media' (Pasti et al. 2022, p. 235).

Theory and Methods

The Russian Media System and How It May be Analyzed

The mechanisms of media control in modern-day Russia are different from the mainstream theories developed during the Cold War (see, e.g. Siebert et al., 1963). In an attempt to solving the normative-teleological problem of analyzing the Russian media system, Altschull (1995) removes the western normative-determinist framework by criticizing the key premise that Soviet and 'totalitarian media' were 'political' – whereas the western counterpart was 'above' politics, merely performing a neutral, critical role against institutionalized power (Altschull, 1995). In other words, media are not neutral; and they are not using neutral language.

Media language on the other hand offers interpretational patterns for the understanding of reality (Fairclough, 1995) affecting the development of institutions, and citizen perceptions (von Seth, 2011 in Klyukanov & Sinekopova,

2014, p. 901). Media are never apolitical – they are always affected by societal interests. In fact, media discourse serves to deliver a number of empirical entry points of analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse Analysis and Communicative Action. Media Use and Informed, Active Citizens. Discourse analysis sets out to reveal aspects of mediated language that are basically implicit with the aim of elucidating how reality is constructed and interpreted. Discourse is shaped by social structures, institutions and generally held norms and values. It is also constitutive, in that it helps to form all those dimensions of social structure which shape and constrain it (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Further, discourse analysis stipulates that any text be simultaneously representing reality, setting up identities, and structuring social relations. 'Representation' deals with the construction of knowledge and belief. 'Relations' is to do with how social relations are constructed in text. 'Identities' refers to the ways in which social self-perceptions are mobilized in discourse (Wodak & Forchtner, 2017).

The media in the public sphere are central to democracy. Serving as arenas for political dialogue, their treatment of matters of the day are vitally important for how the public perceive and participate in social life.

Identity is crucial in understanding civic agency. In order to participate as an active citizen it is necessary to regard oneself – and to be regarded – as a citizen (Clarke, 1996; Dahlgren, 2006). In the public sphere, citizens communicate in pursuit of their interests, which is done by discussion, or deliberation. Such interaction shapes individuals' identities and fosters values suitable for democracy (Dahlgren, 2018).

The construction of social identities feasible to democracy is largely a function of communicative activity in the public sphere (Habermas, 1999). 'Specific uses of language offer certain interpretational patterns for the understanding of reality, and also construct certain social relations and identities which are a precondition for the citizens' participation' (Habermas, 1988, p. 173). Language serves to implicitly position the participants, and linguistic elements appear as critical for the social formation of the citizen role (Dahlgren, 2006; Fairclough, 1992).

Journalistic texts are not ‘objective reflections of facts’. Formal choices are choices of meaning; one word rather than another, one grammatical construction rather than another. Where words are different, meaning will be different (Halliday, 1978). Journalistic texts constitute a specific meaning potential. Specific language causes audiences to make certain associations and inferential leaps, and not others. Thus, the aim is to describe which interpretations of social reality the sample texts are most likely to foster and what identities, that is citizen roles, they may give rise to.

Discourse Representation (Perspectivation), Framing, Style, Modality

Discourse Representation, Framing. ‘Strategies of perspectivation and discourse representation use specific means of reporting of various events and utterances’ (Wodak & Meyer, 2010, p. 29). People that are allowed to express themselves in news texts will shape messages. Certain actors categories may be allowed space in the columns while others are not. When only certain layers of society express their opinions democratic quality can be questioned. Moreover, actors may be identified or not, and a news article have a press voice and actor voices. In indirect speech, actors are referred to using various reporting verbs. Their utterances may be represented in ways that are adapted to fit the policies of the news media, and can in addition serve to promote or discredit certain categories of actors (Wodak, 2015).

Style. Linguistic style also has effects on readers. If an elevated high style is utilized, it serves in general terms to lessen the active role of readers. On the other hand, when a colloquial style is used readers engagement and encouragement for various different topics is stimulated (Fairclough, 1992, p. 160).

Modality. Finally, explicitly stated positions in texts on views and politics will influence readers’ attitudes on matters. In this way, the ‘freedom’ of readers’ interpretations of topics is directly affected by the explicit attitudes of a text, modality (Fairclough, 1992, p. 158). Claims can be objectively and subjectively asserted: ‘...It is a fact that...’, and ‘...I believe that...’. They can, in addition, be categorically or tentatively asserted: something ‘is’ so, and something ‘might be’ so. Modality is critical for the control of representations of opinion in article texts – are they challengeable or is the state of affairs decided once and for all? (Fairclough, 1992).

Thus, are only specific actor categories allowed entry into news articles, and are some excluded? When speech is reported, are report verbs neutral? Is there an identified press voice; and do press voices and actor voices agree on topics? Who is qualified to pass judgement, and who is not? The subject-matters will contribute to the audiences’ independent opinion formation if differing voices on topics are freely expressed.

Accordingly, the analysis of the sample texts strives to establish whether texts can be broadly classified as contributory to the development of informed and active citizens, even though we know that media texts are polysemic. Thus, we attempt to make interpretations about audiences, although we are not dealing with reception studies. Conclusions are made based on a linguistic classification of texts, not audiences.

Citizen Roles

The properties of the sample article texts have distinct implications for the audiences. I propose ideal typical identities, or, ‘citizen roles’, which are defined according to the communicative relationship that is implied through the specific modes of perspectivation, or discourse representation, that is performed and which serves to summarize the results of the text analyses. The specific citizen roles are classified accordingly: Critical reflection – low degree of manipulative rhetoric, that is, the communicative level that is striven for in a functioning public sphere. Functional reception – higher degree of manipulative rhetoric, but largely allowing relevant interpretation of issues. Instrumental repression – which denotes deceptive language that is directed at a passive and ignorant audience.

Text Samples: Article Text Classification

The sample has been selected from eight Russian language news sites: Vzgliad. ru; Rossiiskaia gazeta. ru; Zavtra. ru; Vesti. ru; Lenta. ru; Meduza. io; Kommersant. ru; and Novaiagazeta. ru. A new genre classification is proposed for analytical purposes. A study limiting itself to existing genre denominations would decrease the theoretical and methodological scope of the investigation. Thus, the analytical genre ‘information factual news article’ will encompass a broad range of existing news genres such as zametka; korrespondentsia and otchet (broadly the news article; a more detailed news article, and a more specialized news report). These articles are categorized as informatsionnye zhanry (information genres) (Tertychnyi, 2017).

The pragmatic criteria of this category of text is to

- report
- inform
- persuade

The linguistic criteria for this type article are narrating describing

From one point of view of a number of aspects on one, or several political, economic or social problems; and frequently going into great detail in the course of presentation. The examination covers 145 ‘information factual news articles’.

Text Samples: Purposes, Topics

The sample is aimed at, firstly, reflecting the broad pattern of political views existing in contemporary Russia. Secondly, the sources should exemplify some of the most often visited news sites. Thirdly, the goal has been to mix sources that only appear on the net with online sources that also are examples of national newspapers with high circulations.

The kind of approach that we are using has not been utilized by other research projects in the West. The period of study will also reflect ‘the latest’ developments in news sites before the Ukrainian war. Furthermore, the sample reflects a 10-year period which makes it possible to compare contents over a considerable time span. The sampled topics were chosen because of the high public salience and their potentially high political impact. The samples are also intended to mirror both domestic and foreign news.

The news sites under examination that exist on the Net are: Vesti. ru; Lenta. ru; Vzgliad. ru and Meduza. io. All aforementioned news sites are included on Statista’s (2021) listings of the ten most popular Russian news sites. Zavtra. ru; Novayagazeta. ru; Kommersant. ru and RG. ru are also newspapers. Lenta. ru is substituted by Meduza. io in the 2018 pension reform coverage as Lenta.ru completely changed its editorial team in 2014 and became more pro-regime. In sum, Vesti. ru, Vzgliad. ru, Zavtra. ru and RG. ru are considered broadly pro-government, whereas Lenta. ru, Meduza. ru, Kommersant. ru and Ng. ru are considered oppositional, or independent.

The sample articles reflect coverage of news reporting during 2008–2018. The article texts reflecting the Russo/ Georgian/Ossetian conflict of 2008 have been chosen accordingly: one week prior to the war breaking out on the ninth of August; and two weeks directly afterwards. All week days were selected. The parliamentary election of 2011: articles were picked

from election day; and two weeks afterwards. Selection days: Dec. 4, 5; 10, 12, 15 Dec. 2011. The referendum on the Crimea of 2014: articles were picked from the two weeks leading up to the referendum, on 16 March. Selection days: March 3, 4, 5, 6; 14, 15 16. The pension reform of 2018: the day of the announcement of the reform, and during the following week; then, one month after the announcement, during two weeks. All week days were selected. In ‘information factual articles’, analytical attention is put on framing, perspectivation devices and linguistic style.

Findings

Perspectivation. Information Factual News Articles

All materials can be broadly divided into either pro-regime or regime critical coverage. The assumption of the examination is therefore that a regime critical attitude is the basic criterion of manifoldness of opinion, and/or neutrality. The investigation shows proof of three ways of discursive representation, or three perspectives, in relation to regime policies. The first perspective is press voice that take up voices from society as a whole – experts, non-governmental organizations, private persons, and western sources; and at times representatives of the state organs and the governmental party, United Russia. On the basis of this, the press voice forms an independent opinion on the subject-matter, that is, the outlet’s own position regardless of the opinions of cited actors. The second perspective is press voice, taking up actors’ voices exclusively from federal organs, institutions and United Russia. In the 2008 Georgian case, it includes also Ossetians. The source then presents a message that is exclusively based on these voices. The third perspective comprises press voice, that includes voices from actors in society at large – experts, non-governmental organizations, other political parties than United Russia, private persons, and Western and Georgian sources; and at times also state organizations, institutions or United Russia. These voices form the message that is presented. The main divergence between these perspectives are the actors to whom they refer and on whom they base their messages (Figure 1).

In total there were 145 articles distributed on four case studies.

44 articles on the 2008 Georgian war: Vesti 8; Vzgliad 7; Zavtra 6; Rossiiskaia gazeta 5; Novaia gazeta 5; Lenta 7; Kommersant 6.

35 articles on the parliamentary election of 2011: Vesti 6; Vzgliad 5; Zavtra 3; Rossiiskaia gazeta 6; Novaia gazeta 6; Lenta 5; Kommersant 4.

31 articles on the 2014 Crimean crisis: Vesti 4;

Vzgliad 3; Zavtra 4; Rossiiskaia gazeta 5; Novaia gazeta 1; Kom- mersant 3; Lenta 3; Meduza 8.

35 articles on the pension 2018 reform: Vesti 5; Vzgliad

5; Zavtra 4; Rossiiskaia gazeta 6; Novaia gazeta 4; Kom- mersant 5; Meduza 6.

2008 Article Text Examples

First Perspective. (1). ---‘Cmastj nopdjw strao9 a takhf qrfestacjtfmj nfheuoarpeo9w prdaoijaxjk c tpn yjsmf FS j PPO c9raijmj piabpyfoopst: qrpjswpe>7jn j qrjicamj csfw uyastojkpc kpovmjkta qrfkratjt: pdpo.

FIRST PERSPECTIVE. PRESS VOICE	SECOND PERSPECTIVE. PRESS VOICE	THIRD PERSPECTIVE. PRESS VOICE
Differ from cited actors -comments, and is forming an independent opinion	Voices of representatives for federal organs/institutions, and United Russia. Only one opinion is mentioned. <i>Ossetians and Russians in the coverage of Georgian War.</i> These voices form the message	Voices representing society at large; non - governmental organizations, parties other than United Russia – but sometimes federal sources - are included - ; experts, private persons. <i>Georgians in the coverage of the Georgian War.</i> Frequently, more than one opinion is mentioned. These voices form the message.

Figure 1. Different Perspectives in News Discourse.

Peoakp cpqrps eahf of c tpn, ytp poj dptpc9 (jnj ytp poj npdut) sefmat.: ytpb9, qp nfo:zfk nfrf epbjt:s> qfrfnjrj>. A c tpn, ktp bueft kpotrpmjrpcat: ofqtrjioaou< rfsqubmjku, kpdea c9strfm9 stjwout. Fsmj <hopsftjoskijf j rpssjkskijf cpkska qrpepmhat tfsajt: druijoskijf qperaiefmfoj> s takjn hf usqfwpn, tp rfdjpo, pyfcjeop, skprp pkahts> qpe qpmo9n cpfoo9n kpotrpmfn Rpssjj’---

---‘The authorities in many countries and also represent- tives of international organizations, among them the EU and UN, took alarm at the events and requested all participants to the conflict to cease fire. However, the question is not to do with what they are prepared to do (or what they can do), or; in order at least to achieve an armistice. The question has to do with who is going to control the non-recognized republic when the fighting has ceased. If the South Ossetian and Russian troops continue to successfully push back the Georgian formations, then the region will obviously end up under the full control by the Russians’---

Various different voices and differing opinions

precede the excerpt. Here, the press voice takes up an independent position on the issue.

(Lenta.ru, 08.08.2008. Headline: of uefrhamjs:. The promise was broken).

Second Perspective. (2). ---‘Tan hf oawpejms>... dfofram Narat Kumawnftpc. ... Njouczfk opy:<,- sppb7jm Kumawnftpc, c ipof druijp psftjoskpdp kpovmjkta s druijoskpk stprpo9 qrjnfo>mps: t>hfmfp cpruhfoj. ... Peoakp oazj jstpyojkj c rpssjkskpn njopbrpo9 syjta<t, ytp druijoskjk batam:po - ;tp uhf of njrptcprtx9, a qperaiefmfoj cpruhfoo9w sjm Gruijj, kptpr9f c9qpmo><t c ipof kpovmjkta ofjicfstop kakjf vuokxjj. Of stpjt iab9cat: p tpn, ytp c sanpf trueopf crfn> jnfoop rpssjkskijf njrptcprx9 qrjofsmj ptopsjtfm:o9k njr oa ifnm< 5hopk Psftjj’---

---‘And there was also... General Marat Kulakhmetov... . The night that passed, Kulakhmetov said, in the Georgian – Ossetian conflict zone, the Georgian side used heavy armament... . Still, our sources from the Russian Ministry of Defence believe that the Georgian battalion is not a peace- keeping force, but a formation of the Georgian armed forces and is serving an unknown purpose in the conflict zone. You should not forget that under the most difficult conditions it was the Russian peace keeping forces that brought about a relative peace on the South Ossetian territory’---

A Russian military is indirectly quoted. Defence Ministry sources are represented indirectly.

2011 Article Text Sample

First Perspective. (4).---‘Fsmj jn ueamps: cbrpsjt: scpj b<mmftfoj, tp bpmff 2310 b<mmftfofk qpeao9w ia Fejou< Rpssj< c rakpof YprpzfcP-Nofcojkj >cm><ts> ofekstcjtjfm:o9nj. Skpm:kp yfmpcfk uyastcuft c qpepbo9w swfnaw qp csfk straof nphop tpm:kp epdae9cat:s>’.

‘If they succeeded in stuffing the ballot box, then more than 2310 ballots cast for United Russia in the region Khoroshevo-Mnevniki become invalid. You can only make guesses as to how many people have participated in similar schemes around the country’---

A number of voices precede the extract. Here, the press voice is taking an independent position on the matter.

(Lenta.ru, 04.12.2011. Headline: Karusfm: smpnamas:. The roundabout is broken).

Second Perspective. (5). ---‘Qpnp7ojk qrfijefota Rpssjj Arkaejk Ecprkpcjy ia>cjm... «of syjta< njtjodj muyzfk vprnpk c9rahfoj> draheaoskpk qpijxjj» (...) «Erui8>, ktp qpkeft oa njtjod, qphamksta, bfrfdjtf sfb>». Scpf ptopzfoj k qrpwpe>7jn qpsmf

c9bprpc... c9skaiam... qrfestacjtfm: Rpssjj qrj OATP Enjtrjk Rpdpijo. «Pt ;tjw stpmkopcfokj ojktf of c9draft krpnf cradpc Rpssjj (...) 6 pqasa<s: ia ieprpc:f csfw ktp... qpkeft oa spbraojf ;tjw qrpcpkatprpc»

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---‘Presidential aid Arkady Dvorkovitch announced:

...

“ I do not consider manifestations the best way for citizens to express their position (...). Friends, anyone who attends a demonstration – please, take care.”

Russia’s representative at NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, expressed his view on the events after the election. - “From these controversies noone but Russia’s enemies will gain. I fear for the health of those who... attend the meeting of these provocateurs.”---

Two high officials make statements that are directly quoted.

(Vzgliad.ru, 10.12.2011. Headline: Ecprkpcjy c9raijm scpf nofojf p njtjodaw. Dvorkovitch spoke his mind about meetings (i.e. demonstrations).

Third Perspective. (6). ---‘C efo: c9bprpc c Gpsuearstefoou< Eunu...jotfroft jieaojj... qrfe>cmfop pbcjofojf p tpn ytp jieaoj> iaojna<ts> ofiakpoopk adjtaxjfk.

«Psopcoa> qrftfoij> κ jieaoj<... spstjpt c tpn, ytp Gaifta.ru qubmjkuft jovprmaxj< p oaruzfoj>w Fejopk Rpssjj»... (...).

(Mwp Npskc9:) Gmaco9k rfeaktpr Amfksfk Cfofejktpc ia>cjm, ytp sakt qpecfrds> DDoS-atakan... .

Gmaca <rjejyfskpk smuhb9 JE Kpnnfrsaot:

«yfstop dpcpr>, > cppb7f of smuzam, ytpb9 y:f -tp ia>cmfojf qp qpcpeu DDoS-atak b9mp usqfzop rassmfepcaop». C opy: oa 3 efkabr> qpytj oa 12 yaspc buma iaefrhaoa jsqpmojtfmo9k ejrfktr «Gpmrsa» Mjnj> IIIjbaopca, a ff oputbuk b9m ji:> «em> qrpcfefoj> ;ksqftrji9’.

---‘On election day for the State Duma, Internet sites... were accused of carrying out illegal electioneering. “The main accusation is that Gazeta. ru publishes information on violations related to United Russia...”

The chief editor (of Ekho Moskvj), Aleksey Venediktov, informed that the site had been subjected to DDos attacks... .

The head of the legal department of the Kommersant says “To be honest; I haven’t heard that anyone’s complaint about DDos attacks has been successfully investigated.”

In the early hours of the third of December, the Executive Director of Golos, Lilia Shibanova was detained for 12 hours, and her laptop was seized “for expert control.”----

The represented voices in direct quotation belong to

independent media organizations.

(Kommersant.ru, 05.12.2008. Headline: Jotfroft of qustjmj oa c9bpr9. Internet was not allowed on the election).

2014 Text Examples

First Perspective. No examples.

Second Perspective. (7). ---‘Speft Vfefraxjj eam spdmasjf oa jsqpm:ipcaojf Cppruhfoo9w sjm Rpssjj oa tfrjtrpj Ukrajo9.

(...) Gmaca Kpnjtfta qp kpostjtuxjpoopnu iakpopeatfm:stcu Aoerfk Kmjas sspb7jm...

«Cjktpr boukpcjy mjoyop pbratjms> κ cfrwofk qamatf, j ;tp >cm>fts> ema oas epstatpyo9n psopcaojfn ytpb9 qpeefrhat: pbra7fojf Cmaejnjra Qutjoa...» (...).

Sfoatpr C>yfsmac IIItrpc: ...Spb9tj> ktptr9f qrpjswpe>t oa Ukrajof ;tp vjoam bpm:zpk rabpt9 ktptra> qrpcpejmas:... s uyastjfn jopstraoo9w dpsuearstc. «Ofnampcahou< rpm: s9dramj SIIIA»... . SIIIA... «cmphjmp nopdp efofd,ytpb9 spieat: taku< sjuaxj<. S erudpk stprpo9, Rpssj> csfdea iaojnama sefrhaoou< j cicfzfoou< qpjixj<»... . C tpn, ytp sfoatpr9 pepbr>t oa cofpyrfeopn iasfeaojj pbra7fojf dmac9 dpsuearstca spnofojj, qraktjyfskj of b9mp’.

---‘The Federation Council has approved the deployment of Russia’s armed forces on the territory of Ukraine.

...The head of the Committee for Constitutional Legislation Andrei Klishas said... “Viktor Yanukovitch personally turned to the Upper Chamber and that is enough ground to accept Vladimir Putin’s appeal...” (...).

Senator Viacheslav Shtirov (said) “...the events in Ukraine are the culmination of work involving... the participation of foreign states. The USA played an important role (he continues)... the USA... has invested heavily to create this situation. On the other hand, Russia has always adopted a restrained and carefully considered position.” There is practically no doubt that the senators will approve the appeal on the extraordinary session’.

Through a long quotation, the head of an official committee is referred. Others follow. A web of voices appear. Press voice concludes on the basis these citations.

(Rossiiskaia gazeta. ru, 03.03.2014. Sqastj r>epcpdp draheaojoa. Saving the ordinary citizen).

Third perspective. (8). ---‘Cfrdfk Macrpb8>sojm Ehpou Kfrj, ytp ioayjt Kr9n em> Rpssjj, op tpt of qrpojks>.

Qp smpcan Sfrdf> Macrpbca, em> Rpssjj «Kr9n ioayjt ofspjinfrjnp bpm:zf,yfn Vpmkmmfoe9 em> Cfmjpkbrjtaojj j Kpnpr9 em> Vraoxjj».

Ehpo Kfrj iacfrjm... ytp «SIIIA j njrpepf

spbb7fstcp of qrjioa<t rfium:tatpc rfvfrfoeuna c Kr9nu».

Phjeafts>, ytp sfdpeo> SIIA cofsut oa rassnptrfojf Spcfta bfspqasopstj PPO rfipm<xj< qrijjca<7u< dpsuearstca of qrjioacat: rfium:tatpc rfvfrfoeuna p sue:bfKr9na. Rpssj> hf, kak iacrjm «1» jstpyojk c NJE RV, ;tu rfipm<xj< iabmpkjruf».---

---‘Sergei Lavrov explained to John Kerry what the Crimea means to Russia – but he failed to grasp the point. According to Sergei Lavrov, to Russia “the Crimea means incomparably more than the Falklands to Great Britain and to the Comores to France.” John Kerry declared that... “the U.S. and the world community will not acknowledge the results of the referendum in Crimea.” It is expected that the U.S. will propose to the UN Security Council a resolution calling for states not to approve the results of the referendum on the fate of the Crimea. Russia will, however, as a source in the Foreign Department told “B (Kommersant)»,” veto this resolution’.

Two high officials, of the U.S. and the Russian Federation, are directly quoted. An anonymous source is indirectly quoted.

(Kommersant.ru, 15.03.2014. Headline: J raipzmjs: kak c yfropn nprf kprabmj. And they disappeared like ships on the Black Sea)

2018 Text Examples

First Perspective. (9). ---‘Vaktyfk

Kprptkp. C 1990-f bump of tak strazop; c m<bpn smuyaf, sracojcat: tf efnprdravjyfskijf qrbmf9 s Cfmjkkp ptyfstcfoopk cpkopk - qrpstp ofcfrop. Qrbmf9 qfosjpoopk sjstfn9 sc>iao9 of tpm:kp s efnprdravjyfskijnj qrbmf9nanj’.

---‘Fact check.

In short. In the 1990s it was not that bad; in any case, comparing the demographic problems of the 1990s to those of the second world war is plain wrong. The problems of the pension system are connected not only with demographic problems’.

Different pro – and con voices on the issue precede the excerpt. Here, the press voice takes an independent position. (Meduza.io, 29 August, 2018. Headline: Qpc9zat: qfosjpoopk cpirast qrjwpejts> ji-ia qptfr: Cfmjkkp Ptyfstcfoopk Cpkopk j t>hfm9w 1990-w dpepc. It is necessary to raise the age limit for pension due to the losses of the Second World War and the difficult 1990s.)

Second Perspective. (10). ---‘Gmaca rpssjkskpdp qracjtfm:stca Enjtrjk Nfecfefc ia>cjm, ytp kabnjo qrfemadaft qpeo>t: cpirast c9wpea oa qfosj<c Rpssij ep 65 mft em> nuhyjo j ep 63 mft em> hfo7jo. Qrfn:fr qpeyfrkoum, ytp oprnam:o9k urpcf: hjoij qfosjpoofrc oa epmdpsrpyo9k qfrijpe nphop pbfsqfyjt:, tpm:kp

qrjo>c epqpmojtfmo9f nfr9 (...).

C qracjtfm8stef Rpssij eacop cfefts> aktjcopf pbsuhefojf qfosjpoopk rfvprn9. Qrfijefot Cmaejnr Qutjo... oaqpnojm, ytp «csfdea ptopsjms> k ;tpnu c c9szfk stf9o9 pstprphop j aefkcatop». Cjxf qrfn:fr Tat:>oa Gpmjkkpca dpcprjma, ytp... kpotur9 pbopcmfoopk qfosjpoopk sjstfn9 bueut ptrabptao9 c bmjhakzjk dpe, a qfosjpoopf pbfsqfyfojf c straof epmhop spstpjti ecuw yastfk... ’.

---‘The head of the Russian government Dmitry Medvedev stated that the Cabinet proposes to increase the pension age by which you may go into pension in Russia to

65 for men, and to 63 for women. The PM underlined that in

the long term a normal standard of living for pensioners could be guaranteed only by taking additional measures.

In Russia’s parliament one is working very actively on the pension reform (...).

President Vladimir Putin noted that “I have always approached this question with the utmost caution and consideration.” Deputy PM Tatiana Golikova said that... the outlines of the revised pension system will be drawn up during the next year, and the pension of the country should consist of two parts... ’.

Two high officials are indirectly quoted. The President is directly quoted. Other official voices appear – and the web of voices gives expression to a hierchiazation of voices.

(Vzgliad.ru, 14.06.2018. Headline: Nfecfefc qrfemphjm qpeo>t: cpirast oa qfosj<. Medvedev has proposed an increase of the pension age).

Third Perspective. (11). ---Qfosjpoopnu rfvprnu of pepbr>ft 92% rpssj>o. Ofsnptr> oa ;tp, Gpseuna qmaojruft qrjo>t: qracjtfm:stcfoo9k iakpopqrpftk p qpc9zfojj qfosjpoopdp cpirasta.

«N9 epmho9 pyfo: skruqumfiop qpepktj k pbsuhefoj< rfvprn9. N9 epmho9 qpewpejt: kpostrukjcop, a of ndopcfop...!» ia>cjm oa sfssij sqjkrf pnskpdp qarmanfota Cmaejnr Caroacskjk.

Sefrhaoop krjtjkkcam qracjtfm:stcfoo9k iakpopqrpftk... dubfroatpr rfdjpoa Amfksaoer Burkpc... «C tpk rfeakxjj.kptpra> fst: sfkyas, > of eacam spdmasj> oa ;tu rfvprnu». Tak qpstuqjm(j) crj< dmac9 Qrjnprskpdp kra> Aoerfk Tarasfokp.

Oaqrjnfr Tarasfokp c9skaiams> tak «Sfdpeo> of qpeefrhat: rfvprnu - ;tp ubjkstcp em> eam:ofkzfdp raicjtj> ;tpk jefj. Mtpk rfvprnkp n9 eafn ucahfojj scpjn ptxan j rpejtfm>n».

---‘92% of Russians do not support pension reform. “In spite of this, the State Duma plans to approve the government’s proposed law project on raising the pension age.” We must adopt a very careful approach

to the discussion of the pension reform. “We must be constructive, and not immediately...!” the speaker of the Omsk regional parliament Vladimir Varnavskii said at a session. “The governor of the region, Alexander Burkov, delivered a restrained criticism of the government project.” - In its present version, “I would not approve the reform” (...) the acting head of the Primorsk kraj, Andrei Tarasenko reacted in the same way. For example, “Tarasenko made the following statement”: If we don’t support this reform today, it will be like killing off the further development of the idea. With this reform, “we are honouring our fathers and our relatives”...---

Regional power holders are referred in direct speech. (Meduza.io, 16.07.2018. Headline: Q>t: stratfdjj rfdjpoam:o9w cmastfk. Five strategies of the regional official administrations).

Summary and Conclusions

There is a sliding scale of journalistic representations from 1 to 3.

In Table 1, it is shown that the sample gives proof of a fairly small, but distinct, number of texts where a site takes an independent position in relation to cited voices. The biggest share of article texts cite only state and Party of- ficials and base their opinion on them. A slightly smaller share of texts cite official sources plus other sources. The differences regarding time periods are not significant – with the exception of no single case of perspective 1 for the sample year of 2014 (the explanation is above referred). The stable numbers over the ten-year period could be explained by the fact that the news sites did not swift political loyalties during the period of study. The implication of this is that the situation appears to promote status quo, and that is not entirely positive for the Russian society.

Table 2 reveals that the 18 article texts that together make up the first perspective, are all from Kommersant.ru (7), Lenta.ru (2), Meduza.io (7) and Novaia gazeta.ru (2). Of the 68 article texts comprising the second perspective, are Rossiiskaia gazeta.ru (15), Vesti.ru (15), Vzgliad.ru (16) and Zavtra.ru (15). The remaining articles are from Lenta.ru (3), Novaia gazeta.ru (3) Kommersant (1). The 59 article texts that comprises the third perspective are distributed as follows: Kommersant.ru (15), Meduza.io (7), Lenta.ru (12) and Novaiagazeta.ru (6). The remainder consists of Vesti.ru (8) and Vzgliad.ru (4) and Rossiiskaia gazeta.ru

Table 1. Number of Article Texts and their Different Categorizations. Years of Different Case Studies. 145 Article Texts

	Perspective 1	Perspective 2	Perspective 3
2008	9	18	14
2011	4	20	11
2014	0	16	15
2018	5	14	19

Table 2. Number of News Articles and Sites Distributed According to Perspective. 145 Article Texts

News sites	Perspective 1	Perspective 2	Perspective 3
Rossiiskaia gazeta.ru	0	15	7
Vesti.ru	0	15	8
Vzgliad.ru	0	16	4
Zavtra.ru	0	15	0
Kommersant.ru	2	1	15
Lenta.ru	2	3	12
Meduza.io	7	0	7
Novaiagazeta.ru	7	3	6

(7). Thus, the sample gives proof of sites that take an in- dependent position in relation to cited voices: Lenta, Novaia gazeta, Kommersant and Meduza. These sites also make up the lion’s part of those articles that cite experts and political parties other than United Russia, Western sources, private persons (companies), and non-governmental organizations. Only a handful of articles belonging to this category em- anate from Rossiiskaia gazeta, Vesti and Vzgliad. In con- trast, most of Rossiiskaia gazeta, Vzgliad, Vesti and Zavtra are presenting articles citing exclusively governmental sources on the federal level, or the United Russia Party. In none of the latter category of sample cases are sources forming any independent opinions.

Further, the article texts have on the whole similar features as regards reporting clauses. To pretty much the same extent, they use direct and indirect speech. Rossiiskaia gazeta, Zavtra, Vesti and Vzgliad have, however, a pro- pensity to reserve direct speech for the highest officials – not least President Putin. Where there is talk about Putin he is always directly quoted. Reporting verbs are however practically without exception neutral. Press voice is gen- erally identified.

In terms of style, the sample texts do not differ in any important respect. They vary between a fairly literary style and a colloquial style throughout. As pertains modality features, there is a certain dominance of objective modality and categorical assertions in especially Rossiiskaia gazeta. In this case claims about the world are not open to con- testation, and have a tendency to take on the role of un- questioned assertions.

As to perspectivation, only Meduza.io, Novaiagazeta.ru, Kommersant.ru and Lenta.ru form their own opinions on subject-matters, and they also let a plethora of voices speak their views in articles. In contrast, Zavtra.ru, Rossiiskaia gazeta.ru, Vzgliad.ru and Vesti.ru practically only give voice to government officials, United Russia and supporters thereof. There is a clear demarcating line between these two

categories of news sites in this respect. The results of the analysis of the pro-government materials – *Zavtra*, *Rossiiskaiagazeta*, *Vesti* and *Vzgliad* – indicates strongly that alternative political standpoints are not revealed by means of the use of references – more or less biased – to different political actors. Views are manifest by excluding alternative voices. To be sure, this does stifle reader interest and curiosity of other worldviews.

What implications does this have in terms of audience relationships to the political world? As we saw, both a large part of journalistic notions and the general public have expectations that journalism should not be objective, nor that it should conform to any concept of western journalism. In addition, there are also attacks against media outlets and individual journalists.

The readers of *Zavtra. ru*, *Rossiiskaiagazeta. ru*, *Vesti. Ru* and *Vzgliad. ru* can, as a rule, clearly demarcate between voices, direct and indirect speech is used, neutral reporting verbs and mostly a colloquial style is maintained. But most often, voices of state power dominate messages. In terms of the overall results, they show little variation. No criticism of state policies is to notice. In this respect, they are practically following a straight line from the Communist period. The implied citizen role for the readerships of these news sites, even if they are not equal on all points, is therefore to equal ‘functional reception’.

On the contrary, readers of *Novaiagazeta. ru*, *Meduza. io*, *Kommersant. ru*, and *Lenta. ru* can read pieces of news sites that form their own opinion, distinct from actors cited. Further, they may read about a multitude of actors having different, and critical, views on matters. In addition, they show several positive characteristics as regards modality, reporting clauses and style. As regards use of sources, we can conclude that the type of journalism, or journalistic role, that above was discussed in Slavtcheva-Petkova (2019) and Bodrunova et al. (2021), seem to be practiced in those news sites. Accordingly, these sites practice a journalism that has advanced beyond the democratized post-Soviet press. They make up sites that give expression to ‘critical reflection’. In their discourse representation, they make use of a classic liberal journalistic approach. Taken together, in this respect, they are presenting journalism *sine ira et studio*.

We can finally establish that Pasti et al.’s (2022) contention that the norm of monitoring political power holders has failed in national level journalism around 2017, is rather precipitated. On the contrary, as we have seen, we find that very function by *Meduza*, *Novaia*

gazeta and *Kommersant*, and earlier in coverages by *Lenta*.

The above conclusions are relevant to the investigated news sites in the Russian public sphere until 2018-19. Subsequently, measures were taken against *Kommersant. ru*, and their staff was changed for a more pro-government one. Furthermore, *Meduza. io* and *Novaiagazeta. ru* have been blocked during the current Ukraine war.

It is, however, possible that the situation for the investigated sites gradually, sooner or later, returns to the former state, once the war is over.

At any rate, we saw that in spite of the fact that there are negative conditions for free journalism, a number of news sites contradicted the notion of partisan and biased media. They were using plurality of viewpoints in their representations of subject-matters. It falls outside the scope of the present investigation – but it would seem that these news sites were operating in a more open and democratic fashion than most of their western counterparts. Doubtlessly, a research project investigating this aspect of Western journalism could be worthwhile.

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