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ABSTRACT

A study examined the changes taking place in the Soviet press and readers' attitude to the media in the age of glasnost. A survey, prepared in English and translated into Russian, was conducted among 96 fourth and final year journalism students at the Leningrad State University, U.S.S.R. to obtain information concerning demographics, readership frequency and sources, and readership of foreign news. Five centrally circulated national newspapers were used ("Pravda," "Izvestia," "Trud," "Selskaya Zhizn," and "Komsomolskaya Pravda"); respondents were requested to report the countries they read about and the countries about which they would like to have more information. Findings revealed that readers appreciated the changes in newspaper content and coverage as a result of the new press freedoms, that they would like to read more about Western countries, and that the circulation of "Pravda" was on the decline in the wake of a rising electronic media as the primary source in the U.S.S.R. (Six tables of data are included; 39 references are attached.) (KEH)

THE CHANGING MEDIA IN THE USSR: NEW EVIDENCE FROM A RECENT SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the changes taking place in the Soviet press and readers' attitude to the media in the age of glasnost. It attempts to test the limits of glasnost and to examine the openness of the Communist media by highlighting the gradual return of limited freedom and power to the Soviet people. It also reports the attitudes of journalism students in Leningrad State University to the increasing openness in all walks of Soviet life.

The methodology used here is mainly historical, focusing on glasnost, but with the additional insights from a limited survey conducted in Leningrad in December 1988. This study is part of a larger research project carried out in Russia and was made possible by glasnost itself, which facilitated the visit to the USSR by two of the authors. The findings, we believe, may be useful to the understanding of the dynamics, difficulties, and challenges of press freedom in a Marxist state.

GLASNOST

A new pragmatism appears to be sweeping the Soviet Union as the dogma of the past is being refashioned as Lenin's ghost looks on in silence. The waning Communist philosophy of the Soviet press, which over the years drew most of its inspiration from Lenin's practical and theoretical activities, is being restructured as emphasis on revolutionary politics declines.

Soviet scholars such as Alekseev (1979), Androunas and Zassoursky (1979), Zassoursky and Losev (1981) and Losenkov (1983), who subscribed to the interpretation of the Leninist press as an ideological weapon of the Communist Party, are now reassessing their positions. Before 1985, no one in the USSR thought of the Soviet media as a source of entertainment. Rather, it was allegedly a serious press -- a collective "propagandist," "agitator" and "organizer" -- with a historical mission to spread communism.

Berezhnoi stated in 1975 that every Soviet citizen, regardless of his or her societal position or educational status, used the Soviet press. Journalists were guided by completely different motives than journalists working for privately owned newspapers. While all that may be changing only slowly, more sensational genres are rapidly replacing the dull sentimentalism of Communist propaganda. Soviet radio and television networks are blaring heavy metal rock music, Michael Jackson's "Bad," and capitalist advertising, to the homes of millions of Russians. The national print media are losing ground to the electronic media. Glasnost is blooming in part because of the competition for audience and above all because of the directives from the new boss in the Kremlin.

Historically, the idea of glasnost is not a new phenomenon in Soviet media. Lenin wanted an "open" press. Lenin wanted a free press, at least theoretically, and spoke on the need to constantly review the path of Soviet revolution. He wrote that "those

Communists are doomed who imagine that it is possible to finish such an epoch-making undertaking as completing the foundations of Socialist economy (particularly in a small peasant country) without making mistakes, without retreats, without numerous alterations to what is unfinished or wrongly done. Communists who have no illusions, who do not give away despondency, and who preserve their strength and flexibility 'to begin from the beginning' over and over again in approaching an extremely difficult task, are not doomed (and in all probability will not perish)." ("Lenin Note to a publicist," cited in Lewin Moshe, 1968).

Lenin's vision of political maneuverability and flexibility within a communist framework may have grown from his sense that the Soviet system was untested and, therefore, susceptible to flaws. An escape hatch for his fragile Russian communism was required.

Such tactics did not elude apprehension. Critics of the Soviet system suspected that such temporary "retreat" from communism and criticism in the press were periodically encouraged to mobilize the people to rebuild the ailing socialist economy as it attempted to gain the support of the free economies it sought to overthrow. Timasheff expressed his skepticism in 1946 by pointing out that such strategy was employed because the Soviet leadership was aware that "extreme communist methods (in the past) resulted in the conspicuous malfunctioning of society; their mitigation brought relief and fostered progress," (Timasheff, 1946, p.343). He recalled the relaxation of communist authority during the New Economic Policy (NEP) period, when adoption of Marxism

required it to behave like a confounded version of capitalism.

The Soviet historian Poliakov (1977), in his assessment of the Soviet NEP tactics, proudly noted that the new economic policy was conceived in a broad historical perspective. The retreat reflected in the temporary concessions to capitalism, was only a part of the policy. After the temporary retreat and regrouping, socialist forces were to unleash an all-out offensive, the last, decisive battle against Russian capitalism in industry, trade, and agriculture.

This retreat and offensive strategy apparently has been an illusion. Communist over centralization stifled individual initiatives and slowed growth. Economic measures initiated since the abandonment of the NEP have proven unsuccessful. The need to reassess the situation has been agonizingly apparent. During the late 1960s, Soviet dissidents also called for glasnost in their abortive struggle against censorship and party monopoly. They were harassed, jailed, exiled and denounced by the ruling Communist Party under Brezhnev.

Both Andropov and Chernenko were aware of the need for a drastic turn away from the policies of the Brezhnev's regime. They shied away from the realities.

Mikhail Gorbachev's election as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in March, 1985, ushered in another era of glasnost. In his post election address to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Gorbachev spoke of the need to "improve the economic mechanism and the whole system of management" which would

involve "constantly implementing the planned development of the economy, strengthening socialist ownership, broadening rights, enhancing the independence of enterprises, and increasing their interest in the end results of their work."

At the 27th Congress of the Communist Party in February, 1986, Gorbachev told the gathering of the need to restructure the Soviet system and he spoke of the Soviet press as one of the strategies of accelerating the country's socio-economic development. He pointed out that "among measures to be taken to enhance the democratic nature of the socialist system would be steps to enhance publicity." He called for openness in the press remarking that "when the subject of publicity comes up, calls are sometimes made for exercising greater caution when speaking about the shortcomings, omissions and difficulties that are inevitable in any ongoing effort. There can only be one answer to this, a Leninist answer: Communists want the truth, always and under all circumstances." In the usual Soviet self-praise, he remarked that "We shall not perish, because we are not afraid to speak of our weaknesses and we shall learn to overcome our weakness."

By March, 1986, Secretary Gorbachev had changed more than forty percent of the Central Committee members. Personnel changes were made public in the media, including changes in the leadership of the State Committee for Publishing, Printing and Book Sales, the Novosty Press Agency, and top editorial positions in the leading national magazines and journals such as Economicheskaya Gazeta, Sovetskaya kultura, and Kommunist. And so, as glasnost

started gaining momentum, reports of corruption, drug abuse, crimes and other vices, hitherto proscribed by the censors or party kingpins, hit the press without persecution of the reporters or editors.

By July 1986, Gorbachev was impressed with the new openness in the press. He noted that "nothing comes of its own accord" and "none of us can continue living in the old way...why has the Central Committee launched criticism, self criticism and openness on such a broad scale? I can tell you that so far we have lost nothing, we have only gained." He added that "it is impermissible to approach openness with the yardsticks of traditional short-term campaigns. Public openness is not a one-shot measure but a norm of present day Soviet life, a continuous uninterrupted process during which some tasks--as a rule, still more complicated ones--arise."

Undoubtedly, glasnost is an internal policy of the USSR, but foreign policies are often the products or extensions of the internal polity and policies of nations. Thus, we find that glasnost has implication for the flow of international news to and from the USSR. More is now known about the events in USSR from the local media, and foreign correspondents have been given more latitude in Moscow. Today, glasnost means more news for everybody. However, the operationalization of glasnost or openness in Soviet mass communication system should not be misconstrued as an unconditional willingness to embrace a western type of free press (Eribo and Gaddy, 1987).

Since the introduction of glasnost, and in spite of the liberalization of the media, there is no evidence that there have been fundamental deviations from the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. The press is firmly in the hands of the party and government, and the national ideology and the political structure remain the same.

THE CHANGING TIDE

The Soviet people are responding to glasnost in a very interesting manner. Not only are there more open debates but also the choice to determine which media to patronize is returning to the people. The gradual return of power to the people is taking its toll in the media marketplace as the Communist party loses its monopoly. The Communist party newspaper, Pravda, which was the leading paper in the USSR and all of Eastern Europe has lost its first-place circulation figures to other Soviet papers deemed more interesting by the people. Pravda's print-run of eleven million in 1982 has dropped to 10.7 million in 1988 and the figure in 1989 is believed to have dropped so dramatically that it was not published during a recent visit to the USSR by one of the authors. As glasnost grows stronger, the people are expressing their choice of media without the previous coercion from the Communist party. Market forces, thus, are newly becoming a determinant of newspaper survival. Trud, the Trade Unions' newspaper, has taken a dramatic lead in readership. Its subscriptions skyrocketed from 8.6 million in 1982 to 18.7 million in 1988 and further soared to 19.6 million in 1989. It seems Soviet workers are rallying around their main

union organs, and Pravda is losing subscriptions because Communist party members have always been few.

Komsomolskaya Pravda, the organ of the Youth Communist League experienced a rise in subscription from 10 million in 1982 to 17.6 million in 1988 and a slight drop to 17.5 million in 1989. Izvestia which has ranked second to Pravda since the 1917 revolution, gained more readers with the introduction of glasnost. Its 1982 print-run of 8.6 million rose to 10.4 million in 1988 but dropped to 9.9 million in 1989. However, subscription to the paper in the last two years, exceed the subscription before glasnost.

Table 1

1982, 1988 and 1989 Print-run of Selected Soviet Newspapers

Newspaper	1982 Print-run (millions)	1988 Print-run (millions)	1989 Print-run (millions)
Trud	8.6	18.7	19.6
Komsomolskaya Pravda	10.0	17.6	17.5
Pravda	11.0	10.7	n.a.
Izvestia	8.6	10.4	9.9
Selskaya Zhizn	8.5	7.5	n.a.
Sovetskaya Rossia	3.2	5.3	n.a.
Literaturnaya Gazeta	2.6	3.8	5.9

Sources:
Kurian, G. (1982) World Press Encyclopedia, New York: Facts on File.
Romanov, A. (1988) Moscow News, (8) February 21. p.2.
Butenko, B. (1988) Argumenti i Fakti, December 10 -16. p.8.

The preceding print run figures, in addition to depicting the changes in the media market-place, also reflect the gargantuan size of the Soviet newspaper industry and the popularity of the print media.

The popularity of newspapers among Soviet citizens is further reflected in statistics indicating that there are more than 694 dailies and some 7,242 non-dailies in the country. Romanov's 1988 survey of newspaper sales in Moscow shows that the vendor sells out the kiosk allotment of thirty copies of Moskovskiye novosti (Moscow News) in ten minutes, twenty copies of Literaturnaya gazeta

(Literary Newspaper) in fifteen minutes, and on Saturdays, fifty copies of Ogonyok (Flame) are bought in twenty minutes. Three times a week, twenty copies of Sovetskaya Kultura (Soviet Culture) are sold out in half an hour. Fifty copies each of the dailies Sovetskaya Rossiya (Soviet Russia) and Sotsialisticheskaya industria (Socialist Industry) are bought up within an hour. In an hour and a half, fifteen to twenty copies of Selskaya Zhizn (Country Life) are sold, as are forty copies of Za rubezhom's (Abroad) Friday edition. About 150 Pravdas are sold in two hours.

The Soviet newspaper world is uniquely Soviet and hierarchized into 30 all-Union papers, 158 republic papers, 313 kray, oblast and okrug papers, 95 autonomous Republic and oblast papers, 683 city newspapers, 2,946 rayon newspapers, 3,076 house organ papers and 635 collective farm newspapers. This hierarchy has not changed because of the slow pace of glasnost outside Soviet big cities.

Censorship of the press has come under increasing challenge by editors and reporters in the USSR. According to Time (Sept 7, 1987. p. 54), many now feel free to debate government action, criticize officials, stir up controversy, publish readers' opinionated letters about bureaucracy, all without consulting the censors of Glavlit, the organization that protects State and military secrets.

Other changes are also taking place in the Soviet media world. For decades, the primacy of newspapers over other media was resounding. From the available data in 1960, a sweeping eighty-nine percent of media users cited the newspapers as their source

of information. The second highly used source of information was word of mouth, followed by the radio, then meetings, personal observation, and magazines, in that order (Inkeles and Bauer, 1961). In 1969, Hopkins cited a survey of print and electronic media audiences comprising of 5,232 samples from both the rural and urban regions at thirty different points in the USSR. This inquiry indicated that the print media was the prime source of international news and information, followed by radio, television and political lectures. Korobeynikov further reported in 1979 that seventy-nine percent of the media audience and readers in the country depend on the newspapers as their sources of information on national politics. The radio was the next most popular medium, followed by the television, then journals, movies, office gossip, friends and relations.

Soviet readers thirst in particular for international news. Mickiewicz, in her study (1981), reported that Soviet citizens' preference for international news has been consistent and three surveys which included two national newspapers and one regional paper revealed that readers turned first to international news. The intensity of respondents' thirst for international information was expressed by their overwhelming demand for foreign news when asked in what area they would like more information. Mickiewicz pointed out that interest in international events cut across all ages, all levels of educational attainment, and all occupations.

Given all this, it is surprising to report that the power and influence of the newspapers in the USSR may be declining. The

survey reported here will examine the use and effect of Soviet mass media on some graduate students in the Soviet Union. The purpose of the research is to offer some additional insights about how glasnost is influencing the media marketplace, as well as uses and attitudes concerning the mass media during this momentous period in Soviet history.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted in December 1988 in Leningrad, USSR. It is the first such survey conducted by a private researcher from the United States without consultation with the bureaucracy. The survey was conducted among the students of the Faculty of Journalism of the Leningrad State University, USSR.

A questionnaire was distributed to 96 fourth and final year students of journalism. It was prepared in English in the United States and translated into Russian in the USSR. Xerox copies of the Russian version of the questionnaire were produced in the commercial section of a Western country's diplomatic mission in Moscow. Survey response rate was 100%.

The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographics, and the second part dealt with readership rates and sources. The survey also aimed at understanding respondents' assessments of Soviet newspapers since the introduction of glasnost by asking questions about newspapers and interest.

A final objective of the questionnaire was information on readership of foreign news. For this, five centrally circulated

national newspapers were listed (Pravda, Izvestia, Trud, Selskaya Zhizn, Komsomolskaya Pravda), and respondents were requested to report the countries they had read about in the newspapers. Also, respondents were asked to tell about which countries they would like to have more information.

One shortcoming of the survey, due in large part to the often insurmountable difficulties associated with conducting studies in the Soviet Union, is its convenience sample. The student group involved in this survey is not representative of more general population views. However, as students of journalism they are being trained to write for the whole population and even beyond. It is no overstatement that their views and responses have their positive contributions to our understanding of the uses and effects of the Soviet media. The media use of the youths of today may represent or at least serve as an indicator of media use among the adults of the future, and as future journalists, the responses of this group may be an indication of some of the eventual professional nuances and behavior in Soviet journalism. For example, a good number of the respondents indicated lesser interest in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe with the exception of the USSR.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The demographic information on the 96 journalism students of Leningrad State University on general media use revealed that they were mostly youths in their twenties, gathered from around the

Communist countries. The mean age was between twenty and twenty-five years, and the majority, that is 68% of the students, were between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. Students between the ages of twenty-six and twenty-nine made up 26% of the surveyed group. There were no students above forty years of age. Forty-two percent were male and 57% were female. Thirty-eight percent of the students were married while 58% were single, with 4% not declaring their marital status.

The frequency of the students' readership of newspapers was high. The survey revealed that 62% of the students were in the habit of reading newspapers on a daily basis, 18% stated that they read newspapers at least once a week and only 2% read newspapers fortnightly. No students indicated that they read no newspapers at all.

Table 2

Frequency of Readership of Newspapers: Percent of Respondents Who Use Newspapers Daily, Weekly, Etc.

	Percentages
Read newspapers daily	62
Read newspapers once a week	18
Read newspapers fortnightly	2
Read newspapers sometimes	16
Never read newspapers at all	0

When asked if newspapers are the main sources of news, 36% said yes, 52% said no. It was observed that the respondents used several news sources in addition to the use of newspapers. The survey results revealed that 86% of the respondents used television as an important source of news, while 72% indicated that newspapers were an important source of news. Radio came next, with 51% of the respondents indicating it to also be a vital source of news. The survey showed that 29% of the respondents see word of mouth as a source of news while only 4% consider other sources, such as journals, magazines, etc. as important news sources.

Table 3

Important Sources of News: Percentage who indicated one or more of the sources below as important.

	Percentages
Television	86
Newspapers	72
Radio	51
Word of mouth	29
Others	4

When asked if newspaper reports of new information affected their viewpoints, 64% of respondents said yes, 26% said no and 8% didn't know. This result is interesting because it suggests a certain degree of opinion leadership or influence for Soviet papers, oft maligned otherwise as mere party propaganda vehicles,

discounted by the populace. This is encouraging for the newspaper industry in the Soviet Union.

The respondents were asked if they found Soviet newspapers more interesting since the beginning of glasnost. An overwhelming 87% of the students said yes -- that Soviet newspapers have become more interesting in the era of glasnost. This result is of interest as it points to changes in newspaper content and coverage as a result of the new press freedoms; readers seem to appreciate it.

The survey was also concerned about the popularity of the Soviet newspapers that were analyzed in this study. The students were asked to identify one or more of the newspapers that they normally read. Pravda was more popular among the respondents with sixty-seven percent of them indicating that they read Pravda. Izvestia was in the second position with forty-nine percent of the respondents as its readers. Trud was in the third position with twelve percent and Selskaya Zhizn came last with five percent. Apart from the four newspapers which are the main focus of this study, Komsomolskaya Pravda, a newspaper for the youth, was found to be very popular with fifty-five percent of the respondents as its readers. An overwhelming eighty-three percent of the respondents read other unspecified newspapers.

Table 4

Popularity of Newspapers Among Respondents, based on the number of respondents who read one or more of the newspapers stated below.

	Percentages
Pravda	67
Izvestia	49
Trud	12
Selskaya Zhizn	5
Komsomolskaya Pravda	55
Others	83

The demographics of the respondents may be responsible for the type of newspapers they read. For example, Trud, which is a trade union's newspaper and has the largest subscription among Soviet newspapers, is read by a few students. Full-time Soviet students do not work while in the university and their low patronage of Trud and Selskaya Zhizn reflects their main interest. And Pravda which covers a broader theme was unsurprisingly patronized or read by more students.

The respondents were asked to identify one or more countries they read about in Soviet newspapers, and as Table 5 shows, responses varied greatly. The United States of America tops the list of countries that the students read about. The U.S. with 83% was closely followed by the USSR with 82% of the students reading about it. Other Western countries, as a group, were third on the list with 60% of the respondents indicating that they read about

them. Other socialist countries were next with 56%.

More respondents, 24%, read about pro-socialist sub-Saharan African countries than non-prosocialist sub-Saharan African countries. Sixteen percent of the respondents stated that they read about the non-prosocialist countries.

Table 5

Popularity of Countries Among Readers, based on the number of respondents who read about one or more countries or group of countries.

	Percentages
U.S.A.	83
U.S.S.R.	82
Other Western Countries	60
Other Socialist Countries	56
Pro-Socialist Sub-Saharan Africa	24
Non-Pro-Socialist Sub-Saharan Africa	16

When the respondents were asked to state the countries they would like to read more about, the answers revealed that they would like to read more about Western countries than socialist countries (Table 6). Sixty-eight percent of the respondents want more information about Western countries, 58% want more information about the United States of America, 45% want more information about the USSR, and 7% want more information about other socialist countries.

The survey revealed that more respondents want more information about non-prosocialist sub-Saharan African countries than about pro-socialist ones. The degree of interest in both non-prosocialist and pro-socialist sub-Saharan countries is very close. Whereas 32% of the respondents want more information about non-pro-socialist sub-Saharan Africa, 31% want more information about pro-socialist sub-Saharan Africa.

Table 6

Countries That Should Receive More Coverage, based on respondents' desire for more information about one or more countries or group of countries.

	Percentages
Other Western Countries	68
U.S.A.	58
U.S S.R.	45
Non-Pro-Socialist sub-Saharan Africa	32
Pro-Socialist sub-Saharan Africa	31
Other Socialist Countries	7

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined the ephemerality of openness in the Soviet press, the changes in newspaper circulation, the enthusiasm of readers and the views of Leningrad State University journalism students on glasnost and international news.

The evidence presented portrays a changing media and the

presence of new attitude and market forces. The study also noted the decline of Pravda's circulation and the rise of the electronic media as the primary news source in the USSR.

This study, however, is only a beginning. More research focusing on media use, effects, attitudes, profitability, advertising, and audience are needed before we begin to get a clear picture of the dynamics of the new policy of openness in a Marxist Soviet Union. A new horizon for research seems to be opening in the Soviet Union, and it may well be an ideal opportunity to better understand what the process of mass communication is.

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