

PARADOXES OF JOURNALISTIC PROFESSION: CASE OF RUSSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BRICS COUNTRIES

ПАРАДОКСЫ ЖУРНАЛИСТСКОЙ ПРОФЕССИИ: РОССИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СТРАН БРИКС

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Our empirical studies suggest four paradoxes characterizing Russian media and journalism. The first paradox is the profession itself. On the one hand, journalism is a life-threatening job for truth-seekers. On the other hand, journalism is a fashionable occupation as seen in the growth of journalism schools and number of applicants. The second paradox is the media market. On the one hand, ranked 10th in the world by economic indicators, it has grown into a mass industry. On the other hand, the majority of regional and local newspapers depend on governmental resources.

The third paradox is a marriage of liberalism and authoritarianism. On the one hand, media reveal the same logic of commercialization and concentration as in the West moving to homogenization. On the other hand, market liberalism of the Russian media successfully co-exists with the authoritarian approach of the government. The fourth paradox is between deterioration in the quality of democracy with a decline of media freedom, on the one hand, and the satisfaction of the majority of journalists in their profession, on the other. Two thirds of journalists in Russia are satisfied with their work conditions in spite of their autonomy being reduced.

This paradoxical situation is reflected in Russian media system, offering an intriguing case with elements of both a Western libertarian system and an Eastern communitarian system, referred to as “Eurasian”. Rather than studying it alone and in relation to two main directions of West/Europe and East/Asia, a new approach is provided by the emerging geopolitical entity known as “BRICS” – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Although these countries are different in many respects, they share crucial features in the globalizing world, making them a vanguard group in international arena. The BRICS context is used as an attempt to open new intellectual avenues.

Key words: *Russian media system; journalism; comparative studies; BRICS countries.*

Наши эмпирические исследования отмечают четыре парадокса, характеризующие российские медиа и журналистику. Первый парадокс – это сама профессия. С одной стороны, журналистика – эта опасная работа, если заниматься расследованиями. С другой стороны, журналистика – это модно; открылось много новых факультетов по всей стране, выросло количество желающих учиться профессии. Второй парадокс – это медиарынок. С одной стороны, он 10-й в мире по экономическим показателям, вырос в массовую индустрию. С другой стороны, большинство местных газет зависят от административного ресурса. Третий парадокс – это союз либерализма и авторитариз-

ма. С одной стороны, медиа обнаруживают ту же самую логику коммерциализации и концентрации, как и на Западе, двигаясь к гомогенизации. С другой стороны, рыночный либерализм медиа в России успешно уживается с авторитарным подходом власти. Четвертый парадокс находим между ухудшением качества демократии и свободой слова с одной стороны, и удовлетворенностью большинства журналистов в профессии с другой.

Эти парадоксы российской медиасистемы ставят в тупик, совмещая как элементы западной системы либертарианизма, так и восточной системы коммуитаризма, говорят о «евро-азиатской» модели. Наш новый подход предлагает уйти от традиционной дихотомии, известной как: Запад/Европа и Восток/Азия. Он предлагает взять БРИКС-контекст, пытаясь открыть новые пути исследования. БРИКС стал новой геополитической структурой, включая Бразилию, Россию, Индию, Китай и Южную Африку. Все эти страны, хотя очень разные во многих отношениях, разделяют ключевые черты в глобализирующемся мире и выступают авангардной группой на международной арене.

Ключевые слова: *российская медиасистема; журналистика; сравнительные исследования; страны БРИКС.*

Russia's media system: Paradoxical and hybrid

Our empirical studies carried out in Russia during the last decade suggest four paradoxes characterizing Russian media in general and journalism in particular. The first paradox is the media market. On the one hand, this is ranked 10th in the world by economic indicators (Pankin, 2010), operating at the intersection of state and business interests. Media have grown into a mass industry of entertainment, information, and advertising. The rapid development of the media is triggered by societal changes, particularly the increase in consumption when income began to grow and interests shifted from politics to private life. On the other

hand, the Russian government acknowledges the non-market character of media – the overwhelming majority of the regional and local newspapers exist owing to various subsidies and administrative resources (*Rossiiskaya periodicheskaya pechat'*: sostoyanie, tendencii i perspektivy razvitiya. 2009, 2010).

The second paradox is a marriage of liberalism and authoritarianism in the Russian media system. On the one hand, the media reveal the same logic of commercialization, concentration, convergence as in the West (*European Media Governance: National and Regional Dimensions*, 2008) moving to homogenization of media systems and the triumph of the liberal model, as classified by Hallin and Mancini (Hallin, Mancini, 2004). The analysis of its structure and trends represented in terms of media economy and technology (Vartanova, Smirnov, 2010) implicitly suggests a perspective of its gradual convergence with Western models whereby “Russia is no longer such a special case” (Nordenstreng, 2010a). On the other hand, the so-called market liberalism of the Russian media successfully co-exists with the authoritarian approach of the government: “instrumentalization of media” (Zassoursky, 2004) as well as “market authoritarianism” (Shevtsova, 2005). The trend of the last decade is for a proportional decrease in the commercial capital share and an increase in the state capital and mixed (state and commercial) capital shares. The dependence of the media on the state increases in two ways: through state ownership and through regular subsidies – both buying the loyalty of the media.

The third paradox is the profession itself. On the one hand, journalism became a dangerous job: journalists with the watchdog role faced a high risk in their professional careers and lives. When we calculated the number of journalists killed since 1992, the most dangerous topics to cover were war, politics, corruption, business and human rights (*Committee to Protect Journalists*, 2011). The sad statistics of the violence against the professional rights of journalists since the early 1990s included over 300 journalists killed (*Deaths of Journalists in Russia*, 2011). On the other hand, journalism is a fashionable occupation as seen in the growth of

journalism schools and number of applicants, many from wealthy families. This popularity is not surprising when journalism shines as PR and show business, where big money moves and personal career advancement is achieved, especially in large cities (Pasti, 2010). The study of professional roles of the regional journalists revealed little interest in investigative journalism among young journalists, only a few supported criticizing the government (Pasti and Pietiläinen).

The fourth paradox is between the deterioration in the quality of democracy with a decline of media freedom, on the one hand, and the satisfaction of the majority of journalists in their profession, on the other. During the last decade political research addressed signs of degeneration of democratization (Brown, 2001; McFaul, 2007), although there were opinions that Russia developed as “a normal country” (Schleifer, 2005). Recent studies argue for the crisis of Russian democracy and its authoritarian character (Sakwa, 2011; White, 2011). In the World Audit Democracy (World Audit, 2011) for 13 years Russia’s democracy rank (political rights and civil liberties) went down from place 106 to 136. Its corruption rank is 127, which is twice worse than China’s (61) and what Russia had 10 years back (76). In comparison with the post-communist countries of Europe and Asia, even with remaining communist states (China, Cuba, Vietnam), Russia showed the lowest criteria of democracy. Its present press freedom rank (the degree to which the country permits free flow of information) is 130, which identifies it as the country without press freedom.

The survey of Russian journalists in 2008 showed that the main constraints in the work of journalists were the local authorities and the editorial bosses, that is, the political control and editorial censorship (Pasti, Chernysh, Svitich, 2012). The number of journalists who identified themselves as independent reporters decreased from two thirds in 1992 to one fifth in 2008. Nevertheless, the number of journalists satisfied with their jobs increased in 2008 (72%) in comparison to 1992 (62%). The young generation especially, which entered the media in the 2000s, was happy with the present opportunities for earnings, career and self-expression, as it is seen in table 1:

Table 1

Job Satisfaction by Generation (in percent, fully or mostly satisfied)

Reasons for satisfaction	Soviet 1991 or earlier	Transitional 1992-1999	Post-Soviet 2000 or later	All Journalists
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

The public opinion surveys testify that the majority of Russians today give priority to the basic values of survival – order and security – whereas democratic values remain in the background (Polovina rossiyann razocharovanny rynochnymi reformami, 2010). Like all Russians, journalists as a professional group are also a part of the political culture which today represents a mixture of authoritarian and democratic creed. Therefore, adherence to democracy in the media becomes an important test in the studying Russian journalism and media system.

These paradoxes in the transformation of the media system and journalism witness that Russia remains a special case and puzzle for research, although solid work has been done and conceptual frameworks have been suggested: “Authoritarian-Corporate model” (Zassoursky, 1998), “Eurasian model” (De Smaele, 1999), “Neo-Authoritarian model” (Becker, 2004), “Neo-Soviet model” (Oates, 2009), “Transitional model” (Jakubowicz, 2008), the latter for all post-communist countries; “Statist Commercialized model” (Vartanova, 2012). But the search for relevant conceptualizations and the place of Russia in the global media landscape continues and needs more theoretical and empirical research (De Smaele, 2008).

As shown by a state-of-the-art review (Nordenstreng, 2010b), the concept of media system itself remains unclear and hazy: “A lot of homework remains to be done...” Our new project “Media Systems in Flux: The Challenge of the BRICS countries”, 2012–2016, is an exercise towards doing that homework. It aims at increasing the understanding of Russian media system with its paradoxes and contradictions. This contributes to de-westernization media studies (Curran and Park, 2000; Internationalizing Media Studies, 2009) with major attention to cultural traditions and the plurality of socio-political contexts. BRICS as a new framework offers a challenging landscape for comparative studies of media and journalists in their own systems. Comparative perspective with non-Western cultures, which are in transition like Russia and with legacy of authoritarianism like China provides a context for deeper understanding. This framework has not been much applied in international media scholarship and not at all in comparative research of journalists with both similarities and differences between these countries in transition (see e.g. *Global Journalism Research: Theories, Methods, Findings, Future*, 2008). But today the global importance of the BRICS group rises as a political club with its own regular summit meetings, and also as an economic power with huge investment opportunities and its potential to create a new world order (Ortmann, 2011).

China as point for comparison

Sparks (Sparks, 2010) ranges Russia and China to the fourth media model *authoritarian corporatist* in addition to three models of Western journalism established by Hallin and Mancini (Hallin, Mancini, 2004). However, he argues that China is very different. That constitutes the opposite case is the persistence of Communist Party in power, as distinct from Eastern Europe and Russia where communist regimes collapsed. At the same time Sparks notes that a closer examination reveals some surprising similarities, among which: institutional continuity: old mediums adapted well to market; personal continuity: new elites are direct successors of the old elites; character of privatization: accompanied by large-scale theft of state property and political favoritism; economic order is market oriented but characterized by endemic corruption and political intervention. “Journalistic professionalism remains a dead letter in most of the media” (Sparks, 2010).

What specifics Sparks finds out in China case and what distinguishes China from other countries is no change in the political structure in China. The Communist Party is able to recruit the young and talented, and still is ideologically hegemonic particularly over middle class. China provides a conclusive refutation of the frequently repeated assertion that the middle class is the natural bearer of democracy (ibid). The second distinction of China by Sparks is that the state broadcasters successfully adapted to a world in which their main income is from advertising, rather than governmental subsidy, press titles are much more market oriented. The third is a high degree of personal continuity in the media that means high importance of connections, family privileges and power of personal networks. The fourth is non-transparency of ownership of the Chinese media, “matter of some mystery, but the most reliable source gives the party as the real proprietor”; “combination of continuing political control with strong market orientation” (ibid). The fifth is corruption in the media and political intervention of the party committees.

However, look at Russia and find out the similar specifics what Sparks attributes to China with the exception of communist system. Instead of Com-

munist party, the state in Putin's ruling became to play the central role and (in) directly control the media and market. Like in China, in Russia it is unclear who really owns media. Non-transparency of media market is a consequence of the lack of transparency of Russian economy; "no governmental agency today possesses exhaustive statistical data on the condition and dynamic of the national media market as a whole" (Vartanova, Smirnov, 2010).

Corruption in the media and among journalists became a private matter. In the economically hard 1990s journalists began to excuse their venal practices by claiming a need to survive because of low salaries and lack of social guarantees. During the 2000s, when Russia's economy and its media changed for the better, journalistic salaries rose drastically. However, corruption practices remained. As our survey in 2008 shows, every second journalist produced a news piece in return for extra payments during the past 12 months. Yet having a second job as a means of survival during the 1990s became a privilege and opportunity for advancement in the 2000s. Journalists became well-to-do people with influential contacts in government and big business. Family privileges and personal networks work better than formal institutions and the law in the media market and society as a whole. Professionalism is knowledge of networks and contacts (Blom, 2002), "not *what* you know, but *who* you know!" It rises from such phenomenon as clientelism and nepotism.

Russian journalists represent the middle class, at least in terms of income and education. Although media have lost political independence, the number of journalists satisfied with their jobs has increased. Among the major predictors of their satisfaction were their freedom in newsroom, on the one hand, and editorial line of their mediums, on the other. The majority were satisfied with how their medium informed the public. This shows that contemporary journalists have found a happy consensus between their decision-making in the work and the current editorial politics – an evidence of their adaptation to the changed conditions in the media and the patronage of the authorities. The *etatization* of the media gives obvious guarantees against market uncertainty; at the same time it does not impede *commercialization* of the media – two main trends

of development of media system in Russia. Journalism finds itself in the privileged position being together with the state and market. As our earlier research shows, journalists perform three basic roles: PR worker, entertainer and organizer which differ but not fundamentally from the Soviet journalism roles of propagandist and organizer (Pasti, 2007).

To broaden a list of similarities between China and Russia we could add: 1) the prevalence of domestic owners in the media market and fixed limitations for foreign capital, as distinct from post-communist Europe; 2) tame commercial media not conflicting with the government; 3) a gap of generations over values and skill to work with new technology; 4) striving of young journalists to get job in the state office; 5) growth of independent media in the internet and protesting movements. As the reflection of the resemblance in their developments, researchers to understand China's media system and Russian media system use the same definitions: "instrumentalization" of media (Zhao, 2012; Vartanova, 2012); "Statist commercialization" (Shen, 2012), "Statist commercialized model" (Vartanova, 2012). Comparative study of journalistic roles carried out in 18 countries (Worlds of Journalism, 2011) finds few watchdog journalists in Russia (8%) and China (1%), whereas the majority of journalists in these countries are opportunist facilitators (41% in Russia and 56% in China) and populist disseminators (39% in Russia and 19% in China).

Independent media and social protest

When focusing on Russia, research, as a rule, is satisfied with the mainstream media – today privileged with government and business contracts. However, in our view, such an approach is no longer enough to understand Russian media system because it overlooks new agents such as independent media which emerge outside of the mainstream and act as rebels to the existing political and media systems. Thus, some of the independent media made it impossible to rig municipal elections of 2011 in their localities by acting as watchdogs and even organized open debates between the opposition and the ruling party "United Russia" – an unprecedented political event not only for the periphery, but also the prosperous megacities. As a

result, in several regions the opponents to the ruling party won the municipal elections and formed their new governments. That is, these protesting media acts can be interpreted as a significant part of counter-hegemonic culture within the Russian media system. In some regions the independent reporters established their own new unions of journalists in parallel to the Union of Journalists which exists since the Soviet times. Their regional situations are somewhat similar to some post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where journalists' associations are several and "divided along ideological lines" (Zielonka, Mancini, 2011).

Independent media in Russia usually refer to such famous brands as *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*, *Novaya Gazeta* and *Ekho Moskvy*. All these are located in Moscow with an insignificant audience in provincial Russia and serve, whether intentionally or not, as the "liberal icons" of the current political system. But today the regions, especially economically depressed areas, are awakening owing to civic activity and social protests. In the alliance with the independent media they shake up the social-political situation.

In Russia the experts talk about a new political situation because of rising protest movements in two capitals Moscow and St-Petersburg and other big cities. In China, the rule of the Communist Party is challenged by widespread discontent amongst workers and peasants, often spilling over into savage anti-authority riots (Sparks, 2010). In China every year 450 riots are suppressed. In Moscow, opposition regularly organizes meetings on the 31st of every month to protest the state's refusal to allow free assembly of protesters guaranteed by Article 31 of the Russian Constitution. In Russia social networks (*Vkontakte*, *Facebook*) had played the important role in rise of "snow revolution" in winter 2011-2012 by forcing to change agenda of independent Internet media. "No media defined agenda setting, but their audience dictated to media a new agenda. Many internet media, among which: *OpenSpace*, *slon.ru*, *Bol'shoi Gorod*, *Afisha* and also online versions of leading newspapers of *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*, *gazeta.ru* began to cover and analyze political protests (Kobrin, 2012). In China macro blogs work as platforms for free discussions and critical assessments of the government. Their influence increase, es-

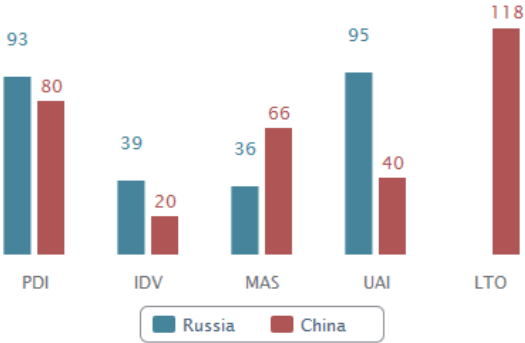
pecially among young people and students because they are politically independent and pose real problems. They emerged at the beginning of the 2000s as grassroots journalism and unite both professionals and non-professionals, working as journalists but without journalism education.

Cultural contexts

In Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001; Geert Hofstede Website, 2012) Russia and China reveal both similarities and differences, as seen in figure 1 below. Both have the highest scores in dimension *Power Distance* (PDI): Russia with 93 and China with 80 that testifies a great importance of status in their cultures and polarized top-down relations – premise to accept authoritarian order. Both have a lower score of dimension *Individualism* (IDV): 39 for Russia and 20 for China that reveals them as highly collectivist cultures where relationship is crucial by prevailing over tasks and company.

Figure 1

Russia and China³⁰ Russia in comparison with the below



But Russia and China are different in other dimensions. In *Masculinity* (MAS): Russia has low score 36, whereas China has high score 66. This characterizes Russia as a feminine society with the dominant values

³⁰ Source: URL: <http://geert-hofstede.com/russia.html>

of quality of life and caring for others, whereas China performs as a masculine society driven by values of competition, achievement and success. In *Uncertainty Avoidance* (UAI): Russia has highest score 95, whereas China has a low score 30. The highest scoring of UAI shows Russia as the most complex bureaucracies in the world, bureaucratic system serves as a defense from ambiguous situations and unpredictable future. Russians prefer to have context and background information. On the contrary, Chinese people are comfortable with ambiguity, they are adaptable and entrepreneurial. Truth may be relative, adherence to laws and rules may be flexible to suit the actual situation and pragmatism is a fact of life. In the dimension *Long Term Orientation* (LTO) China has the highest score 118 and Russia has none at all. Here the main distinction is the extent to which society shows a pragmatic future-oriented perspective (China) and a short-term point of view (Russia).

BRICS as a new framework for studying the media systems

BRICS is an acronym for five countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. It emerged in 2001 as BRIC from the analyst Jim O'Neill who introduced it in a company report (O'Neill, 2001), which asserted that these four countries' economies would develop at a rapid rate, so that by 2050 they would have become the largest and most influential economies within the international system, alongside the US – hence breaking the US's hegemonic role within the world economy. Later, many analysts have extended this prediction of economic strength to a growth in political influence for the BRIC, and indeed a consequent alteration in the geopolitical and normative balance of the international system (Snetkov, Aris, 2011).

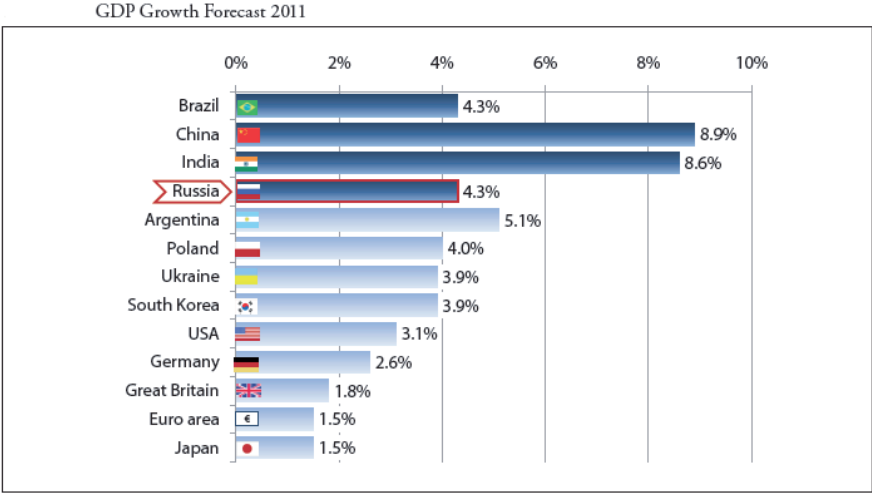
The inclusion of South Africa into the BRIC group in 2010, according to the analysts' opinion, would motivate other developing countries to begin also to seek membership in BRICS (Marat, 2010). In 2012 Indonesia began efforts to join BRICS (Indonesia Considers Joining BRICS,

2012). The admission of such a strong regional player as Indonesia with the world’s fourth largest population, can help expand BRICS influence to Southeast Asia and the Islamic world.

BRICS accounts for 30% of the world’s landmass and 42% of the world’s population. In 2010, the GDP of its member states made up 18% of the world’s GDP and their trade accounted for 15% of global trade turnover. Figure 2 below shows GDP growth forecast for BRIC in international comparison:

Figure 2

Output and Employment – Recent Trends



Source: *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/markets/indicators/>

Russia in BRICS

Initiator

Russia was an initiator of the establishment of BRIC; in particular President Putin offered four countries to begin practical collaboration (Lavrov, 2012). The foreign ministers of the four BRIC countries met in

New York City in September 2006, beginning a series of high-level meetings. A full-scale diplomatic meeting was held in Ekaterinburg, Russia, on May 16, 2008 (Cooperation within BRIC, 2009). In 2010, Medvedev stated that “Russia would like the cooperation between the BRIC countries to become a major factor of multilateral diplomacy and to make a substantial contribution to promoting the nascent multipolarity and development of collective leadership by the world’s leading countries” (Snetkov, Aris, 2011). Although some analysts have questioned the validity of the inclusion of Russia within the BRIC grouping, in particular because it is argued that the strength and capacity for growth of the Russian economy is not comparable to those of China, India and Brazil. However, whether or not Russia can objectively be characterized as a “rising power”, the narrative surrounding BRIC continues to hold prevalence within the international system.

Since 2009, the BRICS group has established annual BRICS summits, each hosted by a different member country. The first summit was in June 2009 in Ekaterinburg, Russia; the second summit was in April 2010 in Brasilia, Brazil; the third summit was in April 2011 in Sanya, China and the fourth summit in March 2012 in New Delhi, India. In 2011 there was formed the BRICS Forum, an independent international organization encouraging commercial, political and cultural cooperation between the BRICS nations.

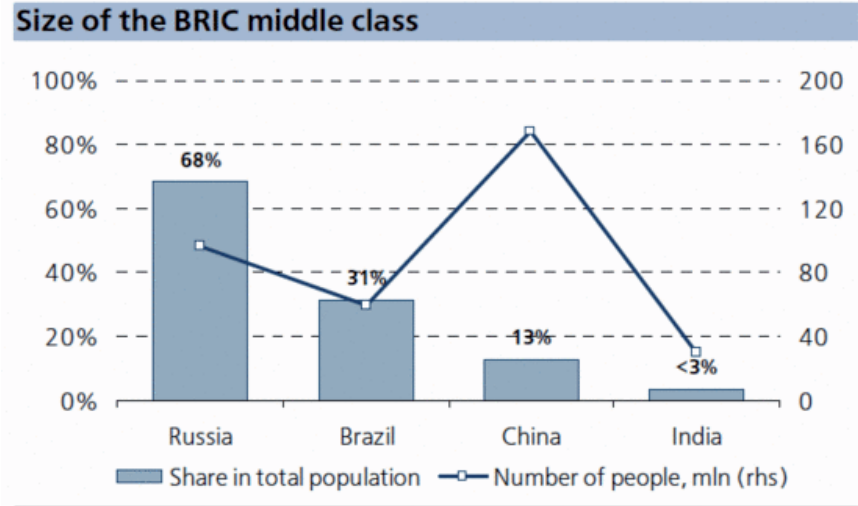
The most equal within BRICS

Although Russia has more dollar billionaires than almost any other nation, the inequality in Russia is growing more slowly than any of the BRIC countries and incomes are more evenly distributed than in the United States (Moscow Blog: The Most Equitable Bric, 2010). Currently Sweden is the most equitable nation on earth with a gini coefficient (measuring inequality) of 23 and Namibia is the least, with a coefficient of 70. In Russia, the rich certainly got a lot richer over the last 10 years, with the well-connected business elite becoming some of the richest people on earth. However, the decade-long economic boom that started af-

ter Vladimir Putin became president in 2000 meant that the poor moved toward middle class status even faster. Russia’s GDP increased 7,5-fold over the last decade, from around \$200 billion to \$1,5 trillion; at the same time, average wages increased 14-fold over the same period, from \$50 to around \$700 a month. Russia’s gini coefficient rose from 39,9 in 2001 to 42,3 in 2008 – lower than the United States in both relative and absolute terms, and a lower value than any of the other BRIC countries.

A burgeoning middle class has been established almost overnight. When Putin launched his long-term reform plan, he called for moving 60% of the population into the middle class by 2020. According to a new report by leading investment bank “Troika Dialog”, Russia is already there: “Troika” claims the middle class (defined in Russia as income/capita of more than \$6,000 a year) already makes up 68% of the population (Business New Europe, 2010), as seen in figure 3:

Figure 3



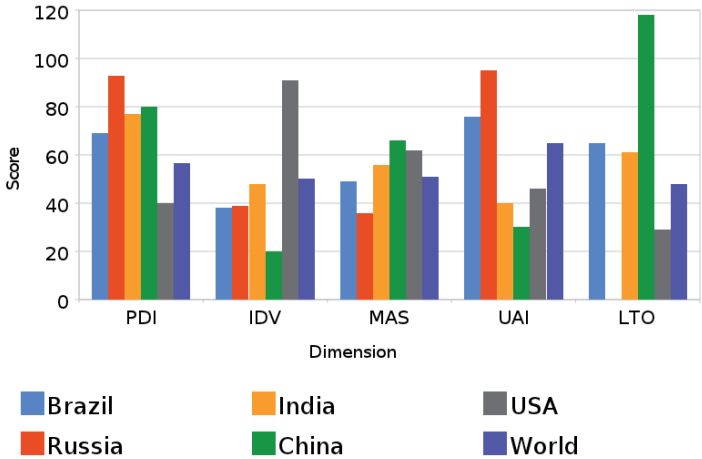
Note: Based on per capita PPP income of \$6,000.

Source: National statistics services

In the study of social media usage in the BRIC countries (Mishra, 2008) the BRIC group was compared with the USA and the world in Geert Hofstede’s framework with five dimensions: Power Distance (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), and Long Term Orientation (LTO). The analysis revealed differences of the BRIC group from the USA, as seen in figure 4³¹ below. In particular, the Power Distance scores for all the BRIC countries are much higher than both the USA and the world average scores. The Individuality scores for the BRIC countries are generally lower than the USA and the world average scores (with India being the minor exception). The Masculinity scores for the BRIC countries are in the same range as the USA and the world average scores. The Uncertainty Avoidance scores for Brazil and Russia are much higher than the USA and world average scores while the scores for India and China are much lower. The Long Term Orientation scores for the BRIC countries (and especially China) are much higher than the USA and the world average scores.

Figure 4

BRIC Geert Hofstede Scores



³¹ Source: Mishra 2008. URL: <https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu>

These findings show that the cultural context of the BRICS group is collectivist, paternalist and status-oriented as distinct from the US cultural context representing Western cultures which are highly individualistic and organized around the principles of consultation and reciprocity based on more or less normative rules. These deep differences between the BRICS context and the Western context have profound significance for the media systems and journalism and need research. They suggest thinking about how to apply Western made conceptions and theories in non-Western contexts.

Discussion

The question of a media system is a pivotal issue in studies of media and communication in rapidly changing national economies and cultures faced with globalization. *Comparing Media Systems* by Hallin and Mancini (Hallin, Mancini, 2004) has become for scholars and students alike one of the most quoted books in the field, at least in Europe. Its popularity has led to their new extended volume *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (2012). Parallel to this is the perspective opened up by *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Christians, Glasser, McQuail et al., 2009) which has precipitated the move of the canonical *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1956) from a pervasive framework-building status to the field's history of ideas. A broader context for all this is provided by the tide of internationalization and de-westernization of the field (Downing, 1996; Curran, Park, 2000; *Internationalizing Media Studies*, 2009) and recently demonstrated by Thomas Hanitzsch (Hanitzsch, 2007) a multinational network the *Worlds of Journalism (WJS)* pulling together journalism researchers for the systematic analysis of journalism cultures from a wide array of cultural contexts.

An important contribution to comparative media studies was made by the late Swedish scholar Jan Ekecrantz (Ekecrantz, 2007) in an ar-

ticle based on a conference at the Moscow State University. He discussed the evolution of media/society models from the traditional quadrant of politics-economics-technology-culture to a post-modernist culture-audience version and proposed an “integrated institutional model” which would accommodate the changing sociopolitical situations (ibid). And he did this in the context of post-communist Russia, including “the neo-authoritarian state and the clash of media civilizations” (ibid).

In the same spirit, Nordenstreng (2010a) points out that the old way of viewing Russia as something special is no longer valid. Also, an overview of the media in contemporary Russia (Nordenstreng, Pietiläinen, 2010) shows that, despite setbacks in the movement from autocracy to democracy, the overall picture is not totally gloomy. A collection of contributions from earlier Academy research projects on media in Russia (Russian Media and Changing Values, 2010) presents quite a varied landscape. Indeed, the Russian media system is in flux – as is the whole country highlighted by the title *Russia in Flux* of Research Programme 2004–2007 funded by the Academy of Finland.

The same flux metaphor is also applicable to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe and indeed to China – a perspective highlighted by Colin Sparks (Sparks, 2010). Actually Ekecrantz (Ekecrantz, 2007) was also led from examining Russia to considering China, as were Nordenstreng and Paasilinna in the anthology from the Academy project on Russian media in 1990s (Nordenstreng, Paasilinna, 2001).

Sparks’ important essay raises critical questions about the theoretical basis of comparing media systems. Like the concept of a media system, the question of comparison – at a time of global integration also makes nation-states increasingly problematic although by no means obsolete – has also become a vital topic in media and communication studies, as demonstrated by the *Handbook of Comparative Communication Research*, which includes an overview by Sonia Livingstone (Livingstone, 2011). Highlighting the same trend is *Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives* (Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives, 2010).

The comparative perspective of the global media landscape is no doubt high on the scholarly agenda, but most scholars approach it from a particular national or regional angle. The angle of our new project *Media Systems in Flux: The Challenge of the BRICS Countries* was originally Russia – with China as a point of comparison. What this project proposes is to widen the angle to three other countries, India, Brazil and South Africa, opening up perspectives on the consolidation of democracy in large developing countries on different continents. This selection of countries follows a new coalition in global politics, which started a few years ago between Brazil, Russia, India and China – known as “BRIC” – and in 2010 was extended to also include South Africa, making it “BRICS”.

Media system is a concept used in media studies since the 1980s and by now it has become a standard framework in describing and assessing the overall media landscape in a country or region. It typically refers to the legal and economic structures of the media as well as to surrounding political and philosophical doctrines. The current Russian media system offers an intriguing case with elements of both a Western libertarian system and an Eastern communitarian system, often referred to as “Eurasian”. Rather than studying it alone and in relation to two main directions of West/Europe and East/Asia, a new approach for its analysis is provided by the emerging geopolitical entity known as “BRICS” – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. These countries are large by their geographical and population size and their economies are rapidly growing. Although they are different in many respects, they share crucial features in the globalizing world, making them a vanguard group of the developing world. Moreover, there are opinions about BRICS’s potential and investment opportunities to create a new world order.

We see importance of the BRICS framework owing to: 1) growing political influence of the BRICS group in the world; 2) becoming framework in many areas of research; 3) ours the first attempt in international media studies; 4) a route to go away from Western transitology.

The Russian media system itself is full of contradictions and paradoxes which cannot be fruitfully analyzed just in terms of the conventional

dimensions. The BRICS context is used as an attempt to open new intellectual avenues. But to understand Russian media system in the context of BRICS we also take the USA as a reference point. It is interesting to explore the potential of Liberal model based on pure Anglo-Saxon culture with a strong national tradition as compared to the BRICS countries which represent hybrid or mixed culture. For example, Russia composes of 11 time zones; has several traditional religions: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist; includes over 100 nationalities; only in the Republic of Dagestan there are 15 official languages. Russia has several political regimes: liberal democratic, authoritarian, feudal, quasi-shariah.

BRICS countries present a challenge to democracy in general and the role of media and journalism in democracy in particular. Their spectrum is ranging from Western democracy (India) through authoritarian regimes (Russia) to communist rule (China). They show different political solutions and there is no uniform development suggested by Western transitology. This article based on the new research project in the making raises questions rather than offers definite answers.

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