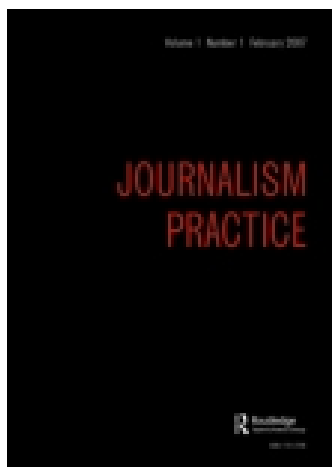


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RUSSIAN AND SWEDISH JOURNALISTS

Professional roles, ideals and daily reality

Gunnar Nygren and Elena Degtereva

To strive for autonomy is key to professional journalistic culture, although the degree of autonomy varies between countries and media systems. A survey distributed to 100 journalists in Sweden and Russia explores their views on journalistic autonomy: the professional duties of journalists, the degree of autonomy they enjoy in their day-to-day work, as well as journalists' opinions about the development of press freedom. The findings reveal that journalists in both countries share many professional values but also feel pressures on their professional autonomy—in Sweden mostly a commercial pressure and in Russia predominantly a political pressure but also the commercial interests of owners and advertisers. There are also some clear differences. Independence in daily work is less for Russian journalists and the obstacles ahead of publishing more common—and they have a negative view on the development of press freedom.

KEYWORDS autonomy; commercialization; media development; political pressure; press freedom; professionalization

Introduction

Journalistic culture has become an important notion in comparative media research. Journalistic culture has a broad definition, as a “whole way of living”. It contains not only values and ideals, but also practices and tacit knowledge. There are different levels in the analysis of journalistic culture—a *cognitive* level with questions about how they shape the world, an *evaluative* level with concerns about occupational ideologies and a *performative* level that materializes in journalistic practice (Hanitzsch, 2007).

This professional culture has different common traits. Hallin and Mancini (2004) define three dimensions to analyze the professionalization of journalism—the autonomy of the profession, distinctive professional norms and the degree of a public service orientation. Other European researchers, like Mark Deuze (2008), give the same dimensions but add traits and values like immediacy and objectivity. American scholar Michael Schudson (2003) reduces the dimensions of journalistic professionalism to norms and practices regulated in ethical codes and journalistic independence and autonomy within commercial media companies.

Comparing different media systems reveals that journalistic professional norms differ (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). But common to journalistic cultures in most countries, even if the values differ, is a struggle for autonomy and independence. It give journalists a legitimacy for audiences and society, the control over the work process empowers journalists to defend their norms and values both as individuals and as a profession.

The professional autonomy of journalists is often analyzed in relation to political parallelism, the relation between the political system and journalism. A strong political parallelism means strong organizational and personal ties between media and the political system, often manifested in partisanship both among journalists and among

media audiences. A strong political parallelism in these cases often means a weak journalistic profession, as well as weak common norms and values (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

Professional autonomy can also be analyzed in relation to economic pressures. The commercialization of news, high profit expectations and the erosion of journalistic independence within media companies are regarded as threats to professional independence (Weaver et al., 2007). Historically commercialization has encouraged professionalism among journalists in the very act of commodifying news (Schudson, 2003). When media companies become profitable enough, they can resist outside pressures from advertisers and political interests. But the marketplace offers both freedom and constraints.

Political pressures and commercial pressures do not exclude each other. There are also mixed media systems where there is both a strong political parallelism and a strong commercialization; China offers an obvious example. With a strong formal or informal state control of media, the market offers little if any autonomy to journalism, at least in the area of politics (Schudson, 2003). A system like Russia has been described as a "Eurasian" model with the mix of western media market economy and the use of media by the "state-market" complex with both repression and partisan journalism (Vartanova, 2007).

A Strong Commercial Pressure in Sweden

Autonomy for journalism can be analyzed at both individual and collective levels; the influence of the single journalist in his/her daily work, and the influence of journalists as a group in the media company. Professional autonomy is a question of power in relation to other groups in the media company and in society (political power and strong economical interests). This relation changes across time and at the same time also the degree of autonomy.

In Sweden, the old system of a partisan press faded during the 1970s. With the influence of public service ideals in television and radio, professional journalism education and strong professional institutions (journalism unions and an ethical system of self-regulation), the independence of journalism grew (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2001).

Since 1989 surveys among Swedish journalists show that the ideal of being a watchdog over power in society is the single strongest ideal, and it has grown stronger in successive surveys. In their survey responses, journalists proclaim themselves to have a substantial influence on both editorial policy and their daily work. But since 1995 they also clearly say that their influence is diminishing, in favor of the owners, the advertisers and the audience. In media companies, market/advertising departments exercise a stronger influence over content, and journalists speak about high levels of stress and a growing influence for news sources and public relations (Asp, 2007).

In the last 10–15 years there are signs of a weaker journalistic profession in Sweden: professional institutions like the unions have lost members and influence, a difficult labor market for journalists weakens the position of the individual journalist and the division of labor within media production is less clear with high demands on multiskilling. The values of the profession are under strong pressures from commercialization (Nygren and Witschge 2009).

Ups and Downs in Russia

The history of post-Soviet Russian media can be divided into several stages. Since the establishment of the Law about the press in 1990, Russian media passed from “The Golden Age”—the period of privatization when media enjoyed maximum freedom (1990–1992)—through the stage of the forming of the new media system with commercialization and propagandistic mechanisms before the presidential elections (1992–1996). In the process of politicization, media became the main environment for political communication following penetration of politicized and commercial capital into the regional markets (1998–2000) (Zassoursky, 2004). The beginning of “Putin’s period” was marked by the “collapsing of the media of the democratic republic and the epoch of declining oligarchs” for the Russian media system (2000–2001). It was transformed gradually under the intensification of the state bureaucracy’s influence (initially for television). On the latest stages controlled TV policy was changed to censored TV policy (Kachkaeva, 2005).

According to interviews with leading Russian experts, there are different traits in Russian journalism today—a traditional demand for opinion rather than facts, mistrust against journalism not only from the audience but also from journalists themselves, a striking decline of professionalism and growing self-censorship (Khvostunova and Voinova, 2009).

Independence and self-sufficiency has been an important professional quality in studies conducted by Russian researchers since the beginning of the 1990s. In a national survey from 1992–93, about 70 percent of journalists felt sufficiently autonomous in their work. But subsequently, journalists have gradually been subordinated to the authorities, owners and other structures. Journalists still have high goals concerning their professional obligations, but it is increasingly difficult to meet them (Svitich and Shirayeva 2009). Journalism in Russia has moved towards business and public relations, according to studies of journalists from St Petersburg (Pasti 2010). This marginalizes quality journalism and the feeling for the public interest, according to the study. The new generation of Russian journalists analyzed in the study is comprised of pragmatic individuals that combine an adaption to the political order with a market orientation and priority for their individual careers.

The Sample and the Methods

The project “Professional Journalistic Culture” was conducted in cooperation by the departments of journalism at Södertörn University, Stockholm University and Moscow State University, 2008–2011. The results from a survey among students of journalism at six universities in Sweden and Russia have been published (Nygren et al., 2010). In the second stage, a survey among 100 working journalists in each country has been conducted across 2010–2011. The purpose of the survey has been to study opinions among journalists about their professional values and duties, as well as their attitudes towards—and the reality concerning—their professional autonomy and the influence of other groups on their daily journalism practice along with their views on press freedom.

The sample in each country is in general comparable, with about 70 percent from the capital and 30 percent from regional media. The focus in the survey is on reporters (60–65 percent in both countries) and on news media, both national and regional. In the Swedish sample, the proportion between genders is representative of the broader

journalist population, while the sample group is slightly above average age and the proportion of journalists from public service media is larger, reflecting the focus on news reporters in the capital. In the Russian sample the journalists in the survey are younger, more highly educated and more female than Swedish journalists, a profile also noticed by other researchers (Pasti, 2010).

In Sweden, the sample was chosen randomly among members of the Journalist Union and among reporters in some selected newsrooms. In Russia, the sample was composed of a mix of personal contacts in different newsrooms via some faculties of journalism, a “snowball sample” (Esaiasson et al., 2003).

Professional Duties for Journalists

The most important duties are very much the same among Swedish and Russian journalists—to disseminate information quickly and to avoid stories with unverified facts. Other important duties in both countries are to analyze problems and to develop public interest towards issues and questions of consequence for society.

Journalists in both countries share a picture of what is important in the profession, and they feel some kind of responsibility towards the audience and society. But there are also differences in the views on involvement in society. For Russian journalists it is more important to “set the political agenda” and for Swedish journalists it is more important to let the audience express their views. This difference was noticed previously in a US/Russian survey from 1992, where Russian journalists were more willing to participate than their US colleagues (Wu et al., 1996).

But the largest difference in 2010 is on the duty to “investigate government claims” (Table 1). In Sweden, journalists give this professional obligation a high score on the four-grade scale (mean 3.4), but in Russia the equivalent score is much lower at mean 2.3. In the US/Russian survey of 1992, the figures for “investigating government claims” were significantly higher in Russia.

This difference is also clear in the answers to another question about the concept of press freedom (Table 2). Russian journalists have lower demands for freedom from the state and for freedom to criticize political power than their Swedish colleagues. All of the 101 Swedish journalists in the survey believe it is very important to have the freedom to

TABLE 1

How important are the following duties for a journalist in Sweden/Russia? (mean)

Duties	Russia	Sweden
To avoid stories with unverified facts	3.6	3.5
To disseminate information quickly	3.5	3.6
To analyze/interpret problems	3.2	3.3
To develop public interest towards questions important for society	3.0	3.3
To get the widest audience	3.0	3.1
To set the political agenda	2.9	2.5
To let the audience express their views	2.6	3.1
To discuss national policy	2.5	2.9
To entertain	2.3	2.8
To investigate government claims	2.3	3.4

Scale: 1 is least important and 4 is most important.

TABLE 2

How important are the following parts of the concept "press freedom" for you? (mean)

	Russia	Sweden
Freedom from the state	3.2	4.0
Freedom from commercial influence	3.4	3.8
Freedom to say everything you want	3.2	3.7
Freedom to criticize political power	2.7	4.0
Editorial freedom within the media company	3.4	3.7

Scale: 1 is least important and 4 is most important.

criticize political power; in Russia the mean is much lower. In general, Swedish journalists have greater expectations on all dimensions of press freedom than their Russian counterparts, but of course this does not say so much about the *actual* level of press freedom.

Dissatisfaction Among Russian Journalists

In general, many professional duties are the same. But are the journalists satisfied with how they fulfill their responsibilities towards society? On this question, Russian journalists reveal a greater degree of discontent than their Swedish colleagues; 43 percent of Russian journalists completely or partly disagree with survey statements on this matter while the equivalent figure for responses from Swedish journalists is 15 percent (Table 3).

Twenty-five of the Russian journalists added comment to these questions. Many of them illustrate the political pressures on journalists. A 30-year-old female journalist claims: "They fulfill responsibilities towards the Russian power and affiliated business that owns the media". Other comments suggest that there is a low level of claims for serious journalism from the audience:

Journalists fulfill professional duties according to the demands of the modern audience. Unfortunately, the audience is most interested in the entertainment, yellow journalism now. (Female journalist, 24 years, newspaper/Web)

The Swedish responses offer fewer such comments; only eight. Some of them stress the conditions at work, including the downsizing of newsrooms. On other questions concerning the current state of the Swedish media, comments also emphasize commercialization and the strong entertainment orientation as negative for journalism.

TABLE 3

Do you agree that Swedish/Russian journalists fulfill their responsibilities towards society? (%)

	Russia	Sweden	Total
Disagree	13	1	7
Partly disagree	30	14	22
Partly agree	52	63	58
Agree	4	20	12
Don't know	1	2	1
Total	100	100	100

Journalists' Autonomy in Their Day-to-day Work?

One question in the survey focused on journalists' perceived autonomy in their day-to-day work, and the answers suggest that Swedish journalists' work typically reflects their own ideas and agenda (Table 4). The editor only infrequently changes anything in their copy ahead of publishing.

In Russia, the independence of journalists in their daily work is a little less. About 40 percent of Russian journalists use their own ideas, a result which matches a US survey from 2002 (Weaver et al., 2007). For Swedish journalists the equivalent figure of 67 percent is significantly higher.

Responses to another question signal a more complex picture. Russian journalists regard their professional independence as equal to their Swedish colleagues, both concerning decisions about their news subjects and journalistic decisions in general (Table 5). Feelings of independence are not lesser in Russia but, on the contrary, Russian journalists regard their freedom to manage their own time as considerably greater than among their Swedish colleagues: 50 percent of Swedish journalists say they have no or nearly no freedom at all to manage their own time, compared with only 21 percent among Russian journalists. Swedish journalists seem to have a higher pressure to produce and less possibility to manage their own time.

The Choice of Subjects

Responses are similar when journalists are questioned about what kind of factors influence the selection of subjects for their reports. The professional interest of the journalist is the most important, according to the survey (Table 6). Other important factors are audience interest and the editorial policy of the media company. But there are also important differences. In Russia, the political affiliation of the media company and advertisers have an important influence on the selection of subjects.

How is it possible to combine a strong professional interest with a quite strong political influence? One possible answer is visible in the comments from a 21-year-old female Web reporter: "We need to remember", she suggests, "that the policy of media

TABLE 4
How dependent or independent are you in editorial decisions?

	Russia			Sweden		
	Mean	4–5 (%)	1–2 (%)	Mean	4–5 (%)	1–2 (%)
How often do you implement your own ideas in choosing the subject for the work?	3.2	41		3.8	67	
How often do you discuss the ongoing work with your editor/ chief?	3.9	67		3.8	62	
How often does your editor change anything in your product before publishing?	2.5		55	1.9		75

Scale: 1 is very seldom and 5 is very often.

TABLE 5

To what extent are you independent as a journalist in your daily work

	Russia	Sweden
Independence to decide about the subject	3.4	3.4
Independence in journalistic decisions	3.8	3.6
Free to manage my own time	3.4	2.6

Scale: 1 is not at all and 4 is very much.

defines everything in the daily work of the journalist. Every journalist chooses his/her place of work”.

This answer gives a picture of “political parallelism”, strong connections between journalists and the political system. Another 43-year-old female television reporter claims that “journalists depend on the power and politics”. And many other Russian journalists give answers in the same direction. Other common methods to influence journalists, for example, are information from agents on behalf of a hidden source. A 23-year-old Web reporter describes it as “attempts to persuade journalists to write about something said by high-ranking officials but making the reference to an anonym source”.

Swedish journalists put more emphasis on audiences and their demands for news. A 45-year-old female television journalist offers this comment:

Customers’ demand for free news will force us to produce at low cost. Commercialization will also make news programs produce more that the customers want instead of what we think is important.

Russian journalists also make comments about media commercialization, and place the influence of advertisers higher than their Swedish colleagues. A 24-year-old female reporter writes:

Media are much commercialized and increasingly entertainment oriented. But not all, the current situation promotes a development of investigative journalism. But such kind of journalism seems like kitsch à la NTV-style with “scandals, intrigues, investigations”.

TABLE 6

Different factors can influence the selection of subjects in the daily work of media organizations. How do you evaluate the significance of the following factors? (mean)

	Russia	Sweden
Professional interest of the journalist	4.1	4.0
The editorial policy of the media company	3.9	3.7
Audience interest	3.7	3.9
Needs and interest of the society	3.4	3.3
The political affiliation of the media company	2.9	1.5
Strong political actors outside the media company	2.4	1.8
Advertisers	2.4	1.5
Economical power outside the media company	2.2	1.7

Scale: 1 is insignificant and 5 is significant.

Obstacles Before Publishing?

Both Russian and Swedish journalists assess professional interest as the most important factor in selecting the subjects for their work. But at the end of the editorial process, obstacles can be raised ahead of publishing, both by actors within the media company and from outside (Table 7).

Generally, Swedish journalists acknowledge only a few such obstacles, and these are often connected to the editorial policy of the media company. Some Swedish journalists, for example, mention the system of ethical self-regulation as such an obstacle.

In Russia, journalists generally feel a greater awareness of such constraints, especially where they reflect the political and economical interests of the owners of the media company. The political influence that was evident in the selection of subjects is also obvious ahead of publishing. A 23-year-old Web reporter writes:

Media are working in conditions of some degree of self-censorship. The situation in state media and in media belonging to the leading party, is even worse: the political interests of the party or officials define the editorial policy.

Another 46-year-old reporter working for a news agency writes that “the dependence on power becomes stronger at all the levels”. But there are also different views among Russian journalists. An experienced editor puts responsibility on the individual journalist:

The level of media freedom depends on the level of competence of the journalist: the professional will find the right words and will be able to draw attention to the problem. An amateur will not bother to search for expressions, nuance and intonation, while his own failure will be explained by the intrigues of “the enemies of glasnost”. (Newspaper editor, 51 years)

The State of the Media?

When journalists are asked to evaluate the general situation for media in Russia and Sweden, the picture differs (Table 8). In Russia, the situation is judged to be less stable, according to journalists. The pressure comes equally from political polarization, commercialization and entertainment—all these trends are important for Russian journalists. A Web reporter gives the following comment:

TABLE 7

How often do journalists at your media company face the following obstacles before final publishing/broadcast? (mean)

	Russia	Sweden
Limits in the editorial policy of the media company	3.2	1.9
Political interests of the owners of the media company	2.7	1.3
Economic interests of the media company	2.6	1.7
Pressure from political actors outside the media company	2.2	1.5
Pressure from advertisers	2.1	1.5

Scale: 1 is very seldom and 5 is very often.

TABLE 8

How can you describe the current state of Swedish/Russian media? (share that have chosen each alternative, %)

	Russia	Sweden
The position of media is stable	29	42
Media are under stagnation	34	31
Media are very politicized	43	2
Media are very commercialized	39	54
Media are much entertainment oriented	40	68
Media encourages investigative journalism	8	22

Media are stagnating. Television is undergoing organizational and content degradation. At the same time the less popular and less powerful radio is developing and looking for new formats. Online journalism is becoming more popular in conditions of less outside pressure because high-ranking officials don't pay so much attention to the new media.

A 28-year-old male Russian TV reporter says that the "diversity of resources and views is becoming more restricted" and a female newspaper editor (51 years old) claims "stagnation, as the truly professional publications are becoming less and less in numbers. A huge number of militant dilettantes have taken over the media, especially TV and radio".

In Sweden the situation is considered more stable. The changes are much more from one direction—from commercialization and entertainment. Nearly 7 in 10 Swedish journalists in the survey define media as much oriented towards entertainment.

Levels of Press Freedom

Many Russian journalists (43 percent of survey respondents) believe that the level of press freedom has declined across the last decade (Table 9).

Press freedom has declined. We can see a suppression and falsification of information, a predominance of socially and politically insignificant themes in reporting. (Female newspaper reporter, 39 years old)

It declined, beginning in the mid-1990s. This phenomenon links with V. Putin personally and with his conservative reforms which gave us stability but returned our country back to stagnation. (Male newspaper reporter, 35 years old)

In Sweden, the level of press freedom is more stable; most journalists think it has not changed. Those who believe it has declined comment on less pluralism in the media and

TABLE 9

The level of press freedom in Sweden/Russia across the last decade has... (%)

	Russia	Sweden	Total
...declined	43	14	29
...not changed	38	59	48
...grown	11	16	14
...no opinion	8	11	9
Total	100	100	100

argue that “freedom of speech is sometimes challenged by religious arguments” (male TV reporter, 31 years old).

Some Conclusions

Journalists in Sweden and Russia are part of the same journalistic universe and are not so different in their values and beliefs as might be imagined. The most important duties for a journalist are the same—to disseminate information quickly and verify the facts, to analyze and to develop the public interest concerning significant questions for society. Journalists in Sweden and Russia argue that it is their professional interests which are the most important factor in selecting subjects for their day-to-day work. But there are also differences, concerning ideals and their daily professional routines.

So far as ideals are concerned, the difference is evident in the modest support which Russian journalists offer to the professional duty to investigate government claims and to criticize political power. But even with these differences, Russian journalists show a great discontent with the way their duties are fulfilled by themselves. They feel a double pressure—both the commercial and the strong political pressure that some of them describe as self-censorship. In Sweden, journalists are quite satisfied with how their ideals are fulfilled, but they also feel a strong commercial pressure.

Differences are also evident in journalists’ routine work. Swedish journalists enjoy greater independence in choosing the subjects for their work and in editorial decisions, but they also feel under considerable pressure in their daily work and argue they are not free to manage their own time. In Russia, journalists feel a much stronger political and economic pressure both in the selection of subjects and confronting obstacles ahead of publishing; both from owners in the media company and from political actors and advertisers beyond.

But in Russia there is a sense of independence concerning day-to-day work. The degree of independence to decide about subjects and to make journalistic decisions are the same, according to journalists in both countries, despite other differences. There can be different explanations to this paradox:

- In Russia, there are lower expectations when it comes to freedom in relation to political power. It is from this tradition that Russian journalists evaluate their independence.
- Some of the comments in the survey argue that every journalist chooses their place of work, and consequently the kind of journalism they want to undertake and within what kind of political affiliation.
- Many young journalists choose to work with subjects other than politics, such as those areas where political pressures are weaker like business, entertainment and lifestyle (Nygren et al., 2010).

New Media Models?

A strong professionalization is a key factor in the model Hallin and Mancini (2004) created for north European countries including Sweden, the “democratic corporatist” model. Findings from the survey here reveal a continuing professional autonomy, but also forceful commercial pressures. The degree of political parallelism is low, and that might

indicate that Swedish journalism is drawing closer to the “Anglo-Saxon model”, but still with strong public service ideals in conflict with pressures in day-to-day work.

For Russia, the results indicate a high degree of political parallelism in the media system, and consequently also a lesser degree of professional autonomy. The journalists show in their answers that political ties and pressure are much more influential than they would like, and many see a declining press editorial freedom. But there is also a commercial pressure from owners and advertisers. This links the results to the “Eurasian media model” described by the Russian researcher Elena Vartanova (2007). This model adopts elements from western market economy, but combines them with non-market goals defined by political elites. The result is a “lack of media market transparency, elements of bribery and corruption of journalists by politicians, suppressed commercial motives in media companies’ activity and the instrumental use of media by the state–market complex” (Vartanova, 2007, p. 117).

The professionalization of journalism is closely linked with the development of commercial media, at least in the history of US journalism (Schudson, 2003). In Russia, the development of commercial media has not had this effect so far—instead, Russian journalists feel the double pressures from commercial interests *and* politics. This “Eurasian” model allows only a limited professional autonomy for Russian journalists.

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