

Marta Dyczok

Do the Media Matter? Focus on Ukraine

Introduction

In November 2004 hundreds of thousands of people in Kyiv and various cities of Ukraine took to the streets to protest against a corrupt establishment's attempt to steal a presidential election. These events have become known as the Orange Revolution (Åslund and McFaul 2006; Krushelnycky 2006; Wilson 2005).

The protests ultimately succeeded in reversing the fraudulent electoral results and a new vote being held. They were very dramatic and much talked about and written about. They also occurred in a society which had endured heavy handed state censorship and media manipulation for years.

Two years earlier, in 2002, Ukrainian opposition parties won almost 60% of the popular vote in the parliamentary election.¹ This despite the fact that they had been largely denied access to mainstream media. The establishment parties controlled and owned much of the media system, yet together they received less than 20% of the votes² (Dyczok 2005a).

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1 The four opposition parties received 57.68% of the popular vote. The largest share went to the pro-Yushchenko Our Ukraine Bloc, 23.57% of the vote, followed by the Communist Party at 19.98%, Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc with 7.26% and the Socialist Party 6.87%.

2 The establishment parties together received 18.04% of the popular vote.

Back in 1991, over 90% of Ukrainians voted for independence even though the central Soviet media was advocating the preservation of a federal state, and opposing Ukraine's secession.³

What does this tell us about the relationship between mass media, politics, economics and society in a country undergoing fundamental political changes? How can theoretical models help to analyze and explain these events?

This paper explores a series of larger questions about media, communications, and post communist change, by focusing the lens on one country, Ukraine. After surveying the main media developments in Ukraine from *glasnost* to the present, it argues that *the role of media has in fact been ambiguous* in the larger political, economic, social, and national changes underway. It critically re-examines a number of the most often used theoretical approaches and highlights issues that need to be re-theorized to arrive at more useful approach for analyzing this shifting empirical terrain. These include a discussion of media power, typologies of media systems, media and democratization, media audiences, and the impact of globalization. It echoes the work of other scholars who call for closer intellectual collaboration between political scientists and media scholars, and the need to move away from normative, teleological approaches and lingering Cold War binary frameworks.

3 There were two referenda in 1991, one in March and one in December. The 17 March referendum was organized by Gorbachev and asked all residents of the USSR whether they supported the Union Treaty. Ukraine added a second question, asking about support for Ukrainian sovereignty. In the March poll, the results were ambiguous. 70.2 % supported the Union Treaty and 80.2% supported Ukrainian sovereignty. In December a second referendum was held asking Ukrainians whether they supported Parliament's Declaration of Independence. 90.2% voted yes.

Focus on Ukraine

Ukraine's media system underwent tremendous changes in the twenty years from *glasnost* to the aftermath of the Orange Revolution. It went from being part of a closed, highly centralized, state owned Soviet media system, to a geographically re-territorialized, diverse, modern media environment integrated into global communications networks. Yet what impact did these changes have on public opinion and social action? Did the media play a significant role in the two main power shifts that occurred, in 1991 and 2004?

Prior to becoming independent in 1991, Ukraine's media was integrated into the Soviet media system. This can best be visualized as a series of concentric circles, with power concentrated at the centre. The all-Union media structure covered the entire territory of the USSR and each republic had its own sub-system, which in turn had regional and local level media outlets. In this centralized system, decision making power and resource allocation remained in the hands of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow. For a variety of reasons, the republican level media systems were less well funded than the all-Union one; consequently they were less technologically developed, staffed by lower quality journalists and overall less influential and popular. For example, *Pravda* was published in Moscow and circulated throughout the USSR, while *Pravda Ukrainy* appeared only in Ukraine. Most Ukrainians had to subscribe to both, but according to available sources *Pravda* was the preferred read.

Gorbachev's reforms liberalized the entire political system, including the media. Changes in Ukraine and other republics were introduced more slowly than in Moscow, and thus the trend to prefer Moscow media became even stronger. System wide structural changes began only in the spring of 1990, when a new Soviet Media Law was adopted that ended the Communist Party (CP) monopoly on media ownership and significantly reduced state censorship.⁴

4 On 12 March 1990, the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow adopted the Media Law, which was ratified and signed by Gorbachev 12 June 1990, and came into effect 1 August 1990. See *Current Digest of Soviet Press* 42 (25): 11.

Previously banned media became legalized Union-wide, and this in turn further opened up the public sphere and protest was articulated more openly.

However, in reality it was very difficult for alternative groups to create new media outlets and disseminate their messages for both economic and logistical reasons. Alternative media consisted of small circulation newspapers and magazines, since creating new TV and radio channels was prohibitively expensive, and obtaining broadcast licenses was complicated. Thus despite the fact that restrictions on media were lifted, most of the media product available to Soviet citizens, especially in the broadcast sector, was produced by the old CP owned media system. Within that old system there were some diverse messages, although for the most part within a certain set of parameters. In Ukraine, as before, changes continued to proceed more slowly.

Things came to a head in August 1991 when, after a failed coup attempt, Ukraine's Parliament declared independence. The act was overwhelmingly supported in a public referendum in December of the same year.

Upon taking control of the political reins, Ukraine's leadership confirmed the end of state censorship, the right to private ownership and lowered barriers to the outside world. Almost immediately the number of media outlets increased and journalists experienced previously unheard of freedoms. The number of print media outlets grew dramatically, 'like mushrooms after a rainfall',⁵ and new broadcasting companies sprang up all over the country. A new legal and regulatory framework was created, starting with the 1992 Law on Information and the creation of the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council in 1994.⁶ As a market economy began evolving and foreign funding became available, privately owned media grew. Within ten years the media system was predominantly in private hands. With the coming down of Cold War barriers, new digital media arrived and integrated Ukraine into global

5 Interview with Svitlana Yeremenko, journalist and civic activist, Donetsk, October 2004.

6 For a full list of laws please see http://www.rada.gov.ua/svobodaslova/law_obesp.html.

communications networks and norms. By 2004 Ukraine had the fastest growth rates in internet usage in Europe.⁷ Parallel to this, Ukraine became disengaged from the old Moscow centric media system and information flows became reoriented from the new capital, Kyiv.

However, in part due to the intense economic crisis at the beginning of the 1990s, and in part because of the manner in which privatization was carried out, the new media landscape grew into a hybrid system. The state retained ownership of part of the media system, and the private owners who appeared often had very close links with political elites. Perhaps the best illustration of this is in the television sector. By 2000, there were six television channels in Ukraine with national broadcast reach; one remained state owned,⁸ and the other five were reportedly in the hands of two oligarchic groups, one headed by the President's son-in-law, Victor Pinchuk.⁹ Decision making in the media sector became dominated by political interests or pressures on the one hand, and market logic on the other.

A second noticeable trend was that many new media outlets were created for purposes of influence rather than to provide the public with information or generate profits. Media became increasingly viewed as an instrument of political and economic influence. For example, the central Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia has over 100 newspapers for a population of 800,000 people,¹⁰ while the Crimean city of Sevastopol has 15 local TV stations for 350,000 people.¹¹

These media developments were occurring within the larger context of political, economic, and social change. By the late 1990s

7 "Кожен 10 українець має Інтернет" [Every 10th Ukrainian is on the Internet], <http://oglyadach.com/news/2007/12/18/186490.htm>, 18 December 2007, based on data from Miniwatts Marketing Group – InternetWorldStats.

8 Pershyi Natsionalnyi, commonly known as UT1 [First National TV Channel], <http://www.1tv.com.ua/>.

9 Studio 1+1, <http://www.1plus1.ua/>, and INTER, <http://inter.ua/uk/>, were reportedly under the control of the SDPU(o), known as the Kyiv clan, and Novyi Kanal, <http://novy.tv/novy/>, ICTV, <http://www.ictv.ua/>, and STB <http://www.stb.ua/main.php>, were reportedly owned by Victor Pinchuk.

10 Interview with Iryna Yehorova, Deputy chief editor *Industrial Zaporozhye* newspaper, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, 21 October 2004.

11 Interview with Igor Sabel'nikov, National Television and Radio Council of Ukraine, representative in the Crimea and Sevastopol, Sevastopol, Ukraine, 15 September 2004.

the economy had stabilized and went into growth, which meant that quality media outlets began generating profits. But democracy was seriously backsliding. Despite a new constitution which guaranteed freedom of speech, and an impressive legislative base on media issues, the establishment increasingly began to curtail free speech. The situation in Ukraine gained international attention in 2000 when then President Kuchma was implicated in the disappearance of opposition journalist, Heorhii Gongadze (Koshiw 2003). Around this time, the use of *temnyky* emerged as an ingenious means of censorship – the President’s Administration circulated instructions to news rooms on how to frame officially sanctioned news. One of the few zones that remained relatively censorship free was the internet, which grew tremendously during this period and gained the label ‘cyber-samizdat.’¹² This widespread censorship in the mainstream media continued until November 2004, when one in five Ukrainians took to the streets in what has become known as the Orange Revolution.

What does this all suggest about the importance of the media in the two main political events in Ukraine’s recent history, 1991 and 2004?

Conventional wisdom has it that media played a major role in Gorbachev’s *glasnost* policies and the ultimate collapse of the USSR (Freidin 1993; Mickiewicz 1999). Gorbachev’s liberalization of Soviet media did in fact lead to the opening up of a public sphere in the USSR. However, a more careful look shows that it was never Gorbachev’s intention to promote free speech, but rather he tried to use the media to promote his reforms (Gibbs 1999; Tolz 1993).

More importantly, *within the liberalization that was allowed, the national question was not given air time in the all-Union Soviet media system.* In other words, those opposing Soviet control in Ukraine had little access to mainstream media during most of *glasnost*. The pro-independence movement originated in three sources: the dissident movement from the 1960s, the cultural intelligentsia, and the miners in the Donbas (Dyczok 2000). None of these groups had access to the Soviet media, unless to have their cause presented in a negative light.

12 This term was coined by Taras Kuzio.

Soviet citizens did not see the violent crackdown on protesters in Georgia or Lithuania, and the demands of national front movements were not objectively presented in the central media discourse before the USSR collapsed. Even after the Ukrainian Parliament had declared independence in August 1991, Russia's political elites used the powerful central media to campaign against cessation by the republics. On the eve of Ukraine's December 1991 independence referendum, Gorbachev appeared live in a TV broadcast to appeal to Ukrainians to vote against independence.

Yet over 90% of Ukrainians disregarded these political messages transmitted through the central media and opted for independence. It could be argued that they were influenced by the messages being sent out through Ukrainian Republican level media, which was being used by Ukraine's elites to promote the 'Vote yes to independence' message. However, in 1991 the most popular and widely watched TV was still the central channel Ostankino, being beamed out of Moscow, not the Ukrainian Republican one (Mashchenko 1998).

This suggests that despite the importance of media liberalization during the *glasnost* period, opposition to Soviet control of Ukraine came from outside the mainstream of the political and media system, and succeeded without media support. Put another way, *access to media was not the key factor in nationally based opposition to the USSR and popular mobilization against the USSR.*

A similar pattern is visible in the years 2000–2004, when opposition to the political and economic elites had little access to mainstream media yet succeeded in winning the popular vote in 2002, and mobilizing one in five Ukrainians to take to the streets to protest a fraudulent election in 2004.

By the beginning of the new millennium the mainstream media system in Ukraine was tightly in the hands of the state and small oligarchic elite, and society existed in what journalist Iryna Pohorelova labeled an 'information vacuum.'¹³ A diverse media system had emerged which in many ways resembled Western media systems. There were various types of media outlets including digital and

13 Interview with Iryna Pohorelova, journalist, founding editor of *Respublika* newspaper, later worked for *Hrani*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, internet paper, Kyiv, July 2003.

new media, and Ukraine had become integrated into global communications networks. Much information circulated yet the state, in collusion with the large media owners, *effectively prevented opposition voices from being heard in the mediated public sphere.*

During the 2002 Parliamentary election campaign, the mainstream media was clearly biased in favour of the statist and oligarchic parties, and either excluded opposition parties or presented them in a negative light. More than half the election coverage on television was devoted to the Presidential bloc, *For A United Ukraine (Za IEdynu Ukrainu)* while the main opposition bloc *Our Ukraine* received only 13% of the coverage, most of which was negative in tone. Yet *Our Ukraine* received twice the number of votes as *For A United Ukraine* (Dyczok 2005a).

In 2004 the ruling elite intensified their efforts to use media to win the presidency. Their main objective was to preserve the status quo, and their greatest dilemma was the fact that the most popular politician in the country, Victor Yushchenko, was an opposition leader and would likely win in a fair contest. Therefore they embarked on a multi-dimensional 'Stop Yushchenko' project, which included creating an uneven playing field through their abuse of state (administrative) resources, distortion of the electoral process (which was later exposed), and an attempt to manipulate public opinion through the mass media.

The 'Stop Yushchenko' media project used at least three tactics: 1) continued and expanded news censorship including denying Yushchenko access, 2) discrediting Yushchenko in analytical and current affairs shows and, 3) the use and abuse of advertising. Parallel to this was a campaign promoting the establishment's candidate, Victor Yanukovich, by focusing on his record as a successful prime minister. (Dyczok 2005b).

The opposition responded by creating their own TV station, Channel 5.¹⁴ Although it played a key role in providing an alternative point of view and became the most watched channel during the Orange Revolution, the channel had a broadcast reach that covered less than 1/3 of the country. The internet also played an important

14 Please see <http://5.ua/>.

role in giving the opposition candidates a platform to present their views, thereby mobilizing opposition activities, and was instrumental in breaking through the 'information blockade' created by the Kuchma regime (Prytula 2006). However, it should be kept in mind that in 2004, only 8% of Ukraine's population had regular internet access.

Thus the political campaign was fought on a very uneven media playing field, yet, again, despite the intense anti-opposition media campaign, a majority of Ukrainians voted for the opposition candidate, Victor Yushchenko (*Aspects of the Orange Revolution* 2007). When news spread that results were being falsified, opposition turned into protest and hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets.

It seems that once again during the years 2000–2004, elites believed that media is an important tool for shaping public opinion and containing protests, but events demonstrated that this is not the case. Opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko won two elections during this time. His party gained the largest percentage of the popular vote in the parliamentary elections of 2002 and he won the presidential election of 2004, with practically no access to mainstream media, and in a society where only a small fraction of the population had regular internet access.

These events in Ukraine suggest a number of things. Firstly, it seems clear that *opposition ideas can appear and circulate outside official mediated political communications systems. Thus media power is not necessary to affect political change.* In the years leading up to the changes of 1991 and 2004, opposition groups and leaders had little exposure in mainstream media, whether it was the all-Soviet media system during *glasnost* or the Ukrainian national media system in the new millennium. Yet in both cases the opposition succeeded. Secondly, by looking at relations between media messages and societal response it seems evident that *there is a high degree of continuity between the Soviet and post Soviet eras in terms of societal skepticism towards elites that are in power.* As Machiavelli once wrote, people may be ignorant, but they know when they are being lied to. Thirdly, *despite privatization of the media system, elite beliefs in the power of media as a political tool do not seem to have changed much.* This seems to question the degree and type of change that has occurred.

Theoretical Challenges

So how can the vast literature on mass media, communications, and politics help us understand this seemingly counterintuitive finding that in Ukraine media has played an ambiguous rather than central role during the two key events in its recent history? This paper suggests that it is useful to consider media from both political and cultural perspectives. To understand the changes that have occurred, it is useful to reconsider five conceptual frameworks: typologies of media systems, theories of media power, discussions of media and democracy, media-society relations, and the role of globalization.

The remainder of this paper will explore how existing theoretical models have shaped our thinking about the role of media, and ways in which we need to reconsider some of those conceptual frameworks to make them more useful for analyzing the situation in Ukraine, and the post communist world more broadly.

Typology of Media Systems

Perhaps the first theoretical challenge comes from the manner in which media systems are classified into typologies. Typologies are useful analytical tools for classifying different types of media systems, which in turn are useful for understanding the political economy of media in any given state as well as for comparative analysis.

However, as Colin Sparks has pointed out, much of our thinking on this continues to be shaped by the Cold War legacy of dividing media systems into a communist (totalitarian/authoritarian) one and a liberal (democratic) one. This conceptualization was shared on both sides of the Iron Curtain, in the communist world based on *Lenin: About the Press* (Lenin 1972), and in the US on the 1956 classic, *Four Theories of the Press* by Siebert, Petersen, and Schramm. Interestingly, this binary view of media systems has continued into the post communist era and many analysts continue to frame discussions in reference to this typology – that post communist (or formerly

authoritarian) societies are moving from one model to another, from the authoritarian one to the liberal one.

This is problematic for two reasons. As scholars are increasingly noting, the collapse of communism revealed that in fact neither of these system descriptions were entirely accurate, and were more normative than analytical (Sparks 2000; Gunther and Mughan 2000). Apart from the schizophrenic view that media play different roles in different systems, the Soviet Union and its satellite states never fully succeeded in manipulating and subverting their societies to believe the official state ideology, or fully eliminating alternative views (Downing 1996). In 1989-1991 all the regimes were rejected by societies, including by Ukrainians, despite decades of official indoctrination through the media. Similarly, media systems in established democracies have never been fully liberal, totally free of state or corporate control. For example it is difficult to speak about the watchdog function of public broadcasters or the representativeness of mass media during an era of concentration of ownership (McChesney 2004).

This points to the need to reassess the typology of democratic media systems, and also develop a clearer understanding of how non-democratic media systems function. There has been some work done in this direction with McQuail, Noredenstreng, Christians, and White proposing a new classification of democratic media systems based on models of democracy, which consists of five paradigms (liberal-individualist, social responsibility, critical, administrative, and cultural negotiation). Another is Becker's attempt to draw distinctions between varieties of non-democratic regimes and contrast them with democratic ones (Becker forthcoming). More needs to be done along these lines.

A second issue seems equally significant – all of these typologies classify *static* media systems, whereas Ukraine and other post communist states are societies and media systems in the *process of change*. Noting that Ukraine's media system is no longer authoritarian does little to illuminate the dynamics influencing its change. What is needed is a theorizing of a fluid media system model, which would help explain how changing power relationships, necessarily different in character than established ones, are shaping the new media system.

Media Power

A second set of concepts which need to be critically re-examined relate to media power. During periods of transition and change, power relationships are usually being renegotiated. Most would agree that media are powerful, and thus part of this process. Yet 'new forms of audience research have rightly undermined the widely held views about the omnipotent power of the media' (Curran and Morley 2006, 2), and increasingly there is debate about what media power consists of. The scholarship is divided on the question of whether media is simply an intermediary, an instrument of used by power actors, or whether is it an independent actor, powerful in its own right.

The dominant view is that 'media power' is about how other powerful forces such as governments, corporations, and cultural elites, use the media to wage their battles. Manuel Castells, for example, uses this approach in his discussion of the global network society, where he argues that 'in a space of accelerated information, people, and finance flows, the media portal is increasingly important for all social action, but the media themselves have no power as such' (Castells 1997).

The alternative view is that 'the media's representational power is one of society's main forces in its own right,' and that direct control over the means of media production is increasingly a central dimension of power in contemporary societies (Melucci 1996; Curran 2002). Furthermore, media power is described as 'an increasingly important emergent theme of social conflict in late modernity,' which, although not new, is now occurring in a context of global communications networks, which allows all sides in conflicts access to global self-representation (Curran 2002). In Ukraine this is visible during the Kuchma era, when opposition forces including journalists used the internet to fight against censorship. Some have argued that in new democracies the media has a dual role, acting both as an intermediary for powerful actors and an active participant in creating political messages (Voltmer 2006).

Elites in Ukraine certainly subscribe to the first view, that media are a powerful instrument which can shape public opinion, and by

extension voting patterns. This is clearly visible in their attempts to control and own major media outlets. In fact competition for media control has been a major theme in Ukrainian politics since 1991, and received international attention when President Kuchma was implicated in the disappearance of a troublesome journalist in 2000.

Groups of journalists and some media owners have attempted to carve out an independent role for media. In the mid 1990s the private TV station Studio 1+1 tried to shape public tastes by creating a new image of a modern Ukrainian identity, culturally hip, stylishly dressed, Western oriented and Ukrainian speaking (Herasumiuk 2004). In 2004 journalists took power into their own hands and began behaving independently of the state and their management and owners, in a series of events known as the 'journalists' revolution.' The entire news team on Studio 1+1 went on strike and refused to report fraudulent electoral results; signers for the deaf on the state owned TV channel went off script and began signing, 'they are lying, these election results are fraudulent.'¹⁵ However, these examples represent exceptions rather than the norm.

Media has without a doubt been at the centre of power struggles in Ukraine, but existing theoretical approaches do not adequately account for the fact that media has not been a powerful force, neither in the hands of other powerful groups and forces, nor as an independent actor facilitating or promoting social and political change.

15 See Dyczok (2005b); Marta Dyczok, "Orange Power Takes Over in Ukraine," Kyiv, 25 November 2004, The Ukraine List (UKL) #282, compiled by Dominique Arel, 26 November 2004; "TSN News Anchor Refused to Go on Air on Channel 1+1," *Telekritika*, 22 November 2004, <http://www.telekritika.kiev.ua/news/?id=18915>; Journalists' Movement for Professional Standards, "Visti Journalists on UT-1 Went on Strike," *Telekritika*, 24 November 2004, <http://www.telekritika.kiev.ua/news/?id=18998>; "UT-1 Sign-Language Interpreter Natalia Dmytruk Told the Audience of 100,000 Handicapped Ukrainians about Falsified Elections," *Telekritika*, 25 November 2004, <http://www.telekritika.kiev.ua/news/?id=19092>; Yaroslav Trofimov, "In a Sign of the Times, Ukrainian TV Interpreter Makes Bold On-Air Move," *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 November 2004; Statement of the Channel 1+1 News Team announcing an end to censorship, Press Release, 25 November 2004, <http://www.1plus1.net/about/news.phtml?637>.

What is needed is a comprehensive assessment of how media interacts with other power sources. Here Habermas' idea of a public sphere may be useful, particularly his description of how a public sphere can emerge during times of revolutionary change as it did in Paris of 1789 and 1848, where every 'half-way eminent politician organized his club, every other his journal' (Habermas 1989). Yet the limitation of this approach is that it does little to assist conceptualizing media change over time, instead illustrating mainly how these dynamics emerge during moments of change. For this Gramsci's theory of hegemony may be more helpful in that it presents an argument of how ruling elites succeed in using a combination of force and cooption of cultural and intellectual elites into participating in a political system of control. A cultural hegemony analysis can show how the media is one of the cultural forces which contribute to a broader socio-political domination over time, thereby getting around the issue of whether it is an actor or an instrument. A Gramscian approach would also be useful for explaining opposition, since he argues that a hegemonic order is always contested by counter-hegemonic forces, which would help explain the journalists' revolution of 2004.

What emerges from a close examination of the Ukrainian case is that a new way of thinking about media power is that *media is a site where power is contested, where larger power struggles become visible*.¹⁶

Media, Democracy, and Democratization

The theoretical literature on media and democracy also needs to be revisited. It is widely believed that uninhibited public debate and free speech play a crucial role for democracy (Keane 1991). As democracy theorist Robert Dahl wrote, 'In fact, without the citizens' ability to make informed choices the legitimacy of democratic elections would be seriously flawed' (Dahl 1989). Put another way, 'In all versions of normative democratic theory, a public sphere providing sufficient information and transparency of political decisions as well

16 This argument is further developed in Marta Dyczok, *Media and the Struggle for Power in Ukraine* (forthcoming).

as competition of ideas and arguments is considered a basic presupposition of democratic participation' (Peters 2005, 104).

Although much has been written about media and democracy, a number of scholars have pointed out that there is very little *theoretical* literature on political communication. This is especially true about comparative literature, on the mutually influencing interaction between the flow of information on the one hand and the democratic regime on the other. (Gunther and Mughan 2000). British scholars Margaret Scammell and Holli Semetko have gone so far as to say that there is no theory of media and democracy as such. In the introduction to their selection of key texts dealing with issues of media and democracy they note that 'the central importance of media for democracy is taken for granted,' and 'democratic theory takes for granted an oversimplified and outdated model of the media, while media studies take for granted an outdated model of democracy' (Scammell and Semetko 2000, xii).

Most normative theories of the role of media and democracy concentrate on the three main functions of media in liberal society as being

1. Most importantly to act as a watchdog against the state
2. To supply accurate and sufficient information
3. To represent people in the sense of adequately reflecting the spectrum of public opinion and political competition

Many media studies focus on assessing whether these duties are adequately met, and this is very much the case in studies of media and democratization.

Needless to say, there is very little theoretical literature on media and democratization. Beyond noting the importance of a free media for democracy, most political scientists and transitologists have largely ignored the role media plays in the process of democratization and democratic consolidation. At the same time much attention has been accorded to media issues by politicians, in region and in the West, as well as funding agencies and NGOs.

A more useful way to frame the question would be to explore what is actually occurring in media systems, rather than attempting to analyze developments according to a normative, theoretical

model.¹⁷ *The central question which needs to be addressed and theorized is whether a free and independent media is an agent of democratic change and consolidation or not.* There seems to be an emerging consensus on the fact that, ‘paradoxically, the media’s ability to uphold democratic accountability eventually depends on the degree to which political institutions have adopted democratic structures and procedures’ (Morris and Waisbord 2001; Price, Rozumilowicz, and Verhulst 2002). Peter Gross put it more strongly when he wrote, ‘We in the West were wrong in assuming that the media will help establish democracy. Independent, impartial, professional media are expressions of well entrenched democratic societies and function in their support. They cannot be spontaneously created in a society in transition to help that transition’ (Gross 1998, 10). Similarly, Jakubowicz has proposed what he calls a ‘nonequivalent interdependence model,’ where he argues that ‘the real chain of causation may be as follows: social conditions, including social change, create conditions for or trigger media action to influence society’ (Jakubowicz 2007, 5).

The Ukrainian case study supports this line of analysis, and pushes the question even further. It is clear that uninhibited public discourse has not been allowed to develop. Yet at crucial moments like 1991 and 2004, a societal consensus emerged, despite the lack of an open communicative exchange within the media. This suggests that there are other factors and forces facilitating public access to information that mobilize Ukrainian activism and democratic behaviour. Twice in the span of 15 years Ukrainians made democratic choices and behaved in a democratic manner without having freedom of information. This is not to suggest that media is unimportant or that it played no role. However it calls into question widely held beliefs about media and democracy. It seems that democratic openings can occur in environments subjected to censorship, and this needs to be theorized more comprehensively.

17 A similar argument was presented by Thomas Carothers regarding the larger democratization and transition literature, in his seminal article, “The End of the Transition Paradigm.” (2002).

Media and Society: Audiences, Identity, Public Opinion, Ideology, Culture

Another area of study which needs to be brought into the discussions of media and power in the post communist world is audience reception. Most studies that include discussions about media within the larger post communist changes focus on how elites use media. It is just as important to explore how society, or audiences, respond. The Ukrainian case demonstrates rather convincingly that audiences interpret messages differently from how political and media elites intend the messages to be received. To explain this, a cultural studies approach may prove useful. Theorists who examine media as culture have observed that 'various individuals and audiences respond to these texts disparately, negotiating their meanings in complex and often paradoxical ways' (Durham and Kellner 2001). Although there are a wide variety of methodologies within the broad field, 'examining how people engage cultural texts, however, may reveal that audiences refuse dominant meanings, and offer their own, sometimes, surprising, interpretations' (Durham and Kellner 2001).

This is a useful method for examining the media dynamics in Ukraine, and possibly other post communist states. Ideas from classic works by Benjamin and Williams can shed light on the dynamics of in Soviet and post Soviet societies (Benjamin 1939; Williams 1966). These include arguments that mass audiences possess critical abilities, that culture and society should be considered together rather than separately, and that media culture is important. Although in some ways developments in Soviet society were unique, historian Stephen Kotkin has convincingly argued that Soviet society experienced many of the same mass phenomena as did Europe and North America during the 20th century (Kotkin 1995, 2003). Thus Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' and 'habitus' can also be useful analytical tools for analyzing social relations in general and media in particular (Bourdieu 1977). The advantage of these approaches is that they look at process and change rather than at static models. For example, Bourdieu's ideas on shifting patterns of collective identity categories, the interplay between social interaction, institutional structure, and subjective meaning can perhaps be helpful in exploring shifting

voter preferences to examine why support for an oppositional presidential candidate in 1991 was at 23%, yet by 2004 the percentage had increased to over 50%.

British cultural studies' idea of an active audience is also relevant here, allowing one to analyze how audiences can oppose the dominant order by stressing conflictual elements in society. Stuart Hall's classic article 'Encoding/Decoding' (Hall 1980), where he argues that a distinction should be made between the encoding of media texts by producers and decoding by consumers, may be helpful in exploring how Ukrainians received messages sent by Soviet and later post Soviet authorities, yet interpreted them in their own way. For example, despite the fact that in 2004 Yushchenko was portrayed as an American stooge, 'Bushchenko,' in election advertising, more than half the country voted for him.

Such approaches challenge the classical communications model that views communications as flowing in one direction, from sender via transmitter to receiver, and highlights the fact that audiences are active. They are more in keeping with Blumler and Gurevitch's model of dynamic interaction between political actors, the media, and audience members, each of whom is involved in producing, receiving, and interpreting political messages, involving a high degree of mutual interdependence (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995).

Similar ideas have been presented by Latin American scholar Martin-Barbero (1993). He writes about the importance of including the cultural context of media reception into the analysis, as well as the need to devise local and regional approaches rather than importing theoretical perspectives from other socio-political contexts. This is perhaps most useful in looking at the regional diversities which continue to be a feature of Ukraine's political landscape, with different parts of the country interpreting media messages in very different ways.

International Dimensions: Technology, Globalization

Finally, it is impossible to consider changes to media systems without considering the impact of technology on media, the importance of growing global networks. This set of issues clearly illustrates the

ambiguity media change has brought to Ukraine and the post communist world, and the need to reframe the discussions on globalization and cultural change.

On the one hand, Ukraine has experienced tremendous changes following the collapse of the Iron Curtain. Old barriers to global information networks disappeared and the country became part of McLuhan's global village. Microsoft has Ukrainian language programmes and many media outlets have on-line versions, national TV channels, newspapers, and magazines, as well as small local media outlets like Kafa in Feodosia in the Crimea.¹⁸ During the dark years of Kuchma's censorship, the internet was dubbed the 'cyber-samizdat' because it was one of the few forms of media that the state could not (or perhaps would not) control. Thus the internet became a space for opposition minded individuals to gather and exchange information and ideas, as well as build links with the outside world. Globalization as defined from Giddens (1990) to Held (2007) arrived in Ukraine.

On the other hand, it is difficult to speak about Ukraine, or for that matter any of the post Soviet states apart from the Baltics, as network or information societies. Despite the arrival of modern technology, a relatively small percentage of the population has actually become networked. A more accurate perspective is one of the digital divide, where the overwhelming majority of the population is completely removed from the technological transformation occurring around them (Antonelli 2003; Norris 2001). Although Castells has argued that 'network society can have very different kinds of political structures,' and can exist in a country that has internally disintegrated (Rantanen 2005), this seems rather unconvincing. He uses Russia as an example of a less connected network society where 'some extremely powerful components of Russian society are more, or even completely, globally connected, while at the same time most of Russia is disconnected. One of the characteristics of the network society is connectivity and disconnectivity. Countries like Russia are characterized by the predominance of disconnectivity over connectivity.' (ibid.) The same can easily be said of Ukraine. Thus although

Ukraine has become part of modern global communications systems, most Ukrainians remain consumers of conventional media.

It is through all these forms of media that they are now exposed to competing cultural influences. Ukraine and other post communist states are attempting to create their own communicative spaces as an important part of their nation building process. But this is occurring in an environment where they are exposed to two powerful external forces. Wanting to be part of global information networks, Ukraine has opened up to media products from Western countries (TV shows, movies, internet sites, social networking groups, advertising). At the same time, Russia continues to be a major presence in Ukraine's media space (Rantanen 2002). Thus Ukraine is facing the pressures of corporate media product coming from Western countries as well as the old cultural imperialism through media product coming from Russia.

Discussions of globalization, American cultural imperialism, and digital divide need to be reframed to consider this post communist experience. Much of the literature on globalization focuses on the binary relationship between the developed world and the developing world. Ukraine and other post communist states are engaged in a triangular process, where their own cultural identity is being refashioned in response to both old Russian cultural imperialism and the newer Western or American influences. There is a need to theorize how technological advancement, globalization forces, and cultural change are affecting *formerly isolated but developed societies* that are experiencing radical transformations, where value systems and the international context are shifting rapidly, and internal disparities continue to grow.

Conclusion

Let's return to the question posed at the beginning of this paper: What role has media played in the larger changes that have occurred in Ukraine? This paper has argued that *the role of media has been ambiguous, and a useful way to think about media power is as a site where*

power is contested, where larger power struggles become visible. Although elites believe that media is an important instrument of power, events in Ukraine shown that control of media system does not necessarily guarantee control over societal attitudes or behaviour.

This argument will come as no surprise to media scholars, who have often noted, 'Political elites widely, if not universally, believe that the media are of paramount importance in shaping these [political] orientations, despite the fact that the extent to which and the process through which media actually influence the attitudinal and behavioural orientations in society is debatable' (Gunther and Mughan, 2000, 3). Few political elites consult the scholarly literature on the subject, and this is certainly true in Ukraine.

Media and communications studies have much to offer to scholars exploring the phenomenon of post communism. However, this paper has argued that many of the existing theoretical approaches which explore relationships between media and democracy require a more nuanced analysis to be really useful. Analysts need to accept the dual reality of continuity as well as change during the post communist transformations, to better understand the process of change that caused and followed the collapse of communism. The case of Ukraine clearly demonstrates how existing theoretical approaches are a useful starting point yet need to be revisited and revised.

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