

**Aida Aidakyeva
Don Flournoy
Ohio University, Athens OH**

**Streaming Television: Participatory Democracy on the
Rise? No, Not Yet.**

MiT 3: Television in Transition

**New Media Panel
May 3, 2003**

Contents

Introduction: Democratization Myth.....	1
About This Research.....	3
Mass Media Industry in Russia	5
Streaming Video for Russia’s Democratization.....	6
Lack of Political Activism.....	7
Conditions for Development of Streaming Video Technology.....	9
Principles of Internet Regulation.....	10
Components of Internet Regulation:	
Pushing Dissemination.....	11
Internet Legislation.....	12
Internet Censorship.....	14
State News and Propaganda.....	14
Hacking Chechnya	15
Police Control.....	16
Private Applications of Streaming Video Technology:	
Entertainment.....	17
Distant Learning.....	17
Internet Archiving.....	18
Emergency Situations.....	18
Teleconferencing.....	19
Political Intrigue.....	19
Orthodox Church.....	20
Business Communication.....	20
Case Studies:	
Alternative TV (Moscow).....	21
Ladya TV (Tyumen’)......	22
Piterskii Meridian (Saint Petersburg).....	23
Conclusion.....	24
References.....	26
Introduction: Democratization Myth	

The enthusiasts of the Internet in western democracies believe that it will contribute to, or even will be primarily responsible for, a new era of participatory democracy and for the “revitalization” of the public sphere. Howard Rheingold (1993) came up with the utopian idea that the new Internet technology itself has a democratizing potential. While television isolates people, distracts them from social activism and does not establish real political communication, the Internet is expected to do the opposite. It should revitalize the public sphere by creating communities and encouraging people to get involved in political discourse.

With these promises, it seems that “The New Information Order” envisioned by UNESCO (UNESCO, 1974), almost three decades ago, now has a chance to become a reality. Imbalances and inequalities of the modern media coverage will be eliminated, the Western countries will no longer dominate the flow of information, and the plurality of voices in the global information space will prevail.

The Internet is expected to bring an end to one-way-only mass media communication and subvert the media’s traditional gate keeping and agenda setting role. “Often mass media ignore real, important stories or promote a particular political agenda. With the advent of the Internet this paradigm is completely obsolete. There is no reason the news can’t be reported by you – using the Internet” (Chan, 1999). Ordinary viewers are expected to assume active reporting roles and provide their communities with their own view of the world. Streaming video technology will be a part of this revolution.

Today, digital cameras are cheaper and easier to use, and modern non-linear video editing technology does not require professional training. As a result, broadcasting is no longer an occupation for a privileged few. Internet television via streaming video

technology will turn the web into a hub of homemade TV news and movies. Social groups, individuals, and the opposition - all those who traditionally could not get access to the mainstream media - can now share their information in the form of text, pictures and video on globally interconnected networks.

The technology today allows for improvements within participatory democracies, without question, the enthusiasm about it is waning, however, as we do not get enough evidence that people actually want to use it to become better citizens. Alvin Toffler (1990) also warns that people should be aware of the “sophisticated mind manipulations” governments will attempt in the future.

The technology by itself does not lead to a democracy, as it does not have inherent good or bad qualities. The environment: social, political and cultural variables shape its application. To this point, the Internet has not proven to activate political communication; on the contrary, it has provided governments with unique possibilities for surveillance, control and disinformation.

Many reasons prevent the Internet from becoming a truly democratizing technology. Economically, computers for many are a luxury, and many in the world cannot pay the monthly connection fees. Lack of disposable income, leisure time, and literacy prevents people from access.

About 82 % of Internet content is in English, and many countries in the world look at the Internet as another tool for dissemination of U.S. culture and propaganda. It is true, if we look at it globally, the agenda is set by American concerns (Thornton, 2002). So, in its present condition, the Internet is not representative of the world and it cannot be

considered a vehicle for democracy. It is the rich and politically privileged who gain the access to the Internet and new digital technology (Hoffman, Novak & Schlosser, 2002).

Also, the democratizing promise of the Internet does not apply to all countries and cultures. Authoritarian regimes use a combination of legal, technical, and social measures to control how the Internet is used. They dominate the Internet from its beginnings and determine its growth and diffusion. In China, for example, the development of the Internet has been largely a product of the state initiative. Proliferation of Internet access does not necessarily imply dissemination of democracy and freedom of speech. These regimes take proactive positioning in an effort to maintain control domestically and to promote themselves internationally.

With the lack of evidence on the democratizing potential of the Internet we can start questioning the myth. Today, the evolution of authoritarian governments has brought them to the point where they do not directly apply censorship but develop more subtle and effective ways of control. Most have realized the benefits of the new technology and they no longer try to prohibit it, but to regulate, shape and use it in their own interests. Russia is a good example of how “democratizing technology” such as streaming video is not being used for democratic purposes.

About this Research

One of the purposes of this research is to look at social, economic and cultural effects on the development of information technology. Specifically, we look at streaming video technology, as one of the latest technological inventions and the one that promises to bring great political, social and economic changes. In this research we are trying to

draw the socio cultural picture of the environment in which the streaming video technology operates, using Russia as illustration. The data was collected through content analysis of web sites that use the technology and, also, through a series of interviews with specialists in Russia who stream video on the Internet.

Mass Media Industry in Russia

To understand, how streaming video technology could have a great democratizing potential in Russia it is necessary, first, to look at the conditions under which the traditional media operate. After Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia the mass media were put back under the old Soviet style state dominant regulation. De facto, the state has a media monopoly in the country. However, President Putin's strategy of mass media control is significantly different from the Soviet style blunt censorship and prohibition. It uses sophisticated regulatory, financial and physical mechanisms. Putin introduces a new form of authoritarianism, one which benefits from the information technology. The state, actually, promotes Internet access growth, but what may seem as more freedom can mean less freedom (Alexander, 2002).

With three national TV channels ORT (Public Russian Television), NTV (New Television), RTR (Russian State Television and Radio of Russia), television continues to be the most influential medium. Each of these networks are wholly or partly owned by the state and are tightly controlled by the government. The chairpersons of ORT and RTR are appointed by the president. Although denied by the media officials, the broadcast networks serve as propaganda tools for the government. Access to the national TV by oppositional parties and autonomous civil groups is limited. The state owns 70 % of the

transmitting facilities (Smaele, 1999). And, overall, 90 % of Russian media is subsidized by the state (Ellis, 1999).

The biggest independent stations also were put under the government's control when Putin came. A national independent network TV 6 was closed down in 2002 for its criticism under the pretext its license had expired. Today it serves as a loyal partially state owned network.

In January 2003, Boris Jordan, a chief director of independent NTV (previously owned by Media Most company), was expelled from his position. He was punished for NTV's aggressive reporting, in particular, for the critical coverage of the seizure of a Moscow theater by separatist militants from Chechnya in the fall 2002. It was the last national network to lose its independence in Russia (Lenta.ru, 2003).

Streaming Video for Russia's Democratization

In a situation like this, many TV journalists made attempts to organize opposition broadcasting on the Internet. "As Media Most owned media are facing extermination, the Internet could become the last place where Russian journalists who want to criticize the Kremlin could go," says Alena Ponomareva, editor of an online newspaper. She adds that it has become very difficult to obtain any valuable information from the state controlled TV. "People are being manipulated to think this and that. There aren't many TV channels to choose from, and everywhere you go you are subjected to some kind of propaganda. Going online might be the only choice for Russians who choose to think with their own heads rather than be brainwashed by government manipulated traditional media."

It seemed like a logical step for independent journalists to transfer broadcasting to the Internet. Anton Nosik, an Internet journalist, says that to set up a web site and start streaming video you need neither tremendous amounts of money, nor serious political connections. Internet sites do not require political support or permission to operate. They can afford to be independent from local authorities on both federal and regional level (Ulmanu, 2001).

Internet TV looked like a safe heaven for the TV dissidents. There is no scarcity of frequencies on the Internet. While the TV industry is heavily regulated, censored and owned by the state, on the Internet, the government has not yet exercised the same degree of control. To become an Internet broadcaster “you do not need a license or permission from the government to obtain the frequency. You do not need to collect a huge package of documentation to become an over-the-air or cable broadcaster” says Maksim Korzhov, producer of Internet TV “Piterskii Meridian” (Magradze, 2001).

Journalists say it is impossible to suppress the freedom of speech when on the Internet one can broadcast anything, virtually uncensored. Banned TV 6 started to simulcast its regular programming on the Internet. However, the project ran for about two weeks and had to be shut down. The station’s management could not find a way to make the Internet TV profitable. Former TV 6 journalists dispersed among other stations or went looking for different jobs (Ardaev, 2002).

Lack of Political Activism

Russian mass media researcher Frank Ellis (1999) questions whether Russians “are going to discover joys of participatory democracy by virtue of their being given a

computer... when hitherto they have not had a slightest interest.” It is false to assume that intelligent, educated and young persons in Russia will flock to the Internet in order to find the truth about their government and then use Internet to spread this truth and mobilize opposition (Alexander, 2002). The streaming video technology is not used for political reasons but mostly for entertainment. One of the reasons is lack of political activism persistent in the Russian culture.

It has been noticed by political science academics that Russians have hardly had any experience with democracy. For centuries this nation has been ruled by tsars and later by communist dictators, with only brief interludes of democratic reform. People are used to dictatorship, and older generation even misses it; they look up to the government to make decision for them and to regulate their lives. Notion of public activism continues to be foreign. People shy away from political activism because they do not believe in the power of a public actions or opinions. Cupidon Goncharov, producer of the Internet based Alternative TV, says people are used to seeing “violations of law and some ugly behaviors.” The public has developed a great tolerance towards the lawlessness. Russians are very skeptical about the effectiveness of political activism and freedom of speech. The common belief is that “the talking can’t change anything”.

In the West the most emphasized aspect of culture is individualism; political, social and economic freedom for the individual are considered the highest values. In Eastern culture, however, the selflessness and submission to authority is also important. The East does not share traditions of democracy with the West and has an inherent respect for authority (Smaele, 1999).

For these reasons politicians in Russia and outside question the appropriateness of the Western media philosophy and western notion of democracy to the Russian case (Ferguson, 1998).

Conditions for the Development of Streaming Video Technology in Russia

One of the main obstacles for the wide employment of streaming video technology is the underdeveloped telecommunications infrastructure in Russia. The quality of telephone lines is poor. Access prices are too high compared with an average income. Russia is far behind the U.S. and European countries in Internet penetration but far ahead of other developing countries such as India and China. Today Russia holds 11th place in the world based on the absolute number of Internet users; 8 % of the Russian population have access which equals to 8.8 million people. However, what surprises communications analysts in Russia is the rapid rate of adoption. From 2001 the number has grown from 3.3 million almost by 5 million people. The Internet, however, is not spread equally, the penetration in Moscow and Saint Petersburg is about 27 % whereas in rural areas it is less than 5 %. The majority of the population accesses the net from work, 47 % of the users, while 32% connect from home. However, the Internet is still considered a privilege for an elite few (Jardin, 2000).

The Internet is mainly used for entertainment; political interests are among the last ones on the list of priorities. Internet audience research shows that 53 % use it for work, 40 % for education, 35 % for pleasure, 29% for communication and only 27 % to

find out the news. From the Internet resources only 5 % of people look for radio or television and 7 % for news or information about politics (Mersadykova, 2002).

In order to view video on the Internet a user needs a connection of at least 28 kb/s. Often, this is hard to have for many, because the quality of the video is often poor, with bad audio, disruptions of streaming, and noise. The most popular streaming standard is RealVideo; it successfully competes with Windows Media and is used at 75% of web sites that employ streaming video technology. The RealVideo format is preferred to the Window's Media because it uses the computer resources more economically. QuickTime is not used at all in Russia for Macintosh computers are virtually nonexistent there.

Principles of Internet Regulation in Russia

Like other technological innovations in Russia, streaming video technology, is best developed at the state financed web sites. Independent companies and individuals who want to stream video do not receive state support. Streaming video falls under the state plan for Internet development in Russia.

When president Putin came to power, the Internet appeared on his media agenda as an important policy objective. Today, the Internet in Russia is subject to aggressive government regulation. It can be felt on different levels. Proactive measures include introduction of new Internet legislation, establishment of state owned online media, "internetization" of government bodies, subtle censorship, state hacking and financial regulation.

The government increases control at the level of Internet providers. The largest Internet provider is the state owned company "Rostelecom." It sponsors and provides

technical assistance for government supported projects, such as Internet broadcasting at the national TV stations. The state competes with small private Internet providers trying to push them from the market.

Pushing Dissemination

In order to grow from 2 % Internet penetration to 5 % Russia will need at least \$10 billion. At the moment only government can undertake projects like that knowing that it will not receive profit in the near future. There are political reasons behind the e-Russia project. The government knows it can influence the outcome of elections by controlling four major TV networks. But if 100 % Russians start using the Internet it will not be as easy to control the public opinion, says Irina Hakamada, the vice speaker of the Parliament . It realizes that it is impossible to prevent the citizens from using the Internet. It chooses to take control over the net in as many areas as possible (Kondratev, 2001).

Government is proactive in shaping the IT infrastructure and in defining the way the Internet technologies will disseminate in the country. The government does not work towards increasing the total number computers, or to provide more individuals with access. The PC and the Internet growth is aimed first of all at educational and state sector. In 2002 the state approved a \$2.6 billion plan for implementation of so called “E-Russia” plan. 39 projects, most important intend to put all government agencies online, it will reduce the paperwork, make the government more transparent and will eliminate the bureaucracy. This plan is considered to be exceptionally important from a political point of view. The efficiency of the government is expected to improve. Also, schools and universities will be financed for setting up computer labs with the Internet access.

Various ministries of Education, Communications, Industry as well as state agencies on Space, Government Communications and even Federal Security Service are involved in the project (Wolfe, 2001). This year only priority programs, those that deal with creation of the “electronic” government will be funded, other programs such as IT for education will be postponed due to the lack of resources. At the same time it is questionable what kind of information the government will be ready to reveal and how “transparent” this data will be. A lot of information can be withheld under the pretext it is “secret”, although the law does not define the notion of “secret” , and it can be anything the state wants to hide (Naumenko, 2003).

The government presence on the Internet does not serve the purposes of participatory democracy. It is still one-way medium, there is more information but it is not an interactive communication, citizens are not expected to provide an input. The government may become more transparent but it does not become easier to reach. State web sites do not provide contact information; they do not ask for feed back. The only way to reach them is to e-mail the web master and in most cases this e-mail will not be answered.

Internet Legislation

So far, the Russian government has not attempted to close down a web site for streaming of inappropriate video information. Legislation is broad enough to control dissidents if a necessity arises, however. The law that most likely intends to limit dissemination of opposing views via streaming video is the Russian Law on Mass Media (Moskalyuk, 2000). Web sites that provide news on a regular basis, including streaming

video portals, are considered mass media and must be registered with the Ministry of Press and Information. The government defines online mass media as “information on the Internet that is updated regularly and is aimed at an undefined category of people.” The government’s desire is to exercise control over the content on the Russian language Internet (Veiner, 2000). Web sites of domestic organizations and even of private persons can also be considered mass media under this law and are required to register with the state (Saharov, 2002).

An important tendency in the regulation of the communications industry and of the Internet is to protect national identity from an overwhelming foreign influence. A web site can be closed down if the state finds it to provide information of “poor quality and that which is unreliable,” especially when it comes from “foreign states,” as stated in “The Federal Law Concerning Participation in the International Information Exchange” (1996). In this case, it is up to the government to define what is “poor quality” and “unreliable information” in each instance.

The state has thought legislation that will monitor citizens and restrict access to “ideologically” inappropriate news. One act that is constantly being pushed in the Parliament is the so-called SORM (Systems of Operative and Investigative Procedures) regulation, which will require all Internet providers to link to FSB, the successor of the KGB. Were this law to be enforced, the FSB would have total control over the content of communication on the Internet (Moffett, 1998).

“The Federal Law Concerning Information, Informatization and the Protection of Information”, adopted in 1995, gives the government a powerful role in the provision of

IT and its infrastructure. In this case, the role of private investors is considered secondary to the state.

Censorship

The Russian government appears not to be as actively censoring of the content on the Internet as is China, for example. There is no evidence a web site was required to be shut down for political reasons. The officials realize that this is not an efficient way to deal with political content on the Internet. Instead, state sponsored hacking activities when “hostile” web site appeared. This is a weak point for streaming video technology. Officials are unable to shut down a TV station broadcasting from another country, but they can make an effort to break or damage a web site broadcasting unfavorable information. In 1999, FSB was engaged in a cyber war with webmasters of Chechen web sites that provided anti-Russian or independent accounts of the war in Chechnya. They hacked into their web sites and the Chechen group responded by hacking back at the Russian official web sites providing information on the war.

State news

Only state can afford to invest into expensive IT such as streaming video that will not bring profit in the near future. The state hopes to get ideological benefits from streaming video by transmitting messages that promote the Russian state in the world, and also among multi million Russian population that lives abroad.

These TV channels are among the first ones who establish streaming media, financing it from the state budget.

Radio and Television of Russia (RTR) in 2002 started to employ an expensive “Internet broadcasting project” which aims at bringing all regional affiliates to the Internet. Each affiliate is expected to have a permanent presence in the Internet and employ streaming video technology to upload their newscasts onto the Internet. At the moment, RTR’s web site streams how quality video clips from its newscasts and some other informational programs. Aleksandr Gagin, the “internetization” project’s director, says state online media will not be used for the propaganda, but admits that state news will lead the coverage.

Hacking Chechnya

Russian media when covering the war in Chechnya always look up to the state for guidance, and they mainly serve as transmitters of official information. It is a common belief now, that the government won the second war in Chechnya because it successfully controlled the media, and information flow. As the result, the public opinion was in support of the military operation.

Chechen rebels used Internet to oppose the Russian propaganda by providing their own coverage of the war. Their intention was to reach brainwashed Russian and foreign audience and prove legitimacy of their demands for independence. Text, photographs, video were presented in Russian and in English, in an attempt to attract attention of human rights organizations and get some support for their case. Interestingly enough, the indigenous population of Caucasus or Chechnya was not a target in this information

campaign. Local population literally had no access to digital technology and relied for its news on traditional mass media such as newspapers, radio and TV. So, the Internet and the streaming video technology were available only for powerful few on both sides, and it served as a tool in a confrontation of leadership (Kostinskii, 2002).

The war in Chechnya included online battle in which each side tried to prevent the other from revealing information. Chechen hackers attacked official web site which they deemed to be “propagandist” and “deceitful”, the Kremlin reacted by hacking back Chechen web sites (Jardin, 2000). The general public did not take any action in this process, and was hardly aware that there was an information war taking place.

Police Control

With the “E-Russia” plan working properly, the government hopes to create an IT technology market which will account for 2 % of the economy and will increase IT exports by \$1 billion (Boreiko & Nefedov, 2001). When the plan is fully implemented, the state sector will have one of the best fiber-optic networks in the country (Naumenko, 2002). One project, sponsored by the Moscow city Government and Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting, aims at wiring up Moscow with fiber-optic cable. One of the goals is the one to install surveillance cameras that will feed video over the Internet from the streets to the police stations. The streaming video technology will be used to help the state to endorse control and order (Naumenko, 2003).

Applications of Streaming Video Technology

Most uses of streaming video in Russia do not contribute to the development of participatory democracy. The technology is primarily used for streaming entertainment programming, for video archiving, and distant learning.

Entertainment

Some first uses of streaming video technology occurred in 1995. Rock musicians provided live video streams of popular Russian bands over the Internet. The streaming was organized for the fans that lived far from the capital and could never attend one of these concerts in their life. For them it was a possibility to watch something unique traditionally not available on network TV (Live broadcasting from St. Petersburg, 2003).

Distant Learning

Streaming video technology attracts enthusiasts in the field of distant learning. Government is extensively investing in this area, also. State sponsored Modern Institute of Humanities in Moscow is experimenting with the streaming video over satellite. Video streams of lectures of prominent professors are beamed from Moscow to distant learning centers in regions and some countries of the former Soviet Union. They also experiment with web casting by daily streaming the Institute's newscast (www.video.muh.ru).

Internet Archiving

Only large independent video production and broadcasting companies can effort experiments with the streaming video technology. Often, their use only consists of archiving video on the Internet. For example, an independent production studio ATV its program on the web for the show fans to watch something they missed on the air. The content of these programs consists mostly of entertainment. Some news magazine style programs carry light stories on social issues, but political criticism is limited. It signifies another trend in Russian mass media – criticizing small rank officials who do not have a lot of power and political significance.

You can also find historical footage such as the coronation of the last tsar, Nikolai Romanov, Lenin and Stalin’s public addresses and footage from the World War II. Unique film about the national heritage is available online for anybody to download, and this is, perhaps, one rare case of democratic application of the technology. Now viewers do not need to wait for national TV programmers to put the last tsar’s coronation ceremony, or beginnings of the revolution on the air (<http://xfilesrus.narod.ru/video>).

Emergency Situations

Streaming video technology, once, proved TV networks a great service in an emergency situation. In 2000 after a big fire destroyed the main Russian transmitting tower Ostankino all TV stations went off the air. Literally, there was not any national TV left in Russia. In this critical situation, the TV networks turned to the Internet and streamed their regular programming (Parfenov, 2000).

Teleconferencing

The state in application of the new technology goes beyond duplicating the broadcast news on the TV networks web sites. The Internet is being used for streaming video from official press conferences. Interviews with the president Putin are organized exclusively for this purpose. State funded web sites keep online his conversations with officials, scientists, common people recorded during his official visits around the country. It is advised for those who missed the president's appearance on TV to look up for full versions of his interviews and conversations. This project is a joint undertaking of two major TV channels – RTR and ORT. Because of their effort, President Putin leads in the video content available on the Internet in Russian language.

Political Intrigue

The streaming video technology is widely used by opposing political forces in “information wars” to cast a shade on a personality of a rival (<http://xfilesrus.narod.ru/video>).

Leaks of accident video taping are organized on the Internet, and later it is quoted by print or TV mass media. The government was involved in this activity. A scandalous video involving Russia's State Attorney, Skuratov, having sex with prostitutes was made available on the Internet two years after it was filmed at a time when it was necessary to take him off his post. Also a lot of scandalous video clips of various political leaders getting drunk, fighting, or swearing are available for public to see.

Orthodox Church

Another active user of the streaming video technology is the Orthodox Church. Live web casts and archived footage of religious services all over Russia are available at numerous web sites sponsored by the Orthodox Church. The content includes video of various religious ceremonies from important spots of religious pilgrimage. The streams are available for different speed connections from 56kb to 512 kb (Liturgy.ru). Also various church leaders and religious scholars get on camera to discuss on the Internet different issues such as, for example, “Orthodox church and the army”, or “Church and the state” (<http://www.xxc.ru/most2/index.htm>).

Business Communication

Businesses hesitate to invest money in Russian IT. The use of credit cards is very low, less than 1 % and it is not likely to grow considerably in the next decade. The Internet audience is too small and despite its rapid growth businessmen for another 5 or ten years will not regard it as a valuable market.

Case Studies

Alternative TV (Moscow)

The only Internet based TV that uses streaming video technology and is not affiliated with any state run media is Alternative TV in Moscow. However, its interest lies far from the politics or issues of the day. It focuses on life of the cultural underground in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. For six years every week they organize live broadcasts of some cultural happenings that are ignored by the main stream media. Organizers of the Alternative TV are inherited intelligentsia “who are concerned with the global ethic and aesthetic issues, with the future of Russian and global culture” says Cupidon Goncharov, one of the founders. He sees Internet as a tool to convey and store historically and culturally important information. This project is a hobby sponsored from the private funds of the organizers. Goncharov says that national TV has become too commercial and main stream to satisfy intelligentsia. A lot of interesting cultural events that are noncommercial and politically unmotivated go unreported.

Most of the Alternative TV’s audience comes from abroad. These viewers have good connection speed to watch their programming. They are attracted to the Alternative TV because of nostalgia, for them it is a possibility to watch programming in native Russian.

The major challenge for the further continuation of the project is the finance. Founders do not have enough funds to renew the equipment, add memory for video archives, it is expensive to pay for the Internet traffic. For example, Goncharov’s salary at his main job is \$150, which is hardly enough in the capital.

Goncharov says he does not feel any regulation coming from the government neither he expects any help would come for private projects like this. The future of the

independent streaming video projects looks dim because of “the poverty of a Russian Internet user and corruption.”

Ladya TV (Tyumen)

Most of the regional TV stations do not attempt to use the streaming video technology, first of all, because they do not see any audience on the Internet, and, second, because they do not have money to invest into a project that will not bring profit in the future. Regional TV stations that do have a streaming video server, such as Ladya TV in Tyumen, say it serves them an image role, “improves the status of their company.” The persons in charge of the streaming video regard it a hobby rather than a job. Evgenii Epanchintsev, the station’s IT specialist says they had unused upward stream and decided to experiment with it to stream their video. According to him, in Russia only those with DSL connection can afford to stream video, meaning big companies not individuals. The monthly fee for that service is \$1250, something only an affluent firm can afford. The equipment to encode video to a digital stream costs anywhere from \$400 to \$5000. And that is compared to an average wage of less than \$50. Majority of the viewers come from Israel, from 5 to 20 visitors per hour. Ladya TV does not hope ever to use streaming video for profit. They also have not felt any government intrusion or support while dealing with the video on the Internet.

Igor Guzei, creator of a Russian Internet TV rating system, says that the government does not regulate this area at all and at the moment Internet broadcasters can enjoy the total freedom. The only issue that they had to deal with so far concerned the copyright issues. Direct broadcasts of TV signal made their programming available

worldwide, disregarding the rules of syndication. New Television (NTV) was the first one to try direct Internet broadcasts; now, it limits it according to the IP zones, so that the Internet broadcast is available in the same areas as the TV broadcast. Other companies stream on their web sites only newscasts or programs produced in-house.

Guzei says that streaming video today serves only PR purposes of the broadcaster and they intend to improve the image of the station. He is optimistic about the future of the technology in Russia, “when the prices for the Internet traffic go down, there will be more possibilities for the independent Internet broadcasting.”

Piterskii Meridian (Saint Petersburg)

A unique independent Internet TV station opened in Saint Petersburg in 2001. It was an example of home made television, proving that broadcasting is not an elite profession and can be anybody’s business. “Piterskii Meridian” was broadcasting its programming in MPEG-4 format for about a year. The first truly interactive television, it allowed the audience to discuss programs in online chat room, while it was broadcast, and anchors welcomed live comments on the news. The video crew accepted requests from the audience and went filming on topics that the viewers demanded. At the same time, the project’s director said they did not target the local audience. Their audience was millions of Russian speaking immigrants from Israel, U.S., Australia, Germany and France. The content of “Piterskii Meridian” did not involve politics. Anya Karelina, the anchor, emphasizes the fact that their viewers are not interested in politics. Their average viewer, according to her, would be a male, 25-45 years old, an intellectual, with an

average income, socially active but not interested in politics. She says that it is even better since it lets the channel stay independent and away from “the political mess.”

One of the main problems for “Piterskii Meridian” was to develop a new concept, to break away from the traditional TV aesthetics, to grasp the uniqueness of the Internet broadcasting, says Maksim Korzhov, the producer. Most of the TV’s programming, however, had a focus on entertainment, featured interviews with musicians, singers, music composers, and interactive Q&A sessions. They planned to accept home made films from viewers and programs produced by regional TV stations to broadcast on their station. Their news segment did not have any original video or text content, compilation from other news services (Magradze, 2001).

The project existed for a year and then it was closed down. The founders could not figure out how to make it commercially viable and kept losing money. They said they will shut it down until they are able to come up with a good business model of Internet TV (Rerih, 2001).

Conclusion

Streaming video technology is not fulfilling its democratizing potential in the countries in transition such as Russia. Economic, social and cultural reasons shape the IT and streaming television growth. The politically inactive public chooses to use the technology primarily for entertainment or other socially safe activities, without engaging in political communication online. While citizens are slow to appreciate the technology’s potential for the growth of participatory democracy, the government takes a proactive role and shapes the IT according to its design. So, today, streaming video technology is

being primarily used for the state propaganda, and dissemination of state sponsored news. The state's technique in manipulating people's minds becomes more subtle and sophisticated. Ironically, what initially looked like more freedom starts to mean less freedom.

It can be true that the streaming video technology has not yet been discovered due to limited Internet access and slow connection speed. In the future, when the telecommunications infrastructure improves, the streaming video technology could be used more actively by individuals rather than by the government.

References

- Alexander, M. (2002). *The Internet in Putin's Russia: reinventing a technology of authoritarianism*. Retrieved March 5, 2003, from <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~bras1486/alexnuffield.pdf>
- Ardaev, V. (2002). "TV 6" on the Internet. Retrieved January 23, 2003 from <http://www.BBCRussian.com>.
- Boreiko M. & Nefedov F.(2001, July 10). Cabinet approves e-Russia plan. *The Moscow Times*.
- Chan, J. (1999). *Internews - the Internet based grassroots news service*. Retrieved March 2, 2003, from <http://www.internews.com>
- Conversations with Russian president Putin. Retrieved April 3, 2003, from <http://www.ortrtr.ru/talk.htm>
- NTV starts broadcasting over the Internet. (2002). *Compulenta.ru*. Retrieved March 15, 2003, from <http://www.compulenta.ru/2002/4/9/28149>
- Boris Jordan lost his position of a chief director of "Gazprom-Media. (2003, March 10). *Lenta.ru*. Retrieved March 11, 2003, from <http://lenta.ru/most/2003/01/17iordan>

Wolfe, E. (2001, June 27). State mulls e-Russia's \$2.6 billion fate. *The Moscow Times*,

Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. *E-Russia plan*. (2001).

Retrieved March 11, 2003, from www.economy.gov.ru/erus.html

Ferguson, D. (1998). From communist control to Glasnost and back? Media freedom and control in the former Soviet Union. *Public Relations Review*, 24 (2).

Jardin, X. (2000, January 10). From Russia with hope. *Silicon Valley Reporter Magazine*.

Ivanov, D. (2002, March 13). Russian Internet as means of political communication.

Russian Journal. Retrieved March 10, 2003, from

<http://www.russ.ru/netcult/history/20030313-pr.html>

Kalathil S & Boas T. (2002). The Internet and state control in authoritarian regimes:

China, Cuba, and the counterrevolution. Carnegie endowment for international peace.

Retrieved March 2, 2003, from http://www.firstmonday.dk/issue6_8/kalathil

Kondratev, A. (2001). Runet - from booklovers to business. *Russian Focus*. Retrieved

March 19, 2003, from http://www.russianfocus.ru/n_17/hi-tech/2.shtml

Kostinskii, A. (2002, 17 September). Information space of Caucasus and the Internet. *Radio Liberty*. Retrieved March 10, 2003, from

<http://www.svoboda.org/programs/sc/2002/sc.091702.asp>

Live broadcasting from Saint Petersburg, Russia (1995). Retrieved March 25, 2003, from <http://www.freelines.ru/art/music/live/concert.htm>

Magradze, R. (2001). *Internet TV from Saint Petersburg*. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://www.telemultimedia.ru/telemultimedia/archive/n05/35.html>

Mersadykova, T. (2002, 4 October). Freedom is their God! 55% of Internet users in Russia call freedom the most important value. *Computerra*. Retrieved on February, 23, 2003, from <http://www.computerra.ru/compunity/russ/20712/print.html>

Moffet, J. (1998). Russia: secret police lowering iron curtain on Internet. *Radio Free Europe*. Retrieved on March 15, 2003, from <http://rferl.org/nca/features/1998/F.RU.980820125102.html>

Moskalyuk, A. (2000). *Politech: Internet control in post-USSR countries*. Retrieved February 17, 2003, from <http://lists.insecure.org/lists/politech/2000/Apr/0021.html>

Naumenko, L. (2002, June 4). Reiman: IT Industry to double by 2005. *The Moscow Times*.

Naumenko, L. (2003, February 26). E-Russia threatened by cuts in financing. *The Moscow Times*.

Naumenko, L. (2003, February 19). City plans \$2 billion project to hot-wire capital. *The Moscow Times*.

Parfenov, S. (2000, August 28). Internet benefits from the TV broadcasting crisis. *Netoscope*. Retrieved March 15, 2003, from <http://www.netoscope.ru>

Rerih, A. (2001, June 11). The only Russian Internet TV is being shut down. *Netoscope*. Retrieved April 2, 2003, from <http://www.netoscope.ru>

Rheingold, H. (1993). *Virtual Communities*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Saharov, V. (2002, April 4). Russian Internet in danger. *Russia Today*. Retrieved March 18, 2003 from <http://www.rusmysl.ru/2002II/4403/440311apr04.html>

Smaele, H. (1999). The applicability of western media models on the Russian Media System. *European Journal of Communication*, 14 (2).

Thornton, A. (2002). *Does Internet create democracy?* Retrieved February 5, 2003, from <http://www.zip.com.au/~athornto//>

Vainer, E. (2000, January 24). How should we deceive Russia. *Russian Journal*.

Retrieved March 19, 2003 from http://www.russ.ru/netcult/20000124_veiner-pr.html

Zupko, S. (1994). *Russia and the Internet*. Retrieved March 5, 2003, from

http://www.zupko.com/russ_int.htm

Ulmanu, Alex. (2001, January 4). Russian journalists spread wings online. *Online*

Journalism Review. Retrieved January 20, 2003, from

<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1017962271.php>

Unesco, *Many Voices, One World*. (1980). Paris: Unesco.