Social Movements, Media, and Democratization in Georgia

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Abstract

A purpose of the study was to analyze the construction of reality around the Georgian media democratization movement in the years 2010 through 2012. A qualitative analysis of movement statements (n=17) and in-depth interviews with movement activists (n=12) found that the movement relied on mobilizing master frames linked to the concept of democracy: free speech, access to information, fair elections, transparency, plurality, and devised an innovative frame, it concerns you. The movement pursued two goals with its framing efforts: improvements in the media environment and mobilization of citizen participation.

A quantitative analysis of news stories about the movement (n=574) in six pro-opposition, pro-government, and independent news organizations found that the news organizations used movement-advanced frames, and, in general, used more mobilizing than demobilizing frames. The marginalization of the movement, a dominant mode of news coverage of social movements based on the literature, did not occur. However, the study found differences in coverage based on news organizations’ ties with the government and the opposition, or the lack thereof. Pro-opposition and independent TV stations covered the movement more frequently, aired reports at better viewing times, used more mobilizing frames, and gave greater voice to the activists and their key frame, “it concerns you.” The pro-opposition newspaper used a more positive tone and lengthier stories, and the independent newspaper more frequent coverage and activists as sources, while the pro-government newspaper featured the coverage more prominently and used the it concerns you frame. Both pro-government news organizations used government sources twice as often as other news organizations, and focused on those movement issues that were eventually endorsed by the government.

In-depth interviews with news journalists (n=5) in these news organizations found that journalists in the pro-opposition and independent press supported movement issues, and engaged in supportive reporting, and thought it was acceptable for journalists to engage in advocacy reporting when press freedoms were in danger. Journalists in pro-government media supported most of the movement’s demands, but were suspicious of political motives behind movement activism (the movement mobilized ahead of the Parliamentary Elections 2012) and did not engage in and disapproved of advocacy reporting.