

Abstract

This research project explores the impact of Western broadcasting on the public opinion of the Soviet audience in the Perestroika and Glasnost periods. Specifically, it focuses on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) contribution to changing attitudes of the Soviet public to the communist regime and ruling party, and constructing a positive image of Western democratic values during the relevant period of study. The theoretical approach to the investigation of RFE/RL broadcasting is based on media effects theories, particularly agenda-setting and framing theories. According to them, the media are not simply a conduit of information, but able to shape public opinion. By emphasising the salience of topics and particular aspects and characteristics of the issues, the media set public agenda and influence on people's perceptions about these issues. The study to assess RFE/RL's impact draws on audience research, quantitative and qualitative data analysis. It examines geographical reach and transmission frequencies of the Radio's broadcasts and analyses the content of the most featured programmes to explore how they framed the reality. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis, as well as the audience research data, demonstrate that RFE/RL's programming set anticommunist agenda by framing events based on the premise that communism and Eastern ideas are negative against democracy and Western values are positive. The study further suggests that the RFE/RL influenced the Soviet audience's perceptions and attitudes of the communist regime, by setting anticommunist public agenda and promoting Western ideas of freedom and human rights, leading to the Soviet people towards the Western model of democratic development.