JOURNALISTS’ ROLES AND ETHICS IN TURBULENT TIMES: CONTEMPORARY CONTROVERSIES IN UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT: The collapse of the Soviet Union started a new era of media transformations in Ukraine. The end of state-controlled media associated with censorship and informational isolation, first lessons of transition to market-driven media system, political turbulences and pressures, and the emergence of journalism professional values, new rhythms dictated by technologies – they all caused significant and rapid changes to journalism culture and media practice. This article is devoted to the issues of media freedom in contemporary post-Soviet Ukraine. Based on the interpretive and visual (collage elicitation) research, it suggests looking at the phenomenon of journalists’ freedom through the journalists’ considerations and as a part of individual ethics, and explores how journalists see their role within the media practices they experience. Ukrainian journalists cannot play the role of agents in democratic change. Justifying the experienced pressures by different, usually external, reasons, Ukrainian journalists tend to adjust ethical norms to existing practices. It causes further conflict between normative standards and their interpretation and implementation in practice that is, according to Voltmer and Dobreva (2009), typical for new democracies in which old structures and values coexist with new democratic norms. In this paper, first, a review of the path of journalism evolution in post-Soviet and contemporary Ukraine and the forces behind the pressures journalists experience. Further, I will refer to the particularities of normative and individual journalism ethics as they are discussed in theoretical works and, finally, present the results of qualitative study showing how journalists interpret their ethical choices and decisions, and, more importantly, perceive their professional roles when they discuss their experienced practices.

KEYWORDS: journalism ethics, individual ethics, journalism professional roles, post-Soviet media, media freedom, Ukrainian media, visual research

INTRODUCTION

One of the main challenges of transforming communication after the breakdown of authoritarian rule is to secure the independence and quality of journalism (Voltmer and Dobreva, 2009). Since Ukraine became an independent state in 1991, Ukrainian media entered a new era of transforming from an ideology-governed system development, and survival under new market conditions. These transformations, or “recovery” (Ivshina, 2008), are still going on, and Ukrainian media practitioners experience challenges similar to those their colleagues have in other countries of the Eastern Europe: limited freedom of speech, little room for advancement, heavy workloads, and inequality at work (Baysha and Hallahan, 2004; Dyczok, 2009, Tsetsura and Grynko, 2009; Grynko, 2010; Grynko, 2012; Willard, 2003).
This article is devoted to the issues of media freedom in contemporary post-Soviet Ukraine. Specifically, it explores the way Ukrainian journalists’ view and interpret existing pressures that are referred to ethical violations according to a normative perspective (1) and how they view their professional roles when they discuss those practices (2).

In this paper, first, a review of the path of journalism evolution in post-Soviet and contemporary Ukraine and the forces behind the pressures journalists experience. Further, I will refer to the particularities of normative and individual journalism ethics as they are discussed in theoretical works and, finally, present the results of qualitative study showing how journalists interpret their ethical choices and decisions, and, more importantly, perceive their professional roles when they discuss their experienced practices.

POST-SOVIET UKRAINIAN MEDIA: “OLIGARKHIZATION” AND INSTRUMENTAL ROLE

The function of the media in the Soviet Union was largely as a channel for communicating decisions of the regional and local government, and, like all Soviet media, Ukrainian media was controlled from the top down. Therefore, once Ukraine gained independence, the media needed to create its own national press on short notice (Baysha and Hallahan, 2004). At the beginning of the 1990s, many newspapers and magazines were closed as they struggled to become economically and politically independent in the turbulent political and economic times. When the transition from state-owned to private hands was over, it became evident it did not bring media the expected liberty. “Many new media outlets were created for purpose of influence rather than to provide the public with information or generate profits” (Dyczok, 2009: 21). Importantly, during the mid-1990s, the formation of large financial industrial groups that concentrated substantial media assets under their ownership started. This was the beginning of a media resources concentration that continues today. It was also the time of the “oligarkhization” process. Media started to play the role of instruments to influence public opinion. Because of the close relation between media and political elites, the state authorities could easily press on media outlets (ibid.).
The beginning of the 2000s was the time when Russian capital entered the Ukrainian media market; “Kommersant Ukraine”, and “Komsomolskaya Pravda in Ukraine” were founded. New forms of media funding appeared. Grants of foreign donors supported such media projects as “Ukrainska Pravda” (online media that is still influential and popular for its objectivity and journalists’ investigations) and “Telekrytyka” (media specialized in journalism issues).

In 2005-2010 (under the Victor Yushchenko presidency) western investors demonstrated a growing interest in the Ukrainian media market. However, non-transparent business practices, difficulties in distribution and political instability made it impossible for foreign investors to develop profitable media projects within the country. The situation became even worse as a result of economic crisis. Thus, the majority of foreign owners had to leave the market. Later, under the presidency of Yanukovych, the media ownership was redistributed among the main business groups in the country that own enterprises in different industrial sectors (refining, chemical, heavy machinery construction etc.) and, therefore, those businessmen are often loyal to the authorities in order to save their own businesses (Dutsyk, 2009).

Today, media business seems to exist in few “parallel realities”. There are big media owners who control the major media corporations in the country. Additionally, there are state and communal media that cover regions. There are also separate media projects in regions, founded by small, local businessmen (Ivanov et al., 2011). Media ownership continues to remain non-transparent in Ukraine. Although the law “on television and radio broadcasting” requires the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine to provide information about the media owners, this information is not enough to give a complete picture of the real owners hidden in offshore zones.

PRESSURES ON MEDIA BEFORE 2004

The pressures, influences and lack of freedom in media is an important characteristic that is usually attached to media situation in Ukraine. Together with other Soviet Social-ist Republics such as Moldova, Belarus, and Russia, Ukraine has been mentioned as
the country where media are still politically controlled and press freedom is limited or non-existent (Mickiewicz, 1998). Ukrainian journalists continued to experience various pressures that were especially visible in coverage of political issues and elections (Grynko, 2012). Later, at the end of 2001, the sources of influences were mainly concentrated in the hands of state authorities who started to use administrative power to influence media.

Then, during the presidential campaign in 2004, the ruling elite strengthened their efforts to use media to win the presidency. Specifically, they expanded news censorship to deny candidate Yushchenko access to media as well as discrediting him in analytical and current affairs shows (Dyczok, 2009). The journalists’ revolution, started in October 2004, was directly connected with the political events in the country. That October, Ukrainian media communities initiated the action supporting the journalists of the 5th Channel, which was under strong political pressure at that time. As a result, on November 21, the 5th Channel began broadcasting the events on Maidan [the central square in Kyiv] where more than 20 thousand Ukrainians came to support Yushchenko, a presidential candidate from the opposition. The protests were supported by international journalists’ organizations (Ligachova and Ganza, 2005).

“CENSORSHIP OF MONEY” AND WHOLESOME JOURNALISM AFTER 2004

After the Orange Revolution in 2004, Ukrainian journalism experienced positive changes, and journalists started to enjoy a relative freedom from centralized government censorship. Freedom House’s report that the Ukrainian media transition from “Not Free” to “Partly Free” happened from 2004 to 2005, matches the Orange Revolution time line (Freedom House, 2005). However, after 2004 the problem of influences was shifted from direct government intervention to indirect influences through intra-organizational – level relations between the media owners and journalists. Belyakov (2009) states that “censorship of money” had started from the 2000s when oligarchs or simple advertisers manipulated media following the goal of profit. Victoria Syumar (2008) also writes about the “censorship of money” that changed government pressure in Ukraine and notes the “election campaign in 2007 was followed by the significant growth of paid-for media coverage”.

Journalists’ roles and ethics in turbulent times: Contemporary controversies in Ukraine
Ukrainian oligarchs who own media, manipulate editorial policy according to their private interests and also allow manipulation by third parties if paid (Belyakov, 2009). Syumar (IREX, 2008) claims:

there used to be censorship by government; now it is censorship by money... Before, the censorship of the powerful was performed by the stick. Then those in power came to realize that the stick is too crude, and the journalists were starting to resist. So they started to exercise it with the carrot, as money is much more pleasant, and it is hard to refuse.

Thus, media owners came to understanding that elections campaign may bring good profits and start selling pages in press and time in TV programs to different political parties. The 2007 parliamentary election campaign reinforced such practices. So, the publishers became major actors who negotiated “media plans” of coverage with major political forces and their headquarters (Dovzhenko, 2009), according to Syumar (as cited in Orlova, 2007), as a result of conscious policy of media management.

During the Kyiv mayoral elections of 2008, media started to provide “pre-election services” that combined consistent loyalty towards one candidate and serving others when paid (ibid.). As a result, journalists demonstrated more and more loyalty towards paid-for materials, thinking this is the only way to get profit for media. Accordingly, they were losing motivation for professional work and this negatively impacted the overall quality of media products. Therefore, the influences on media have been transformed from a “retail” into a “whole-sale system” (IREX, 2008).

After the pro-Russian opposition leader Viktor Yanukovych took office as the president, broadcast frequencies were withdrawn from critical outlets and extra-legal harassment of journalists increased, leading to greater self-censorship. Ukraine, which has consistently been one of the best performers in its sub-region in recent years, saw an erosion of media freedom, falling from 53 to 56 points (Freedom House, 2010).

According to the Democratic Initiative Foundation’s report (2010), although there is no formal censorship in the media, it does exist “informally”. Media experts and activists state that governmental
control is one of the main challenges of media transparency in the country today. Based on the monitoring of daily TV news, Ukrainian NGOs (Internews Network, Telekrytyka and the Mass Information Institute) find the signs of biases in TV news and state that censorship policy is mostly aimed at forming the positive image of the government.

A sociological poll conducted in September 2010 shows that 41% of Ukrainians recognize the decrease of freedom of speech after the presidential elections compared to results in April 2010 when just 18% of citizens believed there was a problem. According to another survey conducted by Razumkov Center, more than 55% of Ukrainians agree that political censorship exists in the country (Sociological Group “Rating”, 2010).

NORMATIVE AND INDIVIDUAL ETHICS

Truthfulness and transparency in gathering and reporting information and independence/integrity by refusing bribes or any other outside influences on the work are normative principles, which are usually declared in codes of ethics for journalists (Laitila, 1995). There are two national codes of ethics for journalists in Ukraine and both formalize the rules that stay in line with international professional regulations. Importantly, the majority of media practitioners report they are familiar with the code of ethics (Umedia, 2012) which manifests that journalists should be able to make their decisions independently (CJE, 2002). Article eight of the code of ethics, adopted by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, specifically states that journalists should be objective and should not accept any rewards that may influence their judgment or prepare any materials in order to self-promote or to materially benefit from publications (NUJU, 2005).

Ethical decisions are always about choices and the main force in this choice is composed by ethical concern: when a media person realizes commitments and thoughtful decisions among alternatives (Gordon et al., 1996). There are two main schools of ethics explaining the direction of journalists’ ethical concerns; The first one says journalist may be guided primarily by the external societal rules or community customs (normative or communitarian ethics). Meanwhile the second one argues that journalists first and foremost ground their de-
cisions on internal, personal perspectives (individual or libertarian ethics).

Although ethics are commonly associated with the normative area, in real-life professional practice, ethics could be hardly limited to normative concepts and imperatives. It is also an internal process of making individual choices that may or may not correspond with established rules. There is a human element in media practice that highlights the ethics of every person within the mass media organization and how they approach their freedom and their responsibility doing the job (Forunato, 2005). Ethics is always a process (or action) of moral reasoning through which people express themselves, articulate their visions, make moral agreements and establish principles: “ethics is not a passive act of obeying a set of rules handed down to us. It is the dynamic activity of imagining new norms and adapting old principles to changing social conditions and human purposes” writes Ward (2004: 27). Looking at ethics as a process of invention, Ward (2004) insists on the practitioners’ ability to construct conceptual schemes, norms, and test their interpretations in various contexts.

Therefore, individual factors (values, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and intentions) are crucial component for moral reasoning and ethical decision-making, according to Ferrell and Gresham (1985). Other factors which influence ethical actions are “significant others in the organizational setting” and “opportunities for ethical/unethical action” (i.e., establishment of professional codes and corporate policies, reward/penalty systems) (ibid.: 90).

**INTERPRETATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

As a way to understand media practices, this study approaches journalism practice within the social constructionist paradigm. Assuming that social life is processual, there are emergent, multiple realities, with facts and values linked (Charmaz, 2006:126). My investigation is built on the methodology of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006) and applies methods of individual interviews and focus-group discussions with media practitioners in Ukraine as well as the creative art-based method.
Interpretative science believes that social reality is socially constructed and the goal of the scientist is to understand what meaning people give to reality, not to determine how reality works apart from these interpretations (Schutt, 2006). Working under the mentioned assumptions, interpretative researchers rarely ask objective survey questions, aggregate the answers of many people, and claim to have something meaningful. Instead, each person’s interpretation must be placed in a more personal, idiosyncratic context, and the true meaning of a person’s answer will vary according to the interview or questioning context and how the situation is perceived by individual respondents (Gunter, 2000).

Applying qualitative methodological approach, this study is based on the assumption that journalists possess an internal sense of media practices in which they are involved, by sharing the meanings of their professional actions and interactions they understand and construct their professional roles and identities.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

A total of 100 media practitioners participated in the study. 49 persons (34 journalists and 15 editors) were interviewed and 51 (23 editors and 28 journalists) took part in the 8 focus-group discussions. The practicing media representatives, editors and leading journalists of national and regional media were invited to participate in the study. The selection of study participants was based on their current active leadership position (top or middle-level management/editor/leading reporter) and participation in making decisions about topics and angles of media coverage, extensive work experience in the field of at least two years, specifically, and, finally, a volunteer agreement to participate in the study.

Each focus group discussion lasted between 90-120 minutes and included between 5 and 10 participants. “The group must be small enough for everyone to have the opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity in perceptions” (Krueger and Casey, 2009: 6). According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), the rationale for the range of focus group size should stem from the goal that within focus groups there should be enough participants to yield diversity in the information provided; yet they should not include too
many participants because large groups can create an environment where participants do not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences.

Group members varied by gender, age and types of media, but had the commonality of being leading media practitioners who have been working in media for at least 2 years and who are responsible for or can influence the selection of topics and angles of coverage. Stewart and Shamdasani explain that interaction is easier when individuals with similar socioeconomic backgrounds comprise the group (1990: 38). A lively, interesting discussion tends to build a sense of cohesiveness. Equally important, the sharing of experiences and recognition that other participants have had similar experiences add to the cohesiveness of the group (ibid.). Interviews were tape-recorded in Ukrainian or Russian (depending on language which was convenient for the participant), completely transcribed, and then analysed to identify all relevant statements for inductive analysis of identifying emerging themes through multiple readings.

The unstructured (specifically, on the very first stages of data collection, pilot interviews and group discussions) and semi-structured (mainly on the final stages of data collection and verification) types of interviewing were applied for data collection. Berger explains that in unstructured interviews the researcher is focused on specific topics of study but exercises relatively little control over the responses of the informant, and in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a written list of questions to ask but at the same time tries to maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interviewing (2000: 112). This methodological approach provided a free flow conversation and allowed insights based on the respondents’ professional experiences. Imposing too much structure on the interview inhibits the interviewee’s responses and may cause an incomplete understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009).

**PROBLEMS LINKED TO THE ETHICAL CHALLENGES AS JOURNALISTS ARTICULATE THEM**

Discussing the function of media in Ukraine, journalists argued that they still have not gained the role of the “fourth power” in Ukraine; the figure of journalist was often depicted as powerless, manipulated, and speechless; some participants also noted that journalists need to
survive and adopt to the existing system, and this adaptation often costs them diminished ethical values:

Journalism is corrupted and compromised...so journalists have to operate in a “muddy water” and some of them try to “catch fish” in it and gain profit.

Talking about the main causes of pressure and ethical violations, journalists named the undeveloped media market in Ukraine as a primary problem and obstacle for development of journalist profession and media freedom. Specifically, journalists agreed that media usually “do not follow strategic business plans” and, thus, “are not managed to be a long-term effective business” that intends to build to be profitable and respond to the audience demand. One media practitioner commented:

“...first and foremost it depends on how long you plan the business. If it is planned for 15 years, it must be professional and transparent. Meanwhile, our media businesses are usually planned as a short-term business aimed at getting quick profit or publicity, and follow so-called “now-and-here strategies”.

Besides, journalists agreed the dependence on owners and sponsors is one of the most significant factors of influence, which complicates media development and causes the violations of journalism principles. Moreover, some participants said there are many media in Ukraine that were created as a “platform for the owner’s communication” and are aimed at promotion of the owner’s messages rather than being a competitive business project. In fact, almost all participants shared their experience about the owner’s pressure and two groups of reasons behind those pressures, as they feel them:

Controlling the coverage content (1), coverage of preferable topics and avoiding unfavorable ones. As journalists explained:

“the owner has his interests or his friends’ interests, so we [reporters] have to cover concrete topics”; “…we are sponsored by “Privat Group”, and that is why we never place any negative information about their business even if it is newsworthy.”
One regional journalist shared her example:

...two TV channels in our region belong to two different businesses: “Zaporizhstal” [the name of the plant] and “Motor Sich” [the name of the plant]. So, these channels “are specialized” in different sectors and never mention news of competitors even if something important and newsworthy happens.

Maximizing the profit (2) is another reason behind the owners’ pressure on media. As the research participants explained – intending to get profit, owners tend to keep friendly relations with advertisers and may establish internal policy that violates ethical principles of media, for instance, by asking journalists to cover topics that are preferable for advertiser. Specifically, journalists recollected examples when owner, being manipulated by the advertiser, manipulated the work of the editorial department: “the founder manipulates editorial staff ‘to satisfy’ the advertiser and get more money”. Consequently, journalists mentioned advertisers as a factor of influence on Ukrainian media but also noted that this is an “indirect influence”, which is usually realized through the owner or media marketing department for profit maximization.

A CONSTITUTED ROLE OF THE JOURNALIST WITHIN EXPERIENCED PRACTICES

Describing the ethical dilemmas they face and solve in their everyday work in media, they provided an interesting shared pattern of explanations; “why” and “how” they think it works and how they view individual journalist (or themselves) in the mentioned practices.

“I DO NOT DO IT WHILE THEY DO”: REFERENCES TO THE EXPERIENCES OF “OTHERS”

Journalists were generally negative about any kind of influence pressures and told that the pressures that challenge the quality of journalism in the country are faced by the majority of the media outlets and people working in media. Respondents rarely connected the pressures to a wider problem of pressure within “personal” professional experience, choice and responsibility. Whilst there were numerous instances when research participants defined the pressures
existing and widespread in Ukraine, they also frequently articulated the problem as one of “my personal” experience:

“I have never experienced it personally but have heard much from my friends, they told as they were offered money and placed materials for that. As for me, I am not a person of this kind, may be I am not a right person” (journalist).

“It is strongly controlled in our newspaper; journalist will be fired for accepting bribes. But not all media organizations have such a strict policy” (editor).

“I have only heard from my friend that they are rewriting materials five times depending on which side gives more money to editor. They have hard time at their work…” (journalist).

Such statements might be interpreted as the perception of influences as ones happening “somewhere there” and do not really refer to individual respondents’ experience. Equally important, they also function rhetorically to conceptualize the problem which is “not mine” or “my media” but “theirs”, for example, “other journalists”, “friends”, “colleagues”, “other newspapers”, “magazines”, “TV-channels”, “competitors”.

Although the lack of freedom was problematized and labeled as topical for the Ukrainian media field, the participants’ description of the problem as not “mine” but “their” might then be interpreted as the intention to present themselves as not involved into the practices that are considered to be ethical by their nature. This can be connected with a sensitivity of the issues discussed. Possibly, the participants intentionally avoided speaking about the practices of pressures as “their own” experiences because those practices are assumed to be unethical. This may also mean the journalists have personally experienced pressures and they did not want to reveal them under the in-group settings or during individual interviews; consequently, I would conclude they find this experience “uncomfortable” or “immoral” and prefer not to be associated with the mentioned professional cases.

“IT IS NOT BECAUSE OF ME, IT IS BECAUSE OF THEM” AND “OUR HARD LIFE”: SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY AND PROBLEM LEGITIMIZATION
While sharing the experiences, study participants were mainly focused on the explanations of “why pressures happen” and “who is responsible for them”. As it was noted from the transcriptions, the reasons of non-transparent practices were often referred to “they” or “other” markers and were connected with other people’s decisions or external factors rather than personal decisions and responsibilities. Specifically, the patterns of shifting responsibility and problem legitimization were constructed by the expanded explanations of the reasons and responsibilities for non-transparent practices. Hence, responsibility for the problem was often shifted to the third person “them” (someone or generalized others) while the reasons were referred to broader conditions (social, economic, professional contexts) which, according to respondents, force them to behave unethically.

The marker “they” referred to different actors who were blamed for media bribery existence and called responsible for the pressures. Specifically, “they” journalists usually meant editors, who were blamed for causing the pressure on journalists as a result of acceptance of cash or other benefits. Meanwhile, the interviewed editors called journalists responsible for paid-for materials as “lazy, non-professional” and that is why accept cash from the news sources. Both journalists and editors expressed the shifting of the responsibility on advertising departments or media owners that “influence editorial policy to maximize profits from advertisers”.

This pattern of blaming the other stakeholders for the existence of media bribery practice also concerned Public Relations specialists who are “too aggressive”, “not professional”, “unethical” and “lazy”, and prefer to pay for publicity rather than work professionally. Another variation of the “blaming others” or “shifting responsibility” pattern concerned readers and the media, blaming consumers who are not very fastidious, “do not demand high quality product” and usually “can not even recognize paid-for materials”.

The problem of legitimization was another pattern that, in participants’ accounts, functions like a “good” reason for accepting bribes and pressure from news sources. It was articulated in a broader context of social, economic and political conditions:
“…Journalists get not much money nowadays, but they have to feed their families. Their life is hard, believe me”.

“It is hard to survive without taking bribes now, everyone takes them, and our life is corrupted starting from politics”.

“This practice is not regulated here, so there are no sanctions and almost every media takes bribes. Why and how should we be transparent?”.

By these phrases respondents made attempts to prove the necessity of accepting bribes and tried to legitimize this practice by extremely hard social, economic conditions or commonness of corruption in different spheres. The legitimation is realized through the construct of “hard reality” which is usually comes with such concrete attributes as “low salaries” and “financial struggles”, “undeveloped system of law and ethical regulations”, “absence of competition in media field”, “lack of good example” “corruption in social and political fields which is common”.

Meanwhile, research participants almost never mentioned the effects and outcomes of the practice (why this happens). Specifically, the research indicated the lack of attention to the consequences of the individual responses to the pressures and too much attention to the reasons (especially, their justification) and responsibility (who is responsible or should be blamed) for unprofessional actions.

**VISUALIZATION OF MEDIA PRACTICE AND JOURNALIST ROLES: ANALYSIS OF COLLAGES**

Focus group participants were asked to create collages reflecting how they see (and experience) journalists’ work in Ukraine. Collage is constructing a picture by sticking images or other materials to a surface. To make the collages, journalists received colourful magazines, booklets and newspapers, so they had plenty of choices and could cut and stick any pictures, photos, headline and pieces of texts from there; they were also given markers and pencils to write and draw anything they wanted to express their view in a graphic way. Journalists were asked to create collages in small groups of two-three people, and then to give commentaries on what they had depicted.
Since knowledge can not be reduced to language (Eisner, 2008) and verbalized notions, I have combined traditional qualitative interviewing with elements of visual method (creation of collages), allowing people to reflect creatively on the topics of the research interest and show the world beyond the text, words and verbal descriptions. Creatively mixing methods encourage thinking “outside the box” and generating new ways of interrogating and understanding the social realities (Mason, 2002).

Methodologists refer to collage as a creative art-based visual method that helps to enhance participants’ reflexivity and to take into account also their different needs and expressive styles. Applying drawing methods in the context of an interview opens up participants’ interpretations of questions, and allows a creative way of interviewing that is responsive to the participants’ own meanings and associations (Bagnoli, 2009). Collage seems to work best when we move from the intuitive to the conceptual so it is an appropriate medium for exploring identity, ethics and professional dilemmas (Ridley and Rogers, 2010). The work with images helps to communicate more holistically and through metaphors (Prosser and Loxley, 2008). Besides, collaborative work helped to get more insights as participants were sharing ideas and discussed images they chose for their collages. Collaborative drawings produced in larger groups can extend the insights to more complex forms of communication and meaning-making (Ridley and Rogers, 2010).

The analysis includes review of the main components (both people and objects) that appeared on the collages and that, according to research participants, influence professional lives of Ukrainian journalists (1). Here I was looking at what (objects) and who (actors) were present on the collages. Second, I analyse the representation of “the journalist”; specifically, how the journalist role and professional functions are visualized (2). The third category is the review of general composition of the collages (how elements are located, what are their sizes and proportions) (3). It is also important to note that every single collage made by journalist was original and contained unique details I will also mention as meaningful features and descriptions.

The figure of journalist was present on every collage. Pictures of influential political and business figures also appeared on the collages.
Mainly they were shown as important and powerful stakeholders in journalism practice and ones who influence journalist’s work. The influence was mainly related to financial pressures or financial dependence, and it was mainly reflected by the issues of ownership or financial manipulations (which may be associated with corrupted practices). More rarely, journalists drew political and business actors as ones who influence journalists only as news makers.

The concept of money was somehow marked at almost every collage. Specifically, the sign of “money” was presented as a tool of manipulation and influence on media practice (see Collage 1) and as the purpose why media owners open media outlets. This may indicate that journalists are especially concerned with the financial side of their work and, especially, their financial dependence. The concept of money also appeared in Collage 1 at the part titled “How journalism should work”; here the creators put their expectation about the “high salaries” journalists should get for keeping their professional autonomy.

Mainly, research participants who created collages described money as a tool of pressure, which politicians and business owners apply to manipulate media. The makers of Collage 1 placed the numbers meaning certain (big) amounts of money under the pictures of two business figures illustrating oligarchs who are competing and fighting to make more money; in their fights they use media as an instrument for their business goals.

Collage 3 also contains fragments illustrating money issues. As journalists depicted it, the thoughts about money (profits) determines the decisions of the media owners and frame editorial policy. Finally, at Collage 4, the Presidential Advisor Anna Herman is depicted portrayed as the one asking journalists “How much do you cost?”. This image illustrates a cynical attitude of state authorities towards journalists.

Generally, the images of politicians and businessmen were often selected as the main stakeholders of media practices and the ones who greatly influence the work of journalists. These figures, presenting ones who have greater power and influence, were often bigger sized, with brighter colours and located at the centre or on the top of the whole picture.
Interestingly, the figure of the journalist was placed under the photos of oligarchs and under the “money”. The question “Who pays more?” is written near his head, indicating the real thoughts and intentions of the media professional. It may illustrate that journalists are serving the interests of ones who have financial resources and power in the country.

This situation, as research participants believe, diminishes the professional ethics of journalism. They have illustrated it in a metaphoric way, selecting the picture of a journalist’s ID/certificate (“посвідчення журналіста”) in a dirty, oily, trash-like pan (see Collage 1). This picture, according to the practitioners who were working on the collage, illustrates a real state and nature of journalism in
Ukraine. This was an ironic way to show that values of profession are cynically neglected and “burnt to ashes”. It is significantly to note, that the same photo of journalist ID, fried in a dirty pan with the pieces of stale food, was used by the creators of another collage. Therefore, this picture seemed to be meaningful for participants and worked best to present how they characterize their professional work.

The composition of the collages also says a lot about how research participants present the way the power is distributed in media practice. Specifically, the figure of journalist is located on the bottom; meanwhile the faces of ones who represent political and business elites are in the middle of the picture (see Collage 1). On the top of the picture journalists put the sign of “struggles between, those two influential figures”.

It may say that business (and political) interests and struggles are interpreted as the main issue that guides and shapes the work of journalist. Collage 3 also presents the figures of journalists working in an editorial department on the bottom. Central and top parts of the picture are occupied by a big image of the media owner (particularly, his head) and the image of “the President Administration”; this finding may convey the meaning that the owner and government play a crucial role in the work of media.

Collage 2.
Translation of the phrases, the first part:
a journalist – smaller figure,
“Investor” - a bigger one;
the second part: “ideal journalism”, “big salaries”, “airy goals”, “true values”.

Collage 3.
The minor and instrumental role of the journalist was clearly illustrated by Collage 2, where focus group participants showed the figures of journalist and investor in a metaphoric way. The media owner is given as a huge faceless and grey monument, meanwhile a small cartoon-like (childish looking) character following the monument and looking at his back, represents the journalist. The figure of the journalist creates the impression of a small, powerless and manipulated man who has nothing to do but hide behind the big figure of the owner.

The powerless and instrumental role of media is clearly reflected in Collage 3. The editorial department is drawn as a group of small, grey and similar looking people (journalists) and is titled as a news selling (instead of news production) division. Focus group participants also drew journalists as “speechless and silent” who cannot (or do not want) to express their opinion; the pictures of “people with closed (plastered) mouths” represent media workers on Collage 4.

Therefore, the visualization of the journalist role and function stays in line and adds new metaphoric features to the image of journalist constructed by the research participants’ narrative stories and interpretations.

Collage 3.
Translation of the phrases from right to left: “President Administration”, “What offers does the President of Russia have?” “News-selling division”.
Therefore, media owner, influential politicians, state authorities and businessmen are drawn as the main actors in media practice together with journalist. The latter often shown as small, powerless figures mainly doing the technical work of producing “news for sale” or news for serving owners’ interests.

However, no one collage contained any piece representing either the audience nor any interests of public consuming media products. The concept of audience and public interest was not portrayed in any of the collages. Having analysed the visual data, I have noted that images of people reading newspapers or watching TV or any visual signs that could be interpreted as their needs, interests, expectations were not included in the pictures of journalist work.

The absence of audience among the actors in the picture of Ukrainian journalism and in the focus group transcriptions may be interpreted by the fact that research participants may experience very small (or extremely small) influence of news consumers on their work. The issues of money and purposes of serving the interests of influential people (political and business elites) seem to replace audience needs and expatiations. This finding corresponds with the ideas sounded during the interviews, when practitioners mentioned that many media organization play instrumental roles rather than intend to meet audience needs and serve public interests.
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Aimed at the exploration of journalists’ ethical interpretations that guide them in their professional work, this research suggests to look at the phenomenon of journalists’ freedom through journalists’ considerations and as a part of individual ethics, and explore how journalists see their role within the media practices they experience. According to Koltsova (2006), the study of media practice is especially helpful for finding observable units of social reality and struggling with “normativism” as it describes how people act, and not how it is required by perspective rules. This notion is especially true about Ukraine, where both media market and journalism professional culture are still developing, journalism value system is being established and journalists continue to question their professional roles and obligations within existing political, economical and cultural environments.

Lauk notes (2008) that after the fall of the communist regimes in the Central and Eastern European countries, media and journalists found themselves in a certain “normative vacuum” and there was confusion as to how to behave in the changing public sphere where the old patterns did not work and new ones were yet to be introduced or adapted. According to the study, although Ukrainian journalists are aware of the normative rules and ethically responsible practices, they demonstrate relative and blurry ethical considerations when it comes to the discussion of every-day professional choices. This can be widely found in other post-communist countries where “legal and/or conventional framework that would motivate journalists to follow the principles is still missing” (ibid.: 194). This finding corresponds with what Zielonka and Mancini identify as a blurred journalists’ professional identity, putting it as a common feature across Central and Eastern Europe: “it has proved difficult for journalists to develop a strong and clear professional identity in the constantly changing political, economic and social environment… Journalists diffuse and frequently overlapping social roles have generated confusion and lack of coherence” (2011: 7).

The interviewed journalists tended to realize the threats coming from the side of media owners, put the concept of “money” and figures of political and business elites in the centre of both visualized
and verbalized images of contemporary media practice, and mention “self-censorship” as the main challenge for journalistic work. At the same time, discussing their own experiences, journalists tended to position themselves as victims of the existing practices (and manipulations in media). Respondents often explained the pressures as mainly “external factors” (in particular, “unethical” journalists or representatives of other professional groups as well as political and economic hardships or general “culture of corruption” in the society) and rarely referred to the importance of personal choice and responsibility for involvement into unethical practices.

Discussing the function of media in Ukraine, respondents argued that journalists still have not gained the role of the “fourth power”; the figure of the journalist was often visualized as powerless, manipulated, and speechless; some participants also noted that journalists needed to survive and adapt to the existing system (“…to operate in a “muddy water” and “catch the fish”), and this “adaptation” often costs them diminishing ethical rules.

Generally, the discussions often focused on justification of the practices that are not normally justified by ethical rules and blaming “others”. Speaking about the issue of pressures, journalists tended to pay attention to the reasons (why this happens?) and actors (who are involved and guilty?) of experienced media practices rather than outcomes of the journalism that lacks freedom, specifically, public interests or reputation of media organization, its credibility and professional and business success, etc. The notions of audience and public interest were usually excluded from the journalists’ discussions about media experienced practices. Both textual and visual data demonstrates that journalists do not perceive readers and viewers as ones who influence or are somehow present in the overall picture of media practice. Media owners, political figures, businessmen, advertisers, editors and reporters are mentioned among the main actors who compose and influence media practice and set the rules of media practice.

Therefore, the reformation of a media system that, according to the normative view, was expected to ensure media independency has not fully worked in a Ukrainian context. Having experienced the years of state control under the communist regime, Ukrainian journalists did
not manage to gain expected independence after the Soviet Union collapse. Specifically, media privatization did not ensure the freedom as well as the attempts to adapt ethical values formalized in the codes. Owned by political and business elites (“oligarchs”) private media continue to face the pressures that, in many cases, question journalists’ independence and the transparency of media practices.

It is hardly debatable that working under such conditions Ukrainian journalists cannot play the role of agents in democratic change. Justifying the experienced pressures by different, usually external, reasons, Ukrainian journalists tend to adjust ethical norms to existing practices. It causes further conflict between normative standards and their interpretation and implementation in practice that is, according to Voltmer and Dobreva (2009), typical for new democracies in which old structures and values coexist with new democratic norms (or what is understood to be democratic norms).

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