

An Exploratory Study of the Media Transparency in Ukraine

Katerina Tsetsura and Anastasia Grynko

This study extends the global media credibility research by analyzing the phenomenon of media transparency in Ukraine. A survey of journalists and public relations practitioners revealed that both direct and indirect forms of media influence distort the independent news coverage in Ukraine. Public relations practitioners, advertisers, and publishers often pressure the Ukrainian media to place publicity materials as news stories on the pages or on the air. The pressure to place publicity in exchange for advertising is the most wide-spread practice. Results indicated that media non-transparency occurs at three levels in Ukraine: interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational. The qualitative data showed that this country's media professionals as well as public relations practitioners have yet to identify the modern roles and functions of both media and media relations and have yet to find ways to underpin their professional codes of ethics.

Katerina Tsetsura, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at University of Oklahoma, tsetsura@ou.edu.

Anastasia Grynko from the Kiev Mohyla Academy in Kiev, Ukraine

Introduction

Media relations practices account for about 60 to 70 percent of all public relations efforts to convey organizations' messages to various publics (Zoch & Molleda, 2006).

Many scholars and practitioners are interested in what constraints media relations practitioners might face in countries with rapidly developing public relations professions (Jo & Kim, 2004; Tsetsura, 2004). Media relations practitioners and journalists have a symbiotic relationship: both need each other and both realize that the free flow of information is essential for the exchange of ideas in a democratic society. The media transparency concept determines how and why information is conveyed through various means. Media is considered to be transparent when: 1) there are many, often competing sources of information, 2) much is known about the method of information delivery, and 3) information about the funding of media or media productions is publicly available (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2004). Absence of any direct and indirect influence is central to the concept of media transparency.

Honesty, independence of opinion, fair judgment, and news values are among the main factors that define journalistic principles and aid media credibility. If one or several of these principles are violated, the public has the right to know what influenced certain editorial decisions (Craig, 1999, 2006, 2008). Lack of disclosure of influences and constraints placed on journalists, editors, and the media in which articles or programs appear is often referred to as non-transparency. Non-transparency is defined as any form of payment for news coverage or any influence on editorial decisions that is not clearly indicated in the finished product of the media, such as an article or a

program. For instance, non-transparent media could publish a news article which appeared as a result of cash payments to the media channel or to its journalists or editors and there would be nothing in the article that would identify it has been paid (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). Examples of media non-transparency, such as directly paying cash or presenting products or services to journalists or editors, or indirectly influencing the media to receive news coverage, have been widely studied in the last few years in specific countries such as Estonia and Poland (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Tsetsura, 2005) as well as globally (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). Many scholars and practitioners around the world are concerned with existing practices of influencing the media in exchange for publishing desired materials because these practices compromise the traditional functions of mass media in society. They undermine media's roles as gatekeepers (Boynton, 2007; Craig, 2007; Pasti, 2005).

This study builds on previous research on media transparency around the world (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003) to analyze the phenomenon of media non-transparency in Ukraine. Its goal is to help researchers and practitioners better understand the nature of Ukrainian media relations and challenges journalists and public relations specialists face in this Eastern European country. This analysis creates the basis for future studies to compare Ukrainian media practices with those of other countries in the region and extends previous media transparency research conducted in Eastern Europe (Tsetsura, 2005). It provides the first description and analysis of the development of media relations in Ukraine and the challenges it faces. The article also demonstrates how practices Ukrainian media relations can be understood and conceptualized within the larger frame of media transparency (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003).

This article first provides an overview of contemporary practice of public relations and specifically media relations in Ukraine. Next, the context for understanding the issue of media non-transparency in Ukraine is presented, followed by the results of the primary research conducted among members of three Ukrainian professional organizations. Finally, the implications of this investigation for scholars and practitioners are discussed.

Overview of the Public Relations Development in Ukraine

Since 1991, the year of Ukraine's independence, public relations has developed rapidly (Kucheriv & Odarich, 1993). As in Russia, much of the early Ukrainian public relations dealt with political consulting (Tsetsura, 2004). In the middle

of 1990s, some agencies turned to corporate public relations as its popularity grew.

Those agencies offered somewhat questionable services focused on promoting products and services that they nevertheless called public relations at the time (Kulish, 2001). Some of their first clients were large multinational corporations well familiar with the goals and long-term effects of public relations. However, most of the companies saw public relations as a subset of marketing or advertising and placed it under the marketing function (Sukhenko, 2007). Further economic growth and market expansion, along with new investment opportunities, gave boost to the Ukrainian public relations practice and theory development (UAPR, 2006).

According to the latest research of the Ukrainian market of public relations services (Publicity Creating, 2007), the annual public relations budgets of large national and international companies in Ukraine vary between 10,000 and one million US dollars. The most typical annual budgets are 100,000-500,000 US dollars (Publicity Creating, 2007). Experts forecast the Ukrainian market volume will increase tremendously in the next five years, and new public relations players and clients will enter the market demanding more complex services and practices (Aigars Nords, CEO, Nords Porter Novelli of Latvia and Ukraine, personal communication, October 5, 2007). The growing interest in public relations practices and services, however, does not necessarily mean growing professionalism (Boynton, 2002). Strategic understanding of public relations goals and functions is rare. Several full-service public relations agencies continue to offer primitive advertising and event planning services (Sidorenko, O. & Sidorenko, N., 1998; Sukhenko, 2007). Clients put pressure on public relations practitioners and demand clear return on investment (ROI) to measure the value of public relations (Publicity Creating, 2007; Sukhenko, 2007). One of the most effective ways to measure ROI, according to the clients, is to present media relations and publicity efforts in terms of advertising value (Publicity Creating, 2007). Thus, placing materials in the media is highly desirable.

Some have argued that this mismatch between what clients want and what public relations agencies deliver can be explained by the lack of: 1) clients' understanding of public relations, 2) clear ethical guidelines in Ukrainian public relations practices, and 3) accountability of professionals for their public relations practices (Sidorenko, O. & Sidorenko, N., 1998; UAPR, 2006). Among other problems of media relations in Ukraine are political dependence of the media, lack of specialization of

journalists and specialists of public relations, and, most importantly, misunderstanding and a lack of trust and knowledge among reporters and editors what public relations, specifically media relations, is (Baysha & Hallahan, 2004; Kulish, 2001; Ligachova & Ganzha, 2005; Pikhovshek, 1997; Willard, 2003).

Media Credibility and Media Transparency

Media non-transparency, as any form of payment for news coverage or any influence on editorial decisions that is not clearly indicated in the finished product, has been actively studied in the last few years (Hobsbawm, 2006; Holmes, 2001; Kruckeberg, Tsetsura, & Ovaitt, 2005). Offering and paying cash for publishing news releases and other publicity materials is an observed practice in many countries (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Kruckeberg, & Tsetsura, 2003). But cash for news coverage is only one of many ways to influence news coverage in the media.

Previous studies on media transparency around the world emphasized that journalists can experience both direct and indirect pressures in terms of which news to cover at three different levels. At the interpersonal level, they can be offered money, meals, or products and services for their coverage of a corporate publicity event or news conference (Lo, Chan, & Pan, 2005). At the intra-organizational level, journalists can be asked by their editor, media advertising department, or publisher to cover or ignore publicity activities of certain companies because these companies did not buy advertising from that same media outlet (Tsetsura, 2005). Finally, at the interorganizational level, journalists can be forced to write or not to write news stories about certain companies because these companies have or do not have formal contracts with the media outlet to “provide informational services” as these formalized relations between media advertising departments and companies ensure consistent and proper news coverage in the media (Klyueva, 2008). Thus, factors that influence media nontransparency in any country can be classified as direct or indirect and as interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational.

Regardless of the classification, the issue of media non-transparency has been particularly relevant in countries with transitional economies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc. After all, Russian practitioners were the first to bring the world’s attention to this issue (Holmes, 2001) and Polish practitioners sponsored the first empirical study of media bribery in a specific country (Tsetsura, 2005).

In 2003, the global index of media bribery ranked 66 countries from 1, most

transparent, to 33 as least transparent. Ukraine was placed 19 (out of 33 countries) and tied with Argentina, Mexico, and Taiwan (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). Ukraine scored low on the perceived effectiveness of anti-corruption laws, professional education of journalists, existence of well-established and enforceable journalism codes of ethics, and free press and free flow of information. Other research showed that Ukrainian public relations and media practitioners may experience challenges similar to those in other countries of the Eastern Europe: limited freedom of speech, little room for advancement, heavy workloads, and inequality at work (Baysha & Hallahan, 2004; Willard, 2003; Willard, 2007). What exactly constrains the development of public relations in Ukraine?

Many Ukrainian public relations practitioners see the difficulty of working with the media as their main challenge because media representatives misunderstand the roles and functions of public relations practitioners. In contemporary Ukraine, public relations is often understood as placement of materials in the media on paid or non-paid conditions. Often the efficiency of any public relations agency work is evaluated by the number of publications in the media (Yaryna Klyuchkovska, president of UAPR, personal communication, October 5, 2007). The recent IREX study “Media Sustainability Index” showed that non-transparent paid-for copy, also known as *jeansa*, “overwhelmed the media for commercial as well as political reasons” (IREX, 2006/2007). MSI panelists reported that *jeansa* reflected “both the cynicism of media owners and journalists and the low professional level and poor education of most journalists” (IREX, p.6). Previous studies also reported that the editorial interests and special issues of magazines and newspapers in Ukraine are often managed solely by the advertising department and not by the editorial department (Ligachova & Ganzha, 2005).

Kulich (2001) argued that communication between Ukrainian public relations practitioners and media professionals may be corrupt because journalists often lack understanding how public relations practice contributes to information exchange. One possible reason for media non-transparency is a weak journalism education system and no standardized system of public relations education in Ukraine (Eugeny Fedchenko, director of the Kiev Mohyla Academy School of Journalism, personal communication, October 6, 2007). This educational situation is similar to many countries where public relations is considered a young field and journalism is in transition (Baysha & Hallahan,

2004; Braun, 2007; Nikolaeva, 2007; Tsetsura, 2004). Misunderstanding of media relations practices limits the ability to generate publicity in the Ukrainian media (Sukhenko, 2007). Previous research demonstrated that public relations practitioners in other countries of Eastern Europe experience similar difficulties (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Tsetsura, 2005).

Combating Media Non-transparency

The rapid development of Ukrainian media relations practices fosters discussions about transparency and about professionalism in journalism and public relations (Nagornaya, 2004; UAPR, 2006). Currently, there are two competing professional public relations associations in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Association of Public Relations (UAPR) and Ukrainian Public Relations League (UPRL). These organizations work to combat non-transparency in Ukrainian media relations.

The Ukrainian Association of Public Relations monitors and reinforces professional standards the Ukrainian public relations practice (UAPR, 2006). UAPR was established by national industry leaders in 2005. It acts as an international organization and represents Ukraine in International Communication Consultants Organization (ICCO). In October 2007, UAPR has become a member of the Global Alliance. The main goal of the Ukrainian Association of Public Relations is to develop and reinforce professional standards for the industry (UAPR, 2006).

The Ukrainian Public Relations League (UPRL), founded in 2003, protects members' interests and satisfaction in legal social, creative, economic, and other areas (UPRL, 2008). UPRL initially attracted specialists in political or government public relations. UPRL defines its tasks, among others, as forming an active and competent professional public relations community according to common democratic values and professional and ethical principles of international public relations organizations; creating positive image of public relations specialists profession; creating professional and ethical standards; and implementing League's members activities (UPRL, 2008).

Several times a year, these associations organize professional seminars, trainings, conferences, and congresses. Most of them take place in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine (UAPR European PR Congress, 2007; UPRL, 2008). Every year, for instance, UAPR organizes the European Public Relations Congress and Ukrainian and UPRL sponsors the PR Days in Ukraine, an international public relations forum. Both

associations invite internationally known public relations scholars and professionals from all over the world and attract hundreds of participants from Ukraine and other Eastern European countries.

The practice of media relations and relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists are among the major topics discussed. To educate both media and public relations professionals about the benefits of free publicity and worldwide media relations practices, UAPR created the all-Ukrainian public relations PRAVDA Awards (the acronym translates as “truth”) to recognize the best ethical public relations practices in Ukraine (UAPR European PR Congress, 2007). The PRAVDA Awards have a separate category called “Honest Spice Cake” to the most professional journalist, elected by public relations specialists (UAPR, 2006). This award is given to the journalist who best understands public relations efforts and does not take money or nonmonetary payments to publish publicity materials (Yaryna Klyuchkovska, personal communication, October 5, 2007). The reason why this issue is so important for UAPR is that no well-developed system of ethical standards and reinforcement of media relations practices yet exists in Ukraine (Publicity Creating, 2007) although all professional organizations of practitioners and journalists have written codes of ethics that condemn non-transparency.

Codes of Ethics of Ukrainian Major Professional Associations

The Ethics Code of UAPR was adopted in 2005 as soon as the organization was established. The UAPR code mirrors ethical standards of international public relations codes of ethics, including the code of IPRA among others (UAPR, 2006). The UAPR Code obligates all members to act according to the professional standards which do not tolerate any media bribery. The Code states that honest practice of information exchange can help society to feel the difference between journalist honest opinion and hidden advertising material which looks like journalistic materials (UAPR, 2006). The UAPR Code of Ethics consists of five articles which address professional activity, relations with clients, rights and responsibilities of the professionals, unethical conduct, and problems of discrimination. The Article 2.5 states, “News must appear just as a result of editors’ solutions but not any kind of payment.” The Article 2.6 confirms that advertising materials must be marked as advertising and information given for media must contain news, therefore, any direct or indirect payment is prohibited.

The Ukrainian Public Relations League (UPRL) also has a code of public

relations professional ethics which states that each public relations specialist and company must follow the principle of true, full and accurate information expansion (UPRL, 2008). The Article 4 specifically addresses the importance of protecting the integrity and reputation of the public relations profession. However, the media transparency is not directly addressed in the code, and the member of the organization is free to decide whether he or she supports media transparency.

The journalism codes of ethics in Ukrainian professional organizations mimic the professional codes of ethics of global and international organizations, including the International Federation of Journalists and the International Press Institute (Sergei Kvit, rector of the Kiev Mohyla Academy, personal communication, July 25, 2007). The Ukrainian Commission on Journalists Ethics Code of Ethics manifests journalists should be independent (CJE, 2002). Article Eight of the Code of Ethics of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU) 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).

Thus, the professional codes of ethics of the Ukrainian journalists and public relations practitioners share similar ethical standards that are in line with codes of ethics of international professional associations. However, no empirical research exists to confirm or deny media non-transparency in Ukraine.

After reviewing the development of the Ukrainian public relations and challenges it faces, the study posed the following questions:

RQ 1: In what ways does media non-transparency exist in Ukraine?

Specifically, this research aimed to discover forms of direct and indirect media influences in Ukrainian media relations practice at the interpersonal, intraorganizational, and inter-organizational level, as reported by the Ukrainian communication professionals.

RQ 2: Is there a difference between journalists and public relations practitioners in the ways they perceive different forms of media non-transparency in Ukraine?

The second question tapped whether the perceptions of media nontransparency by communication professionals in Ukraine differ between those who represent the media and those who work for public relations agencies or departments.

RQ 3: Do Ukrainian communication leaders consider these media nontransparent practices ethical?

Finally, the third question aimed to address ethical considerations of the Ukrainian professionals in regard to the practice of media non-transparency. If this practice happens, do these professionals consider it ethical? Do these professionals refuse to engage in or embrace this practice because of the ethical stands on the issue? The methodology to answer these questions is discussed next.

Methodology

The study population, communication leaders of Ukraine, was defined as media and public relations professionals, members of Ukrainian professional associations. Public relations professionals and journalists were invited to participate because they were part of the identified Ukrainian professional organizations. Specifically, two groups of respondents took part in the study: 1) media representatives, editors and journalists, of national, regional, and local media (later referred to as journalists), and 2) public relations practitioners and marketing specialists (later referred to as public relations practitioners or practitioners).

Sampling

To identify potential participants, a non-probability purposive sampling was utilized. This method is often used in studies when individuals are deliberately selected because they have special knowledge, position, characteristics important to study (Cresswell, 1994). The main filters for this purposive sample selection were a current membership in a professional association, the current active leadership position (top or middle-level management, or a leading reporter/editor), extensive work experience in the field of at least four years, and a working email address. Respondents who met these criteria were invited to participate in the study (the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine N= 125, Ukrainian Public Relations League N= 18, and the Ukrainian Public Relations Association N=46). Only 30 people (15 journalists and 15 public relations practitioners) agreed to participate in the study yielding a 16 percent response rate. Although the number of respondents is low, the data from this study, first of its kind, presents a unique exploratory perspective on the phenomenon of media transparency in Ukraine.

Instrument

The study utilized a survey instrument used in a previous investigation of media

bribery in Poland (Tsetsura, 2005). This survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data using Likert scale and open-ended questions. Twenty-five questions allowed participants to share their opinions about specific media practices that can be considered non-transparent. The referents included eight types of media: national daily newspapers, local daily newspapers, specialized printed media (such as trade publications), national TV, local TV, national radio, local radio, and web news portals or news websites. Each question had a 5-point Likert-type scale to report the frequency of the practice (from 1 *never* to 5 *always*) and included an open-ended part so that participants could share their personal experiences and stories about same or similar media practices so their responses could help to answer research questions of this study. Specifically, participants were asked to comment on kinds of non-transparent practices discussed in the questions and provide specific examples of non-transparency from their practice. Although this study mostly presents the qualitative data gathered from open-ended questions, quantitative data provide additional information about the nature and scope of media non-transparency in Ukraine.

Operationalization

Direct forms of influence included acknowledgments, including but not limited to providing illustrative cases from practice, that cash and other forms of payments are offered or sought for news coverage, whether personally to journalists or to the media outlets. Indirect forms of influence included pressures from news sources, editors, advertisers, publishers, or other parties on journalists in terms which news should be covered. If personal accounts of Ukrainian communication professionals provided specific examples to illustrate how advertisers, publishers, or other parties ask, request, or hint that certain news stories should have a specific angle or certain news from certain companies should be covered, then it would mean that indirect forms of influences on the Ukrainian media exist.

Data Gathering and Data Analysis

The survey was translated into Ukrainian, back-translated into English, and then checked for accuracy. Survey questions were then edited and adopted for Ukraine after a pre-test. The survey was sent via email to all potential participants four times over the period of eight weeks between January and March of 2007. The qualitative responses were translated from Ukrainian to English and back, checked for accuracy, and analyzed using the Lindlof multi-step analysis method.

The Lindlof method includes three parts: finding repetitiveness in open-ended responses, identifying participants' explanations of the phenomena in these responses through a systematic close read of the written narratives, and grouping responses through the reflective analysis of the data (Lindlof, 1995). The process of grouping is similar to a thematic analysis technique in that it is used to identify and scrutinize recurring themes within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Such reflective analysis is particularly useful in qualitative research when recurring themes might lead to a grounded theory approach to further understand participants' narratives and systematically analyze the reasons behind accounts of these narratives (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings

The findings below are organized according to the posed research questions and common themes identified through the analysis of open-ended responses. After providing some background of participants, this section discusses perspectives on media non-transparency in Ukraine.

Background of Participants

Public relations practitioners who participated in the study were either employed by companies or advertising/public relations agencies. Journalists worked for national, regional, or local Ukrainian media. Women accounted for 40 percent in a journalists' sample, and 70 percent in a public relations practitioners' sample. Although no demographic data are available, anecdotal evidence suggests that the sample reflected the populations' gender distribution, as women occupy the majority of public relations jobs in Ukraine and men occupy a slight majority of media jobs (Eugeny Fedchenko, personal communication, October 6, 2007). Age of the respondents also varied, with the mean age of 32. Forty percent of all respondents had more than five years of experience in the field.

Perspectives on Media Non-transparency in Ukraine

Research question one asked, in what ways does media non-transparency exist in Ukraine? A qualitative data analysis of open-ended responses confirmed the fact that media non-transparent practices indeed take place in Ukrainian media relations. Almost all respondents (n=27) agreed that journalistic materials, which are a result of direct payments or indirect influences and are not clearly marked as advertising, appear in Ukrainian media. Two themes emerged from a further analysis of

multiple examples from communication professionals, both journalists and public relations practitioners: 1) direct forms of influence, such as concealed, or hidden, advertising and cash payments to journalists, exist in Ukraine despite the national laws that prohibit such practice, and 2) publicity in exchange for advertising is the most widely spread indirect form of influence on the media.

Direct Forms of Influence: Cash Payments and Concealed Advertising

Mostly the public relations practitioners provided examples of cash payments sought to publish news. According to some public relations professionals, sometimes journalists want to get cash payments at the early stage of preparing the material “to guarantee that the material would be published.” Another public relations specialist testified, “It is not a secret that many journalists and editors get additional money placing jeans.” This is evidence of the interpersonal level of influence.

Participants also reported another, more wide-spread form of direct influence (and a kind of *jeansa*, according to some professionals) – a concealed, or hidden, advertising. Several people (n=9) reminded that concealed advertising is prohibited with national law and ruins public trust but said this practice happens rather frequently: Concealed, or hidden, ad is a great problem of modern Ukrainian media. The TV packages of news and whole programs are sold; articles and covers are also sold. It is really harmful for journalists as this practice does not allow them to realize their professional duties. Because of the numerous public relations materials, the real journalism is perceived through the money and even honest journalists are often accused in bribery. (journalist)

Some participants argued this practice of hidden advertising is caused by either editorial policy when media marketing departments aspire to support good relations with advertiser or by journalist’s personal decision. A media owner often wants to place an advertisement and does not consider the journalist’s right to pass only true and objective information. As one journalist noted, “As a rule, if the owners are interested in advertising (it happens almost always in private media), they want advertising look like regular materials. And the protests of journalists against this practice do not work.” This is an example of the intra-organizational level of media practices.

Several participants, both journalists and public relations practitioners, however, indicated that materials that appear in the media as a result of hidden

advertising can be easily recognized:

Regarding whether the paid material looks like regular editorial., it depends on the aims the person has and what PR-specialist asks media to do. There are media in Ukraine where the material is paid and goes through the advertising department. On the pages, it appears without any indication this is an ad although many people who work in our field are able to differ jeans from news. (public relations specialist)

Some also noted these materials usually have some indication they are paid.

These materials are marked with a certain symbol or separated from the rest of news stories by a border on a page or whether they are placed at the very end of the TV news program:

Yes, I have had this experience. I was producing paid news packages for two years. It is really hard to hide it as the material often looks too “sweet” and positive. And paid packages are often at the end of the program, so they are not connected with the whole program structure. (journalist)

Here, the journalist referred to difficulties he or she faced when working with the pre-paid materials because he or she was forced to produce those materials (an intraorganizational level of influence). However, this journalist emphasized the placement of stories in the TV news program was strategic so that the audience could “easily pick up” which news was paid. The other journalist confirmed, “There are paid packages on a TV channel where I work. But they run separately from news and often go after the news and with a different design. And our advertising department never influences the actual program planning.” This way the practice of accepting cash for news coverage at the interpersonal and inter-organizational level was justified as it did not violate news standards.

Indirect Influences: Publicity in Exchange for Advertising

The most popular type of indirect payments received by the media (the second form of influence) was, according to the respondents, paid advertising in exchange for publishing news materials about a company or its product or service in the same media. One journalist reported, “In media which attract mass audience, the editor makes the decisions, but he [sic.] considers the advertising department’s advice.” Another journalist agreed, “This is a very wide-spread practice. The advertising is the main source of survival after the publisher’s money,” and a public relations practitioner confirmed, “The news from the sources which do not agree to buy advertising can be

ignored.” Several participants indicated there is a very fine line between what counts as direct or indirect forms of influence in relation to publicity in exchange for advertising. Many media outlets in Ukraine often can have advertising contracts which state news materials would be published in the same media if the company agrees to buy advertising:

The advertising department does not only influence but also chooses topics and news. It also decides [how the material should be written]... and does not allow to mention names and brands of companies and employees whose companies did not pay.

(journalist)

This finding confirms previous research on media self-censorship (an intraorganizational level of influence) to avoid conflicts with large advertisers in other parts of the world, including China (Lo, Chan, & Pan 2005), Poland (Tsetsura, 2005), and Russia (Klyueva, 2008). Some participants also pointed out that formalization of media transparency practices at the inter-organizational level happens in Ukraine, which is in line with other research on media transparency in Eastern Europe (Klyueva, 2008).

Difference of Opinion between Journalists and Practitioners

Research question two asked, is there a difference between journalists and public relations practitioners in the ways they perceive different forms of media nontransparency in Ukraine? According to public relations professionals, the practice of receiving cash “bonuses from advertisers” happens quite often ($n=15$, $M=3.47$, $SD=1.1$). On the other hand, journalists were more inclined to deny this practice ($n=15$, $M=2.2$, $SD=1.4$). Few journalists acknowledged that *jeansa* practices take place in Ukrainian media but almost all of them reported that they personally did not witness *jeansa* or have any examples of *jeansa* activities taking place in their media outlets. Only one participant testified, “[The offers] are coming from the person - mediator who is in charge of negotiating such deals. I was also proposed money for materials.” However, this person wrote that he or she refused to take money.

The fact that journalists did not report *jeansa*, or cash for news coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), was interesting particularly because public relations practitioners in their responses emphasized the practice of offering cash or products and services to journalists and editors at the interpersonal level was an open and quite popular among many media outlets. However, the fact that this practice was characterized by some journalists as unprofessional could possibly explain why

journalists did not want to bring up the subject. This practice, which requires one to exercise professional responsibility at the interpersonal level, could potentially have an effect on their reputation or be interpreted as if they were the ones who engaged in this practice – even though the surveying of journalists was completely confidential.

Both public relations practitioners and journalists reported that advertising departments, publishers, and owners of the media have much control over what materials appear in the news pages or in the news programs in Ukraine. According to participants, advertising departments of the media pressured editors in terms of which news from which sources to cover. Public relations professionals were more inclined to see this power of advertising departments ($M=3.73$, $SD=0.8$) than journalists ($M=2.73$, $SD=1.4$):

I was working in media where the advertising department recommended which news to print or what to write, about whom to write, and whose comments to take. [The advertising department] even participated in making corrections and taking away words and phrases they do not like. (journalist)

Public relations practitioners said that the existence of this practice often depends on the publisher's decision. As one practitioner wrote, "Media differ. But in any case, the last decision is always made by the owner." These practitioners acknowledged media non-transparency practices at the intra-organizational level of influence. Journalists insisted that they think it was the publisher's duty to manage the permanent conflict between the journalists and the advertising departments.

Journalists agreed they would appreciate if the media were to adopt standards of objectivity to empower editors and journalists to define the news. At the same time several journalists noted they were ready to work on conditions of informational cooperation with their media advertising departments, "From my experience, it depends on the media publisher's position. It cannot be decided on the level of editors and journalists." Another journalist pointed out:

I suppose that functions of journalists must be separated from functions of those who create advertising materials. But these departments should work in cooperation.

Otherwise, the conflicts will be inevitable when, for instance, the advertising material about one product or service appears one page and on the next page, in the column 'To Consumer' the same [product or service] is criticized by journalists.

The findings were in line with previous research on influences on the media

content in Eastern Europe (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006) and Ukraine (IREX, 2006/1007). In addition, this study extended previous work on media transparency worldwide (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003) identifying indirect influences at the intra-organizational level, publicity in exchange for advertising and advertising departments' pressures, as contributors to media non-transparency in Ukraine.

According to both public relations practitioners and journalists, media nontransparency practices also happened at the inter-organizational level: the ability to change the situation was beyond their or their editors' power. In some ways, even the fact that the advertising department was to dictate what news to publish was not as big of a concern as the inconsistency in coverage of a certain company, product, or service. This could mean that journalists recognized broader indirect influences and pressures on the media, beyond simply pressured from one editor, one media advertising manager, and even one publisher. This also could mean that journalists minimize or find the way to dismiss their professional responsibilities to quality journalism precisely because of apparent media non-transparency practices at the inter-organizational level.

Previous research specified that national media report fewer instance of media non-transparency due to their high professionalism and their ability to sustain their financial independence (Tsetsura, 2005). According to some participants, several national media in Ukraine also aspire to protect their reputation by avoiding the publication of influenced materials. These national printed media, so-called "quality" newspapers, can afford to separate advertising from the rest of the news content as one journalist argued, "Today this [separation] is widespread in national media, mainly in ones which are positioned as quality papers. They support their reputation and separate advertising from editorials. This way they demonstrate their integrity."

Journalists and public relations practitioners agreed that media nontransparency practices take place more often in the local and regional media rather than in the national media. Journalists reported that local media are often more dependent on the financial support from advertisers than the national media and, as a result, place paid materials more often, "Specialized and regional media are more dependent on jeansa, and they are often influenced by advertising departments." Here is another journalist's account of this practice:

As far as I know, central media try not to publish clearly uninformative press-releases.

It can badly influence their reputation. The regional media often don't have enough information or are simply lazy to look for it. So they take ready material and publish it for getting profit.

Public relations practitioners agreed with journalists in that the financial struggles of the regional and local media encourage media non-transparency practices at the inter-organizational level, "It is really a mass practice in regional media." Another practitioner reasoned:

The financial condition of media defines the readiness it has to place paid materials... They often appear under the columns "Facts" or "Business" on the news pages. As for national profit media,... the practice is more complex. Even the leading business media propose such service in their price-lists [calling it] "the placement of advertising material without an advertising sign."

Previous research demonstrated that local and regional media in other countries, including China, Poland, and Russia, also experience greater pressures from their advertising departments (Tsetsura, 2005), publishers (Lo, Chan, & Pan, 2005), and other influencers, such as local governments (Klyueva, 2008), compared to the national media precisely because of the financial instability. These pressures often compromise professional and ethical standards of both, journalists and practitioners, as the future analysis of the results demonstrated.

Ethical Considerations and Non-transparent Practices

Research question three asked, do Ukrainian communication leaders consider these media non-transparent practices ethical? Almost all journalists (n=13) and public relations practitioners (n=14) indicated they agree this practice is unethical. Some journalists even said they refused or had to leave the media because they could not accept this editorial policy. One journalist shared, "I had short experience: wrote ad materials several times. But finally I had to refuse as this practice contradicts my ethic principles." Another confirmed, "I was offered money for [placing materials in a] program many times. But I refused the offers."

The Ukrainian journalists cited low salaries of media professionals and an undeveloped system of reinforcement of professional ethical standards among the reasons why the unethical practice of accepting direct forms of media nontransparency takes place. This occurs despite the fact that professional codes of ethics prohibit it, as one journalist noted, "I think the paid materials must be separated from

the rest and be identified as the advertising. But it is hard, almost impossible, to achieve it in practice because of the financial constraints we have.” Another journalist indicated that the problem of media non-transparent practices at the interpersonal level can only be resolved if it is addressed at the organizational level, “The media ought to decide how high salaries for journalists should be (by the way, they are growing now) and the system of punishments for journalists.”

But three respondents (2 journalists and 1 practitioner) indicated there was nothing fundamentally unethical (wrong or bad) in having paid-for materials in the news pages. One journalist shared, “I don’t perceive it as a hard violation of professional ethics. It is more ‘bad self-service’ for media as the readers’ trust would reduce.” All three people agreed that the decision to have these materials should be formalized and these materials should be marked as advertising and should have interesting and informative content:

Regarding the regional media, the quality of materials is really bad. And some paid materials can make those media really better and bring money as well. But the design must be considered, and they must be marked as advertising. (journalist)

It is difficult to differentiate between a paid material and an editorial on radio and TV. So there must be a minimum of such [paid] materials on TV and radio. Or they should be in separate block. The same concerns magazines. A separate part must be devoted to paid materials. (public relations practitioner)

Based on the results of this study, one can conclude that Ukrainian public relations professionals and journalists who participated in this research see publishing news materials for indirect or direct payments as an ethical problem. Many Ukrainian professionals condemned this practice. However, there were a few participants who were not sure whether this practice was completely unethical. Interestingly enough, these practitioners were members of organizations which have Codes of Ethics that condemn this practice as unethical. According to the results of this study, public relations practitioners yet to define the roles and functions of both media and media relations in Ukraine and yet to find ways to reinforce their professional codes of ethics.

Toward Media Transparency in Ukraine

The goal of this study was to collect the data on the status of media nontransparency in modern Ukraine. Specifically, the study addressed three questions: in what ways media non-transparency exists in Ukraine; whether journalists and public

relations practitioners perceive media non-transparency practices differently; and whether Ukrainian communication professionals consider these practices unethical. Although the study sample was small and results cannot be generalized to the whole population of communication practitioners of Ukraine, the qualitative data provided some interesting insights into how Ukrainian professionals understand challenges associated with media non-transparency.

Specifically, the results demonstrated that media non-transparency exists in Ukraine and is understood as direct and indirect influences on the media. This study revealed that one of the problems of Ukrainian media non-transparency directly relates to influences advertising departments, advertisers, and publishers have on the media. Media transparency can be compromised in several ways, both direct and indirect, and at the three different levels: interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational. Often Ukrainian journalists justify this influence by citing personal or organizational financial struggles. More often, however, this practice is more than just a bribe: it is rather a calculated conscious decision to accept a direct or indirect payment from a news source because of a certain pressure from within the media company (such as an advertising department or publisher) or from the outside (such as an advertiser or a public relations practitioner).

In some ways, perceptions of media non-transparency were different for journalists and public relations practitioners. However, the majority of them agreed that these practices more often take place in local and regional media than in the national media because of the ability of the national media to sustain their financial independence. At the same time, local and regional media often give in to pressures from advertisers, publishers, and governments and engage in various kinds of nontransparency at all three levels.

Finally, both journalists and public relations practitioners indicated they agreed the practice of media non-transparency is unethical. They worried about the future of independent journalism in Ukraine and expressed interest in reinforcement of ethical standards at the organizational level. Members of Ukrainian public relations and journalistic associations may want to reconsider their professional Codes of Ethics. These professional groups of public relations practitioners and journalists may not have the right to define ethical standards for other professional groups.

Public relations practitioners, however, as professionals have the moral right

and obligation to refuse demands for direct and indirect payments and avoid being a victim of the non-transparent practice. Journalists, in their turn, have a right to be professionally offended and to voice their protest when these payments are offered or when the pressure is evident. More importantly, as citizens, public relations practitioners and journalists not only have the moral right but also the ethical obligation to identify and follow their self-regulatory codes of ethics to secure media transparency for consumers of the Ukrainian media, to ensure readers and viewers' trust in the media.

This study examined the existence of the phenomenon and provided empirical evidence how journalists and practitioners deal with media non-transparency in Ukraine. In terms of theoretical implications, this study extended the work on media transparency worldwide and specifically in countries with transitional economies (HarroMedia Loit & Saks, 2006; Klyueva, 2008; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003; Lo, Chan, & Pan, 2005; Tsetsura, 2005) and offered three levels of media practices—interpersonal, intraorganizational, and inter-organizational—to better understand media non-transparency.

At a practical level, the results of this study can help to facilitate the discussions among the members of professional societies, who are concerned with the reinforcement of codes of ethics, about self-regulation of media relations in Ukraine. These discussions will help to better understand the dynamics of media practices in Ukraine.

As evident from this study, public relations professionals indicated that nontransparency exists at all three levels, interpersonal, intra-organizational, and interorganizational.

No surprise that public relations professionals reported the problem:

after all, they are the ones who directly encounter the problem and deal with it in practice while working with a variety of media, whereas journalists may have reported opinions about their own types of media. This is in line with previous research on public relations practitioners' challenges in Ukraine (Kulish, 2001; Ligachova & Ganzha, 2005; Sidorenko, O. & Sidorenko, N., 1998) and other countries (Tsetsura, 2005). Plus, journalists might have been reluctant to report non-transparency cases even if such non-transparency exists in their media as journalists strive to protect the image of a newly independent free media system in Ukraine (Baysha & Hallahan, 2004).

The qualitative and quantitative data showed that media transparency rarely works in practice. Professionally enforced self-regulation of this practice at the national level might be helpful in the development of civilized cooperation with newsmakers if all

Ukrainian professional associations (public relations and journalistic associations), such as UAPR, UPRL, and NUJU, are serious about changing this practice as they claim to be in the name of public interest (NUJU, 2005; UAPR, 2006; UPRL, 2006). Similar efforts were made by the Polish professional association of public relations consultancies after the association distributed the results of the Polish study of media bribery (Tsetsura, 2005).

Further studies should further investigate reasons and motivations for different types of direct and indirect influences on the media in Ukraine. Insights from communication leaders from different parts of Ukraine can be collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups to learn how opinions and explanations of these practices change depending on the age, years of experience, and the professional status and membership in professional organizations. Future studies of media transparency in Ukraine can also be used to compare Ukrainian media relations practices with those in other countries of Eastern Europe and around the world. This will be especially useful for improving the public relations and journalism codes of ethics and self-regulation of both industries.

References

- Baysha, O., & Hallahan, K. (2004). Media framing of the Ukrainian political crisis, 2000-2001. *Journalism Studies*, 5, 233-246.
- Braun, S. L. (2007). The effects of the political environment on public relations in Bulgaria. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19, 199-228.
- Boynton, L. (2002). Professionalism and social responsibility: Foundations of public relations ethics. *Communication Yearbook*, 26, 230-265.
- Boynton, L. A. (2007). Commentaries: Commentary 1: This PR firm should have known better. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 22, 218-221.
- Commission on Journalism Ethics (CJE) (2002). Code of Ethics of the Ukrainian Journalist. Retrieved August 24, 2008, from <http://www.cje.org.ua/main/>
- Craig, D. A. (1999). A framework for evaluating coverage of ethics in professions and society. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 14, 16-27.
- Craig, D. A. (2006). *The ethics of the story: Using narrative techniques responsibility in journalism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Craig, D. A. (2007). The case: Wal-Mart public relations in the blogosphere. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 22, 215-128.

Craig, D. A. (2008). Journalists, government, and the place of journalism across cultures. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 23, 158-161.

Gabor, N. (2006). The Ukrainian media landscape. Media Criticism. Retrieved August 27, 2008, from www.mediakrytyka.franko.lviv.ua/ukr-landscape.htm

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Hobsbawm, J. (2006). *Where the truth lies: Trust and morality in PR and journalism*. London: Atlantic Books.

Harro-Loit, H., & Saks, K. (2006). The diminishing border between advertising and journalism in Estonia. *Journalism Studies*, 7, 312-322.

Holmes, P. (2001, March 12). IPRA moves swiftly on Zakazukha; PRSA stays out of the Nike fray. *The Holmes Report*, p. 2.

IREX (2006/2007). *Media Sustainability Index (MSI) Europe and Eurasia, 2006/2007: Ukraine*. Retrieved August 26, 2008, from http://www.irex.org/programs/msi_eur/2006/MSIE06_bu.pdf

Jo, S., & Kim, Y. (2004). Media or personal relations? Exploring media relations dimensions in South Korea. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81, 292-306.

Klyueva, A. (2008). *An exploratory study of media transparency in the Urals Federal District of Russia*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

Kruckeberg, D., & Tsetsura, K. (2003). International index of bribery for news coverage (Institute for Public Relations). Retrieved September 3, 2006, from <http://www.instituteforpr.org/>

Kruckeberg, D., & Tsetsura, K. (2004). International journalism ethics. In A. S. de Beer and J. C. Merrill (Eds.), *Global journalism*, 4th edition (pp. 84-92). Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.

Kruckeberg, D., Tsetsura, K., & Ovaatt, F. (2005). International index of media bribery. In *The Global Corruption Report 2005: Transparency International* (pp. 258-261). London: Pluto Press.

Kucheriv, I., & Odarich, S. (1993). *Shlyax do peremogi*. [Path to victory]. Kiev, Ukraine: Democratic Initiatives.

Kulish, A. (2001). *Public relations dlya gromadskix (nederzhavnyx) organizatsii: Praktichny porady naschoden*. [Public relations for social (non-government) organizations: Practical everyday advice]. Kiev, Ukraine.

Ligachova, N., & Ganzha, L. (2005). *Zhurnalistiska revolutsiya 2004: Podi, ludi, diskusii*. [Journalism revolution 2004: Events, people, discussions]. Kiev, Ukraine: Agency Ukraine.

Lindlof, T. R. (1995). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lo, V., Chan, J. M., & Pan, Z. (2005). Ethical attitudes and perceived practice: A comparative study of journalists in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 15, 154-172.

Nagornaya, N. (2004, June 10-16). Ukrainiski bisnes mozhety byt sotsialno aktivnym [Ukrainian business can be socially active]. *Delovaya Nedelya*, 22. Retrieved August 26, 2008, from <http://www.pr-liga.org.ua/1/14/3>

Nikolaeva, T. (2007, January 26). SMI I PR-sluzhby – voda i kamen [Mass media and PR-agencies: Water and stone], *Reklamaster*. Retrieved May 18, 2008, from <http://reklamaster.com/news/id/317/index.html>

NUJU, National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (2005). Code of ethics. Retrieved August 26, 2008, from <http://centra.net.ua/old/codensju.htm>

Pasti, S. (2005). Two generations of contemporary Russian journalists. *European Journal of Communication*, 20, 89-114.

Pikhovshek, V. (1997). *Chetvertaya kolonna: Svoboda ta nezalezhnost mass media v Ukrainy*. [The forth pillar: Freedom and independence of mass media in Ukraine]. Kiev, Ukraine: Agency Ukraine.

Publicity Creating (2007, February 22). Itogi pervogo issledoavania rynku PR-uslug v Ukraine [Results of the first research study of the PR-services in Ukraine]. Retrieved May 20, 2008, from http://www.publicitycreating.ua/news/2007/Ytohy_perv.html

Sidorenko, O., & Sidorenko, N. (1998). *Zvyazki z gromadskistu*. [Public Relations]. Kiev, Ukraine: Center of Innovations and Development.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Sukhenko, D. (2007, January 18). PR v Ukraine: Chto bylo. Chtp budet, chem. Serdtse uspokoitsya [PR in Ukraine: what happened, what will happen, what will calm the heart]. *Reklamaster*. Retrieved May 19, 2008, from <http://reklamaster.com/news/id/315/index.html>

The Law of Ukraine “On Advertising”, 03.07.1996 № 270/96-BP.

The Law of Ukraine “On Printed Mass Media (Press) in Ukraine,” 16.11.1992 № 2782-XII.

The Law of Ukraine “On Television and Radio Broadcasting,” 21.12.1993 № 3759-XII.

The Law of Ukraine“ On Information Agencies,” 28.02.1995 № 74/95-BP.

The Law of Ukraine “On the Procedure for Covering Activities of Bodies of State Power and Local Self-Government by Mass Media in Ukraine,” 23.09.1997 № 539/97-BP.

Tsetsura, K. (2004). Russia. In B. van Ruler, & D. Verčič (Eds.), *Public relations and communication in Europe: A nation-by-nation introduction to public relations theory and practice* (pp. 331-346). Berlin/New York: Mouton De Gruyter.

Tsetsura, K. (2005). Bribery for news coverage: Research in Poland (Institute for Public Relations). Retrieved September 3, 2006, from

http://www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/Bribery_Poland.pdf

UAPR, Ukrainian Association of Public Relations (2006). An official website. Retrieved October 12, 2007 from <http://www.uapr.com.ua>

UAPR European PR Congress (2007), official website, retrieved October 12, 2007, from <http://www.prcongress.com.ua>

UPRL, Ukrainian Public Relations League (2006, 2008). An official website. Retrieved October 12, 2007 from <http://www.pr-liga.org.ua/3/1>

Willard, J. M. (2003). *The flak: A PR journey*. Kiev, Ukraine: Vidalia House.

Willard, A. (2007). Why do women leave newspaper jobs? *Quill*, 95, 23.

Zoch, L. M., & Molleda, J. C. (2006). Building a theoretical model of media relations using framing, information subsidies, and agenda-building. In C. H. Botan & V.

Hazleton (Eds.). *Public relations theory II* (pp. 279-309). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.