

Ukrainian journalists' perceptions of unethical practices: Codes and everyday ethics



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ABSTRACT: The goal of this study was to explore the nature and variations of media bribery practices, as Ukrainian media practitioners perceive them. Three focus group discussions were conducted with Ukrainian editors and leading journalists. The qualitative data provided evidence of the existence of both direct and indirect influences at three levels: interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational. Although Ukrainian journalists consider media non-transparency to be unethical, they tend to justify direct and indirect influences. Bribery on an interpersonal level is often related to the personal decision of each media professional and is connected with personal professionalism, responsibility and reputation. Nevertheless, journalists feel less responsible for the practices of indirect influences on both intra- and inter-organizational levels. They perceive them happening beyond their personal decisions and that is why they rarely counteract them.

KEYWORDS: media practice in Ukraine, bribery, media transparency, public relations ethics, media in post-Soviet countries, codes of ethics in post-Soviet countries



INTRODUCTION

The duty of transparency is closely connected with commitment to truth and requires acknowledging moral dimensions of all communicative acts (Plaisance, 2008). Although Public Relations and journalism organizations have different codes specific to the profession, commitment to truth and concern about bribery are common areas in both professions (Wilcox, 2006).

Transparency is first and foremost a requisite for credible media practices that are based on trust between the media representatives and their audiences (Tsutsura & Kruckeberg, 2009). As truth seekers and truth presenters, the journalists must be open and honest with their audiences (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Consuming media content citizens expect certain quality of information to aid in self-governance and community sustenance, and journalists have unique qualification for providing that information (Craft & Heim, 2009). That is why honesty, independence of opinion, fair judgment, and news values are among the main factors that define

journalistic principles and support 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).

News and journalism are more than a societal institution serving democracy. News and media products are also commodities and most news organizations are actors on a commercial market. Media relations is an essential activity aimed at targeting media and communicating organizations, government entities or individuals (Hendrix & Hayes, 2007). However, media relations may also serve the media by providing them with information. The term “information subsidy” was offered by Gandy in 1982 to describe information that is generated by a public relations practitioner to publicize the organization, its products, or a specific point of view (Gandy, 1982). Respective information subsidies are generated by public relations specialists to influence the media agenda and affect public opinion (Turk, 1985); they have enormous potential to help getting important social issues on the public agenda (Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005). However, extreme forms of information subsidies may facilitate the emergence of media transparency phenomenon and damage the credibility of media.

Since non-transparency is a relatively broad and abstract term, some authors prefer to utilize more concrete terms to describe and measure it, thus, they associate non-transparency with corruption in the media system, for instance, “media bribery” or “bribery for news coverage.” Several studies on media practices conceptualize the phenomenon of media non-transparency as any form of payment for news coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003; Kruckeberg et al., 2005; Tsetsura, 2005a; 2005b; Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2011; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). It is also described as cash for news coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), media bribery (Tsetsura, 2005), envelope journalism (Shafer, 1990; Romano, 2000) and payments for news coverage. Meanwhile many practitioners prefer to use slang words to refer to this phenomenon: *zakazukha* in Russia (Holmes, 2001), and *pay-for-play* in the USA (Tsetsura, 2008), and *dzhynsa* in Ukraine (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009; Grynko, 2010).

The issues of media transparency and freedom are topical for Ukrainian media and media relations (Grynko, 2010). Independence of media, professionalism and ethics of journalists are one of the main points that are actively discussed in the professional community. The recent survey of Ukrainian journalists and public relations practitioners built on research on media transparency around the world (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003) revealed the existence of both direct and indirect forms of influence that distort the independent news coverage in the country (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). This study is focused on further in-depth exploration of media non-transparency in Ukraine by application of qualitative methodology.

This article first provides an overview of values of truth and transparency as they are conceptualized in national codes of ethics. Next, normative understanding of media bribery and transparency is discussed based on the previous theoretical and

empirical works. Finally, the results of three focus-group discussions conducted among Ukrainian editors and leading journalists are presented.

THE VALUES OF TRUTH AND TRANSPARENCY IN UKRAINIAN CODES OF ETHICS

Professional codes of ethics of the Ukrainian journalists and public relations' practitioners share similar ethical standards with codes of ethics of international professional associations.

The Ukrainian Commission on Journalists' Ethics manifests that journalists should be able to make their decisions independently (CJE, 2002). Article Eight of the Code of Ethics of 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).

The Ethics Code of the Ukrainian PR Association (UAPR) mirrors ethical standards of international public relations codes of ethics, including the code of IPRA among others. The UAPR Code obligates all members to act according to 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 journalistic opinion and hidden advertising material that 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. Article 2.5 states: "News must appear just as a result of editors' solutions but not any kind of payment." 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 Code of Ukrainian Public Relations League states that each public relations specialist and company must follow the principle of true, full and accurate information expansion (UPRL, 2008).

Shaped by moral principles of society and aims of the occupation (Christians & Traber, 1997) media and Public Relations ethical codes of International and Ukrainian professional organizations manifest the values of truth and objectivity. Besides, giving formal definition to professional standards and values, the codes may also represent serious difficulties in inculcating substantial ethical values in individual journalists and in the profession as a whole (Black & Barney, 1985). These difficulties may cause a gap between "moralistic" codes, which imply "general precepts," and specific practices occurring in reality.

MEDIA TRANSPARENCY: CONCEPTUALIZATION, TYPES AND LEVELS OF INFLUENCES

The visibility of information movement is a central idea of transparent communication. Generally, transparency requires all the stakeholders in the communica-

tion process and, primarily, audience to witness how, why and in what way media gets, processes and produces information. As Tuchman (1972) stated, journalism procedures must be discernible to news consumers; it also helps the news media to avoid external critics. Such visibility of media practice allows balancing competing interests and values; it also makes possible that all the participants of media communication speak the same language (Plaisance, 2007) and understand the motives and intentions of the other players (Craft & Heim, 2009). The transparency of the newsgathering process is important because it clarifies the mediating character of communication in news media; it reminds the reader that there is a journalist between reality and representation of reality (Rupar, 2006, p. 128).

Media transparency concept is rooted in normative ethics of communication (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Plaisance, 2007; Singer, 2007; Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2011; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009; Tsetsura, & Zuo, 2009; Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2010; Karlsson, 2011).

The media are 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).

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 as been paid (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003).

Examples of media non-transparency have been widely studied in the last few years in specific countries such as Estonia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and China (Tsetsura, 2005; Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2011; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009; Tsetsura & Zuo, 2009).

According to Kruckeberg and Tsetsura (2003), direct payments are cash or other monetary payments for news coverage. Indirect payments and influences are classified in the study by Tsetsura (2005b) as: 1) publication or production of materials in exchange for paid advertising, 2) written media rules of conduct that allow the receipt of samples, free gifts, or attractively discounted items from third parties to media representatives, 3) conflict of interests, when a journalist is employed with media and a company, institution, government, or public relations agency, 4) pressure from the advertising departments of media on editors in regards to which news from which sources to cover, and 5) financial and psychological pressure from news sources, companies, and public relations agencies in the media to present the information that they desire.

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 et al., 2005). At the intra-organizational level, journalists can be asked by their editor, media advertising department, or publisher to cover publicity activities of the companies who buy advertising from them or ignore certain companies who do not buy advertising from that media outlet (Tssetsura, 2005). Finally, at the inter-organizational 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." This is a case when two independent institutions consciously and formally involved in the paid-for informational collaboration, establish formalized relations, which ensure consistent and proper news coverage in the media (Klyueva & Tssetsura, 2011).

MEDIA ETHICS AND TRANSPARENCY IN UKRAINE: PREVIOUS STUDIES

The lack of freedom, and frequent external pressures and influences characterize the media situation in Ukraine. Theorists usually call these phenomena as "non-transparency," meaning direct or indirect payments to, or influences on journalists and editors for publication of newsworthy information provided by the news sources to the media. The practice of offering and paying cash for publishing news releases and other publicity materials is common in many countries, particularly of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc (Kruckeberg & Tssetsura, 2003; Harroloit & Saks, 2006). Even though the Soviet system of state censorship has been removed, the first years of independence did not bring freedom to Ukrainian journalists: they have continued to experience various pressures that are especially visible in coverage of political issues and elections (Dyczok, 2009; Orlova, 2010).

The Ukrainian slang word *dzhyynsa* was coined in 1996, when articles written-to-order appeared. This pseudo-journalism was at its most brutal in 1999, during Leonid Kuchma's second bid for the presidency. Later, at the end of 2001 the sources of influences were mainly concentrated in the hands of state authorities that started to use administrative power to influence media. Centralized censorship and so called *temnyky*¹ appeared. The President's Administration exerted pressure upon media organizations with formalized instructions about frames for news coverage. Dyczok (2009) writes that, as a result, during the 2002 parliamentary election campaign, the mainstream media was clearly biased in favor of the pro-presidential bloc, while excluding opposition parties or presenting them in a negative light.

The recent studies mark the topicality of media transparency problem for Ukraine and reveal some of the conditions that cause the existence of non-transpar-

¹ The Presidential Administration's directives to the media about news coverage. Retrieved March 18, 2012, from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2003/03/16/ukraine-informal-political-censorship>.

ent influences on media. Moreover, they showed that Ukrainian media and public relations practitioners experience challenges similar to those in other countries of Eastern Europe: limited freedom of speech, little room for advancement, heavy workloads, and inequality at work (Willard, 2003; Baysha & Hallahan, 2004; Willard, 2007).

The International Index of Bribery for News Coverage 2003² ranked 66 countries from 1, most transparent, to 66 as least transparent. Ukraine was placed as 46th and linked with Argentina, Mexico, and Taiwan. 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.

The IREX study Media Sustainability Index showed that non-transparent paid-for copy, also known as *dzhyynsa*, “overwhelmed the Ukrainian media for commercial as well as political reasons” (IREX, 2006/2007). MSI panelists reported that *dzhyynsa* 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 showed that 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) and revealed that quantity of paid-for materials in leading Ukrainian regional printed and on-line media varies from 30 to 70 articles per month in each of the regions (IMI, 2008).

Finally, an exploratory study aimed at getting data on the status of influences on media and media transparency in Ukraine confirmed the existence of non-transparent practices and revealed their variations in the country (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). Surveys of journalists and public relations practitioners showed both direct and indirect forms of media influence occurring at three levels (interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational) and distorting the independent news coverage in Ukraine. Thus, the previous research indicated the potential problems and obstacles for media transparency in Ukraine and confirmed the existence of non-transparent influences that are experienced by journalists and PR-specialists in their practical activities. However, no qualitative research exists for deeper phenomenon investigation and understanding its nature and variations through practitioners’ interpretations.

Considering the instances of existence of media non-transparency in Ukraine (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009), this study was aimed at determination of influences as they are experienced and interpreted by the professionals involved in media practices. Specifically the study posed the following questions:

² Retrieved March 18, 2012, from <http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/bribery-news-coverage-2003/>.

RQ 1: What are the mechanisms and variations of the non-transparent practices in Ukraine?

RQ 2: How do media practitioners perceive influences and what are their attitudes towards non-transparent practices?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Three focus group discussions, with a total of 18 participants, were conducted with media practitioners (journalists and editors) to get their detailed opinions about the challenges faced in their every day practices.

The focused type of discussions provided a free flow conversation and allowed getting ideas and insights based on the respondents' experiences. Specifically, the guide covered the following themes: 1) situation and problems faced by Ukrainian media today, 2) factors and sources of influences of media, 3) relations between journalists and news sources, 4) transparent and non-transparent media practices (perceptions, interpretations, attitudes), 5) ethical and law regulations.

McMillan (2008) emphasizes the natural settings, relaxed conditions and flexible designs of qualitative studies, which may be changed during the process of research. In this study the researcher intended to take the position of an involved person who interacted with participants building trustworthy relations.

Sampling

The practicing media representatives, editors and leading journalists from national and regional media in Ukraine were recruited for focus-group discussions. 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 and characteristics important to study being thus, the most informative (McMillan, 2008).

Respondents' selection was based on current active leadership position (top or middle-level management/editor/leading reporter), work experience in the field of at least two years, specifically, experience of decision-making on topics for coverage, involvement in media relations, work with sources and, finally, volunteered their agreement to participate in the study.

Respondents were accessed through the gatekeeper's assistance (the contacts of the Digital Future Journalism School and Mohyla School of Journalism). Nine of 18 participants were editors-in chief, managing editors or executive editors, responsible for choosing agendas and topics for coverage, and 9 were senior level professionals (reporters, journalists and correspondents) who practically work with news sources and are involved in making decisions about news for coverage. Another 8 respondents were representatives of on-line media (informational websites, news

portals), 5 were working in print media, 4 presented TV channels and 1 person was the editor of an information agency. The length of participants' journalism experience ranged from two to twenty-three years. Participants' ages varied from 24 to 50 years of age. All respondents had higher education degrees.

Data analysis

In the preliminary stage of analysis, transcripts were repeatedly read and re-read and prominent features — topics, themes and issues — recorded. Data analysis was realized through the process of constant comparison; in which collected information is constantly compared to emerging themes as part of a more encompassing theory (McMillan, 2008). The Lindlof method of analysis was used. This data analysis approach consists of three parts: finding repetitiveness in participants' responses, identifying participants' explanations of the phenomena in these responses through a systematic close reading of the written narratives, and grouping responses through the reflective analysis of the data (Lindlof, 1995). This three-step analysis is particularly useful in qualitative research when recurring themes might lead to the analysis of the data beyond participants' interpretations and to identification of systematic reasons behind accounts of the narratives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings

The findings below are organized according to the posed research questions and common themes identified through the analysis of focus-group discussions data.

NON-TRANSPARENT PRACTICES: VARIATIONS AND MECHANISMS

The lack of media independence on both individual and organizational levels was identified as a significant problem for media in Ukraine. The study participants stated that influences and pressures on journalists are among the main obstacles for journalism development and professionalization. Journalists mentioned that dependence on owners and sponsors is the main factor of influence, which complicates media practices and causes the violations of journalism principles. Moreover, some participants said that there are many media in Ukraine that were created as a "platform for the owners' communication" and are aimed at promoting their messages rather than being a competitive business project.

Direct forms of influence: Cash payments

As confirmed by the editors and journalists, the practice of paying cash for news coverage exists in Ukraine, "it is still a problem in Ukraine, journalists and editors

get additional money for placing *dzhyntsa*". The participants provided examples of two direct influences, which usually happen on an interpersonal level: 1) when an editor gets cash from news sources and gives journalists a task to cover the topic; 2) when a journalist is offered cash for coverage.

Mainly, the journalists characterized the practice of accepting cash for coverage as unprofessional and unethical. Some journalists also stated that the practice of taking cash for news coverage has an effect on a journalist's personal and professional reputation. However, some journalists demonstrated the intention to justify the practice of accepting cash for news coverage by the low salaries journalists have in Ukraine. Other ideas, intended to justify the practice of cash payments, concerned the general situation in Ukraine where "all fields, starting from politics, are corrupted" and thus, "it is hard to survive without accepting bribes."

Indirect forms of influence: Three levels of media practices

According to the participants, indirect forms of influence occur on the three levels of media practices: interpersonal (presents from news sources and informal relations with PR-specialists), intra-organizational (the advertiser's pressure through the media owner or media marketing department); inter-organizational (non-transparent coverage is formalized as a paid informational service, offered by media).

a) Interpersonal level of indirect influences: Presents and informal relations

Speaking about interpersonal relations with news sources, respondents mentioned that they are usually congratulated by public relations practitioners and get presents from business companies and political parties. Flowers, alcohol and branded souvenirs are the most frequent presents from the news sources that, as the respondents declared, are almost never returned to the presenter.

Mainly, the journalists decided that the gifts priced less than 200 *hryvnas* [Ukrainian currency] may be considered as souvenirs and are not to be returned. Nevertheless, some respondents confessed that they had accepted even more expensive gifts from the news sources. Even though editors and journalists noted that there was a pressure from the presenter, expecting positive coverage for the presents, but at the same time they did not think it somehow obligated them or influenced their loyalty towards the company:

Once I got an expensive present from one company. Then they attempted to force me to write a positive article, but I refused and answered that I did not ask them to give me expensive things. I never promise positive coverage for any presents I get...

It is important to note that the majority of media presented in the research by the respondents, do not have internal formal rules to codify practices of accepting gifts,

and thus, these cases are usually not formally regulated. Moreover, one editor stated that he does not care “whether the journalists get free products or presents, they must create good media product without bias.” Participants also agreed that media materials in Ukraine almost never inform that the author used a free sample given by the company or participated in a free press-tour.

It was also reported that some media have informal rules about the presents that are not codified and are mostly applied spontaneously: “There is a rule to inform the editor about any present which is more expensive than 200 UAH.” Another respondent added that the decision about the acceptance of the gifts is “usually discussed with colleagues and editor” and recollected that once it was decided “to return the mobile phone to the presenter as the colleagues decided it was not ethical to accept it.”

Besides, the participants emphasized that some public relations specialists tend to have informal friendly relations with journalists, and thus, can also influence the choice of the topic for coverage: “Imagine that I have been working with a company for a long time, and I am interested to get information from it. Finally, I have good friendly relations with a company representative. That is why I decide to mention it in my article once more to keep good relations.” One editor also added: “Journalists and public relations specialists are now appreciated for the number of personal contacts they have. It is obvious.” This practice is more evidence of interpersonal level influences that was also characterized as “mutually beneficial” by one study participant as journalists get access to exclusive news and speakers while the news source gets more possibilities for “free publicity.”

b) Intra-organizational level of non-transparent practices

The pressures of advertiser were named as the strongest obstacle for true and objective news coverage. This pressure, as journalists stated, is usually indirect and realized through two channels: 1) the owner, who wants to maximize profit and does not consider it the media's duty to convey only true messages; and 2) media advertising/marketing department.

The pressure of the advertising or marketing department was one of the top-listed influences on media coverage. The participants shared experiences of non-transparent practices connected with situations when advertising/marketing departments tend to support good relations with the advertiser and control topics of coverage:

Our marketing specialists ask to give an editorial page as a “bonus” for the advertiser. So we write an article which is not marked as advertising. Or they may ask not to cover a special topic.

[...] it is not a direct influence [...] as I experience it. The marketing department may delay publication, and I have to rewrite the material and have overtime in the office.

Another mechanism of indirect influences was connected to the owners' profit maximization policy. Journalists explained that advertisers influence editorial workers through the owner who "recommends" topics for coverage: "The advertiser pays good money for placing advertising. And the owner realizes that if we give 'wrong' information about this company we will lose money, the profit and salaries." Some of the study participants manifested that there are several media in Ukraine that aspire to protect their reputation by avoiding non-transparent relations with news sources and not placing paid-for articles. According to the participants' comments, these are mainly national printed media, TV and some specialized on-line resources, which promote the value of transparency and separation of advertising from the rest of the news content.

c) Inter-organizational level: formalized "informational services"

Ukrainian media representatives who participated in the research, mentioned the frequent practices of "informational services" provided by media for officially formalized payments from the "clients" (business companies, political parties, non-government organizations). Specifically, respondents described the cases of placing paid press releases and texts prepared by public relations practitioners in the separate sections called "press-releases." Another variation was placement of paid-for articles on the page where the advertisements are usually located. In this case participants evaluated the practices as ethically acceptable and agreed that "the reader understands that it is not editorial material, it was paid by the sources" even though material is not clearly marked with a sign of advertising.

One editor shared her experience about the official service rendered by a TV-channel: "The journalists working on our TV-channel prepare video materials about the company that paid for this service. This video package goes separately after an editorial news program, and it is not labelled as advertising."

These are the examples of formalized media transparency practices at the inter-organizational level, which is in line with other research on media transparency (Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2011). As found during the focus-group discussions, the journalists are forced to cover news stories about certain companies because these companies have formal contracts with the media outlet. Moreover, participants usually did not refer to these paid-for and formalized media services as non-transparent or unethical. In this case the ability to take responsibility or change the situation seems to be beyond the journalists' or editors' power, as the journalist recognizes broader indirect influences and pressure on the media, beyond simply being 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.

NON-TRANSPARENT MEDIA PRACTICES: ATTITUDES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Mostly, the direct form of influence, or cash for news coverage, was criticized and called unethical. Journalists frequently criticized *dzhyynsa* as a practice of accepting cash for news at an interpersonal level. Due to a lack of effective punitive measures, this practice mostly depends on the personal responsibility of each media professional and is considered to be an issue of personal reputation. So, this finding shows the close relationship between the direct payments and personal decisions of media practitioners. Moreover, this “personal” component in cash for news coverage practice may possibly explain why journalists were extremely categorical in their negative attitudes about cash for news coverage: “Cash practice is not acceptable. Journalists are obligated to take care of ‘clear’ reputation and must remember that there are millions of people behind their back expecting true information.”

As reported earlier, journalists tend to discuss the practices of direct payments and cases of *dzhyynsa* in their professional communities and usually blame those who accepted bribes. Some respondents shared examples about their colleagues who received big amounts of cash for coverage or extremely expensive presents, for instance, cars. According to the practitioners’ opinion, “being noticed in any ‘shady story,’ related to *dzhyynsa*, journalists have a risk ‘to stain their good name.’” Some editors also added that they would never employ a journalist who was involved in non-transparent practices and has placed materials for cash.

Meanwhile, other variations and mechanisms influence, mentioned in the narrations, were rarely discussed in negative tonality. Hence the journalists were less critical towards the indirect non-transparent practices, which happen on intra- and inter-organizational levels and some participants tolerated these practices as ethically acceptable (Figure 1). Specifically the pressures from the owner and advertising department (intra-organizational level) are sometimes counteracted by journalists and discussed in the professional community as unethical: “My colleagues discuss these influences, we do not like it, but it is hard to struggle. Finally we have a risk of not getting our salary.” One editor also added: “I do not like it when journalists start striking or refuse to do their job, they must realize that this cannot change anything. If you do not like your job, just choose another one. Anyway the same happens in every media, whichever you choose.”

Interestingly, journalists who participated in the study often perceived official service provided by media on inter-organizational level as normal and acceptable. These practices were mostly described as ones that happen beyond the journalists’ decision, and they were not often considered as unethical, unprofessional and connected with violation of professional principles. Some journalists even noted that “it is a quite transparent and mutually beneficial practice” as “media makes good money for concrete services described in the contract” and “the company which buys these services gets publicity which is not placed as advertising” while “media customers understand it was paid for.”

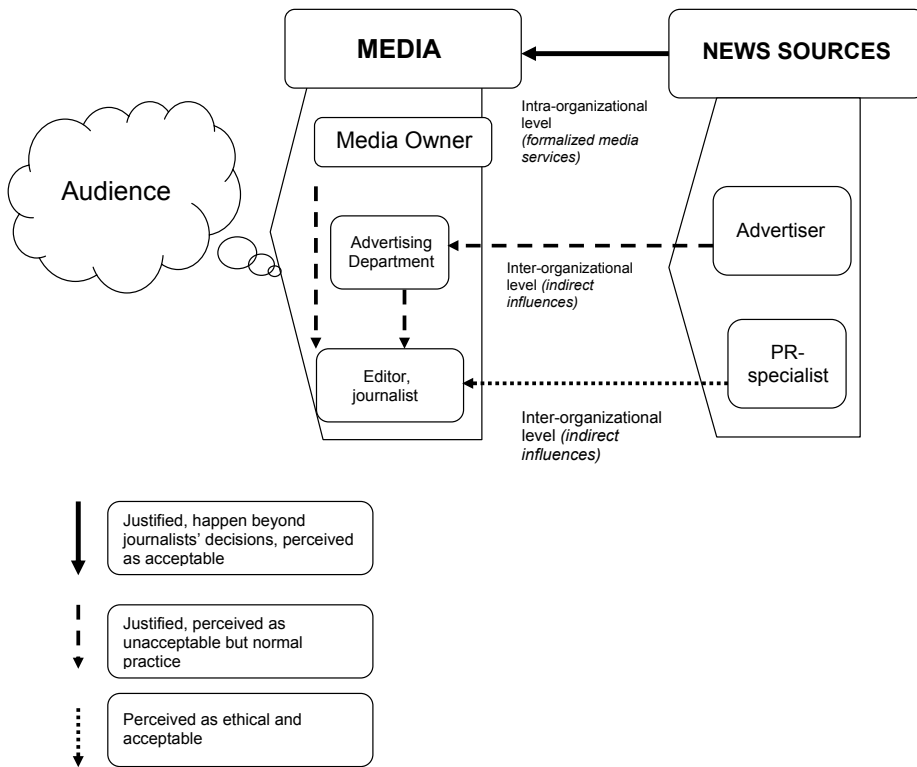


Figure 1. Non-transparent media practices as Ukrainian journalists perceive them (within the media transparency normative framework)

Source: author.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In its normative meaning, transparency emphasizes the claims of non-corrupted, non-bribed and unbiased practices. This study has provided a deeper insight into the mechanisms and forms of unethical influences on media in Ukraine revealed by previous research (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). The focus group discussions provided empirical evidence how Ukrainian journalists and practitioners perceive and deal with media non-transparency on its three levels (interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational).

According to the study, Ukrainian journalists justify the influences of news sources by referring to personal or organizational financial struggles, professional immaturity and an undeveloped media market. However, journalists mainly blame colleagues who accept cash for coverage at an interpersonal level and relate this non-transparent practice to personal decision and consciousness of the journalist.

So, speaking about the direct payments, they tend to connect personal ethics, professionalism and professional reputation. Hence, direct influences occurring at an interpersonal level are mainly evaluated as unacceptable and non-transparent. In this case journalists' attitudes stay in line with the media transparency concept.

Nevertheless, journalists feel less responsible for the practices of indirect influences on both intra- and inter-organizational levels. So, media practitioners tend to evaluate the non-transparent practices that do not happen at an inter-personal level as acceptable and ethical. Therefore, participants quite often perceive pressures inside the organization (inter-organizational level) as normal and find reasons to tolerate it. Moreover, the cases of formalized non-transparency at an inter-organizational level are considered to be transparent for professional media practice. Hence, there is a risky difference between the practices that are not transparent by their nature and the ways they are perceived by practitioners. It primarily concerns intra-organizational and inter-organizational-levels' influences that happen beyond professionals' personal decisions and that is why they rarely counteract.

The study indicated the differences between the normative conceptualization of non-transparent practices and their perception by media practitioners in Ukraine; indicated the importance to consider the practitioners' attitudes and evaluations for media transparency further investigation. According to Koltsova (2006), the study of media practice is especially helpful for finding observable units of social reality as it describes *how* people act, and not how it is required by perspective rules. However, more research is needed to understand *why* Ukrainian practitioners behave the way they do. In terms of theoretical implications, this study extended the work on media transparency in countries with transitional economies (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003; Lo et al., 2005; Tsetsura, 2005; Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2011), and illustrated a typical for post-Soviet countries "advertising propaganda motivation" in media practice that is realized through obtaining indirect benefits from dissemination of information (Koltsova, 2006).

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