



KYIV-MOHYLA
LAW & POLITICS JOURNAL

KYIV-MOHYLA SCHOLARLY PEER-REVIEWED JOURNALS

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Source: Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal 3 (2017): 137–156

Published by: National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

<http://kmlpj.ukma.edu.ua/>

Between Professionalism and Activism: Ukrainian Journalism after the Euromaidan

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Abstract

A crucial benchmark in Ukraine's recent history, the Euromaidan protests triggered many transformations across Ukrainian society. Ukrainian journalism has affected and has been affected by these changes and their challenges. Journalists' activism emerged as one of the major features of Ukraine's post-Euromaidan media landscape but remains understudied. Informed by the concepts of "journalism culture" and "journalism professionalism," this article explores journalists' perceptions about their activism, the boundaries of their professionalism and their experiences confronting the activism versus professionalism dilemma. It identifies journalists' competing approaches to the new challenges and their complicated context and discusses these approaches' implications for the Ukrainian media and journalism.

Key Words: journalism culture, activism, professional identity, media in transition, democratization, conflict.



Introduction

A momentous event for the entire Ukrainian nation, the Euromaidan protests triggered significant transformations across Ukrainian society and politics. The new challenges that emerged following the Euromaidan affected political elites and citizens alike. The outstanding role of journalists during the protests and in post-Euromaidan Ukraine began when journalist Mustafa Nayyem called for the first rally on his famous Facebook post. Tensions on Euromaidan drove many Ukrainian journalists into activism, resulting in blurred boundaries between journalism and activism.¹ By "activism" we mean journalists acting in socially or politically significant ways, in addition to professionally practicing their craft.

The dramatic developments that followed included Russia's annexation of Crimea, the beginning of an armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, and the launch of complicated reforms

¹ Joanna Szostek, "The Media Battles of Ukraine's Euromaidan," *Digital Icons* 11 (2014): 6.

amidst war. These developments weighed heavily on journalists, strengthening their activism and challenging their established views and practices. Though Ukrainian journalists' activism has surfaced as a distinctive feature of Ukrainian journalism culture in the post-Euromaidan period, it has remained largely understudied. This article explores the drivers of activism among certain segments of the Ukrainian journalistic community through interviews with media practitioners. It focuses on how Ukrainian journalists understand their role in the complicated Ukrainian context after the Euromaidan. More specifically, it considers how they explain their decision to either engage in activism or keep within the boundaries of their profession and how they define the boundaries of the journalistic professionalism. It concludes with our observations about the implications of the new journalistic landscape for Ukrainian journalism in post-Euromaidan Ukraine.

This article begins with an overview of developments in the Ukrainian media before, during, and after the Euromaidan. It then turns to its underlying study's theoretical framework, highlighting several crucial concepts that informed that study's approach. This is followed by the study's methodology and findings and our conclusions.

Background

Ukrainian Media and Journalism before Euromaidan

Although the Ukrainian media have seen crucial transformations since Ukraine's independence in 1991, they still carry the legacy of the Soviet era and post-Soviet developments. A strong tradition of state ownership and state control, an absence of business management experience and an acceptance of censorship inherited from the Soviet era have continued to influence the Ukrainian media.²

In the early 1990s, new legislation proclaimed press freedom, banned censorship and established a free media market. A substantial number of privately owned media companies replaced the Soviet era's state-owned media structure. However, a mature, diverse and vibrant media market has yet to emerge in Ukraine. Instead, Ukrainian journalism continues to depend on the oligarchs who emerged as the biggest media owners and to reflect their respective agendas. Within two decades, seven large media groups became the Ukrainian media market's major players.³ These media groups have been owned by oligarchs with political interests, which made them primarily tools for political influence rather than independent commercial enterprises.

Moreover, state media ownership was not abolished, leaving many media outlets dependent on the central government or local authorities. As a result, different Ukrainian governments exercised control over news content and editorial policies. Attempts to censor the media reached their peak during the second term of Leonid Kuchma's presidency (2000–2004), when all mainstream media received the so-called “*temnyky*” — instructions on how to report the

2 Dariya Orlova, “Ukrainian Media after the Euromaidan: In Search of Independence and Professional Identity,” *Publizistik* 6 (2016), accessed November 30, 2016, 10.1007/s11616-016-0282-8.

3 Diana Dutsyk, “Media Ownership Structure in Ukraine: Political Aspects,” *Public Service Broadcasting: A German-Ukrainian Exchange of Opinions: Results of the Conference on October 20th, 2010 in Cologne, Germany* (2010): 35–39.

news.⁴ The situation changed after the Orange Revolution, a wave of massive protests against the fraudulent presidential election results in 2004. During the Orange Revolution, as during the Euromaidan, many Ukrainian journalists joined the protests. Their individual actions and their joint efforts to counteract censorship and fraud resulted in what some observers called a “journalists’ revolution.”⁵ The effect of these journalists’ efforts was swift, as major TV channels stopped relying on instructions from the presidential administration following the first week of protests.⁶

After the Orange Revolution protests, the Ukrainian media gained more freedom from the state. Nevertheless, the post-Orange Revolution period was characterized by the spread of “*jeansa*” — paid-for coverage — to most media outlets, which severely undermined the media’s independence.⁷

Viktor Yanukovich’s presidency (2010–2014) marked a steep decline in press freedom and increased the pressure on journalists. A survey of journalists in 2013, listed the Party of Regions (*Partiia Rehioniv*) and its leader Viktor Yanukovich as among the main threats to freedom of speech.⁸ Developments in the media during the Yanukovich’s presidency also revealed the fragility of the post-Orange Revolution achievements. Those achievements faded because they were not institutionalized, and thus a sustainable environment for media independence and freedom never developed.

By the end of 2013 when the Euromaidan protests erupted, many Ukrainian journalists, especially in the mainstream media, had been pressured in various ways in their respective newsrooms. But, except for a small cohort of independent media, most became accustomed to the demands of editorial policies that often either pushed for advancing the owners’ interests or tolerated purchased coverage. The journalistic standards of unbiased and fair reporting had long been compromised by this widespread pressure, censorship and the lack of a tradition of independent journalism. Yet, at the same time, this pressure and censorship attempts prompted resistance within some journalistic circles. Thus, for example, in May 2010, a group of Ukrainian journalists and media activists founded the Stop Censorship movement, which gathered about

4 Marta Dyczok, “Was Kuchma’s Censorship Effective? Mass Media in Ukraine before 2004,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (2006): 226.

5 Natalia Lyhachova and Lesia Ganzha, “Zhurnalistska Revoliutsiia-2004. Podii, Liudy, Diskusii [Journalists’ Revolution-2004. Events, People, Discussions],” NGO Telekrytyka, 2015, accessed June 30, 2017, http://dl.telekritika.ua/revolution_kniga.pdf.

6 Volodymyr Kulyk, *Dyskurs ukrainskykh medii: identychnosti, ideolohii, vladni stosunky* [*The Ukrainian Media Discourse: Identities, Ideologies, Power Relations*] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2010).

7 Alexander Belyakov, “The Influence of ‘Censorship by Money’ on Freedom of Speech in Ukraine,” *Journal of Socialist Theory* 37.4 (2009); Anastasia Grynko, “Ukrainian Journalists’ Perceptions of Unethical Practices: Codes and Everyday Ethics,” *Central European Journal of Communication* 2.5 (2012).

8 “Svoboda slova v Ukraini: zahalnonatsionalne i ekspertne opytuvannia [Freedom of Speech in Ukraine: Nationwide and Expert Survey],” The Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2013, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://dif.org.ua/article/svoboda-slova-v-ukraini-zagalnonatsionalne-y-ekspertne-opituvannya>.

570 signatories.⁹ Journalists participating in the movement conducted public actions to attract attention to media censorship in Ukraine.

Through these actions, some Ukrainian journalists gained experience in advocating for political changes without abandoning their profession. However, a lack of research on the different segments within Ukraine's journalistic community and the prevailing attitudes and practices among journalists complicates the study of these developments. While issues such as media ownership, freedom of speech and censorship in Ukraine were a major focus of media scholars because of their acuteness,¹⁰ journalism culture, professional values and editorial practices have not been extensively researched.

Euromaidan, Journalists' Engagement and Post-Euromaidan Challenges

When the Euromaidan protests started in late November 2013, some journalists and bloggers appeared to be among the crucially important driving forces at the movement's initial stage.¹¹ Some leading journalists—those who had established themselves as opinion leaders in social media—posted their support for the movement on social media and even addressed crowds of protesters from the Euromaidan's stage (for example, Serhii Rakhmanin and Vitaly Portnikov). Some media outlets also openly supported the protests. For instance, one of the most popular online news websites *Ukrainska Pravda* (Ukrainian Truth) temporarily changed its name to *Yevropeiska Pravda* (European Truth). And after the riot police violently attacked protesters, some outlets even issued statements declaring their support of the protesters (for instance, *Delo* and *Investgazeta* business publications). "We are writing about economy, not politics. But what has happened in Ukraine is far beyond political issues. The situation concerns each of us... We won't keep silent. Editorial board of the *Investgazeta* is going to Maidan," one of the statements read (in a Facebook post on November 30, 2013).

But not all journalists sympathized with the Maidan protesters and their cause, let alone joined the protests. Still, the Euromaidan was visibly represented by journalists who openly supported the protest movement, creating a contrast between that scene and the scene at the anti-Maidan actions organized by the Party of Regions.

Tensions on the Euromaidan and the violence of governmental forces against protesters caused many more journalists to join the activists. This ultimately resulted in a blurred boundary between journalism and activism.¹² Journalists engaged in various sorts of activism: some were translating news into English and disseminating it while others were organizing so-called Twitter

9 "Media Sustainability Index 2011. Ukraine," IREX, accessed June 30, 2017, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2011-ukraine.pdf>.

10 See Dyczok, "Was Kuchma's Censorship Effective?"; Natalya Ryabinska, "The Media Market and Media Ownership in Post-Communist Ukraine: Impact on Media Independence and Pluralism," *Problems of Post-Communism* 58 (2011): 3–20.

11 Joanna Szostek, "The Media Battles of Ukraine's Euromaidan," *Digital Icons* 11 (2014): 5–6; Media Sustainability Index 2015. Ukraine," IREX, 2015, accessed December 29, 2016, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2015-ukraine.pdf>.

12 Joanna Szostek, "The Media Battles of Ukraine's Euromaidan," *Digital Icons* 11 (2014): 6.

storms to attract international attention. Journalists were active as individuals (many journalists identified themselves with the protests and protesters, which was evident from their Facebook posts) and through their media organizations. For example, *Ukrainska Pravda* not only published content that revealed the pro-Euromaidan sympathies of its editors, it also widely retweeted posts containing information about the various needs of protesters, thus significantly contributing to these posts' visibility. The feeling of empowerment that many activists, including journalists, developed during the protests was and continues to be both challenged and reinforced post-Euromaidan.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the eruption of an armed conflict—a war—in the Donbas region shook the country and additionally pressured the media. The overall political and social context was depressing: state institutions were functioning poorly or not at all, the new government's legitimacy was fragile, the army was weak, social relations were tense and fearful and confusion reigned. These challenges, especially the war, prompted a quick and large-scale response from Ukraine's new civil society.¹³ Numerous grass-roots civic initiatives functionally replaced state institutions and played a crucial role in supplying and equipping the army, at least during the war's first phase. The scale of civic activism has been truly impressive and has attracted considerable foreign and national media attention.¹⁴

Some Ukrainian journalists directly joined those initiatives. For instance, some raised donations and bought equipment for the army or collected clothes for internally displaced people using their broad networks of contacts and followers. Other media practitioners even joined the Ukrainian army or all-volunteer, self-organized military battalions. Though reliable statistics on how many journalists joined the army or were conscripted into it as part of the nation-wide mobilization campaigns are lacking, media reports documented numerous individual instances.¹⁵

The activism of journalists in post-Euromaidan Ukraine has gone beyond mere assistance to civic initiatives. Several journalists participated in public councils that monitor reforms, especially

13 Iryna Solonenko, "Ukrainian Civil Society from the Orange Revolution to Euromaidan: Striving for a New Social Contract," in *OSCE Yearbook 2014*, 219–36. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft GmbH & Co. KG, 2015, accessed December 1, 2016, 10.5771/9783845260945-219.

14 See Andrew E. Kramer, "With Borscht and Rifle Scopes, Volunteers Power Ukraine Forces," *New York Times*, November 22, 2014, accessed December 15, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/world/with-borscht-and-rifle-scopes-volunteers-power-ukraine-forces.html?_r=0.

15 See Maryna Baranivska, "Dmytro Lykhovii: Shcho take nasha peremoha u tsii viini? Na tse pytannia nemozhlyvo vidpovisty, yak i nemozhlyvo skazaty, shcho take shchastia [Dmytro Lykhovii: What is Our Victory in this War?..]," *Detector Media*, August 18, 2015, accessed December 17, 2016, http://video.detector.media/show/intervu/2455-dmitro_lihovii_wo_take_nasha_peremoga_u_tsii_viijni_na_tse_pytannia_nemozhlyvo_vidpovisti_iak_i_nemozhlyvo_skazati_wo_take_wastia_18.08.2015; Svitlana Dorosh, "Hranatometnytsia Liera: ne liubyla donetskykh, ale teper yikh obozhniuiu [Grenadier Lera: I didn't Used to Like Those from Donetsk, but Now I Adore Them]," *BBC.ua*, August 25, 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/08/160804_burlakova_ato_interview_sd.

judicial reforms and anti-corruption efforts.¹⁶ Around ten Ukrainian journalists were also elected to the Parliament in the 2014 elections after their increased prominence during Euromaidan made them “desirable” personas for party lists. Most of them have been active in promoting reforms and criticizing the government. In addition, many of the journalists who remained in the profession have also become much more actively engaged in politics, predominantly on Facebook.

In sum, the Euromaidan and subsequent developments in Ukraine brought both dramatic changes for and challenges to Ukrainian journalists. The new context—the struggle against an emerging dictatorship during the Euromaidan, the post-Euromaidan democratic transition and armed conflict—generated much confusion about journalists’ perception of their role and professional responsibilities. Some research has suggested that the Donbas conflict especially caused uncertainty and ethical dilemmas and led to contradictions within the journalistic community.¹⁷ In all, Ukraine’s post-Euromaidan media landscape has seen a renegotiation of journalists’ professional identity.¹⁸ This, however, has long been an understudied issue among scholars, and the lack of a comparative perspective has compounded the difficulty of studying it. This article fills that gap to some extent by focusing on journalists’ interpretations of their role in post-Euromaidan Ukraine’s complicated environment. By analyzing these developments in the broader context of the Ukrainian media landscape’s transformation over the last two decades, it sets the stage for further research and analysis.

Theoretical framework

Generally, “activism” means “the practice of struggling for change.”¹⁹ In this article’s exploration of journalistic professionalism and values “journalistic activism” means “struggling” that goes beyond professional practices and involves political actions.

Journalistic professionalism addresses fundamental concerns like the boundaries of journalistic work and the functions journalists are supposed to perform. These concerns, along with journalists’ perceptions of their roles, news values, news standards, journalistic norms, media system functions, and regulatory mechanisms have been at the center of normative theories for a

16 “Rezultaty dovyboriv do Rady hromadskoho kontrolyu 2016 (5 osib) [Results of the By-elections to the Council of Public Control 2016 (5 persons)],” NABU, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://nabu.gov.ua/rezultaty-dovyboriv-do-rady-gromadskogo-kontrolyu-2016-5-osib>; “Do Hromadskoi rady dobrochesnosti uviishly dvi zhurnalistky [Two Journalists Joined the Public Council of Honesty],” Detector Media, November 13, 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://detector.media/community/article/120547/2016-11-13-do-gromadskoi-radi-dobrochesnosti-uviishli-dvi-zhurnalistki/>.

17 Detector Media, *The Coverage of the Conflict in the East by the Ukrainian Media: Investigating the Values, Guidelines, and Practices of the Journalists* (Kyiv: Detector Media, NGO, 2016), accessed November 27, 2016, http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/content/files/dm_zvit_redpraktika_engl-new.pdf.

18 Orlova, “Ukrainian Media after the Euromaidan.”

19 Bart Cammaerts, “Activism and media,” in *Reclaiming the Media: Communication Rights and Democratic Media Roles*, ed. Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), 217–24.

long time.²⁰ These theories focus on the normative roles that the media play in society.²¹ Although these theories might be regarded as “artificial constructs” that cannot completely and accurately represent complex realities, they are usually foregrounded in journalism training and the various government’s media policies across democratic countries.²² In other words, these normative prescriptions shape the institutional foundations of journalistic work.

The set of functions associated with journalism usually embraces such universal roles as a supplier of information, a provider of the public sphere, and a medium of education, enlightenment and entertainment.²³ A set of conventional norms and values, such as objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics, is widely accepted by professional journalism.²⁴ Based on the data from 33 nations around the world, Weaver and Willnat conclude that journalists in most countries see their roles of “reporting news quickly,” “reporting news objectively,” “providing analysis of events” as the most important, yet no evidence of a global journalism culture has emerged.²⁵ In this research, the concept of “objectivity” is central because it is often seen by scholars and journalists in relation to the notions of “detachment” and “impartiality” and is considered to be a fundamental part of the professional model of journalism.²⁶ The tradition of objectivity in Western journalism traces back to the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the standards of factuality, balance and fairness, non-bias, independence, non-interpretation and neutrality were introduced within the American press.²⁷ As S. Ward points

20 Karol Jakubowicz, “Normative Models of Media and Journalism and Broadcasting Regulation in Central and Eastern Europe,” *International Journal of Communications Law and Policy* 2 (1998); John O’Sullivan and Ari Heinonen, “Old Values, New Media: Journalism Role Perceptions in a Changing World,” *Journalism Practice* 2 (2008), accessed December 1, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512780802281081>; Michael Meyen and Claudia Riesmeyer, “Service Providers, Sentinels, and Traders: Journalists’ Role Perceptions in the Early Twenty-first Century,” *Journalism Studies* 13. (2012): 386–401, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2011.602909>; Rodney Benson, “Journalism: Normative Theories,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Wolfgang Donsbach (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 2591–97; Tony Harcup and Deirdre O’neill, “What is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited,” *Journalism Studies* 2 (2001): 261–80.

21 Clifford G. Christians, *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

22 Rodney Benson, “Journalism: Normative Theories,” 2591–97.

23 Brian McNair, “What is Journalism,” in *Making Journalists: Diverse Models, Global Issues*, ed. Hugo de Burgh (London; New York: Routledge, 2006): 28.

24 Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism. Professional Identity and Ideology of Journalists Reconsidered,” *Journalism* 6 (2005): 447.

25 David H. Weaver and Lars Willnat, “Journalists in the 21st Century: Conclusions,” in *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, ed. David H. Weaver and Lars Willnat (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 536, 544.

26 Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism. Professional Identity and Ideology of Journalists Reconsidered,” *Journalism* 6 (2005): 488.

27 Stephen J. A. Ward, “Inventing Objectivity: New Philosophical Foundations,” *Journalism Ethics: A Philosophical Approach* (2010): 141–42.

out, “objective reporters were to be completely detached, to eliminate all of their opinion and to report just the facts.”²⁸ The values of professional objectivity and neutrality have thus emerged as foundational principles for journalism’s professional ethics in the West and have gradually been accepted in many countries transitioning from autocracies to democracies, at least as aspirational, guiding principles.

The “professional” or “liberal” model of journalism is often seen as universal and applicable to all countries and contexts; however, in reality, journalism “does not grow in vacuum.”²⁹ The real state of affairs in journalism often differs from journalism’s normative assumptions and widely shared values. As Waisbord reasonably notes, journalism following the normative principles “coexists with journalistic models that explicitly eschew these principles and openly declare that journalism is inseparable from politics, ideology, and religion.”³⁰ This means that journalism should also be evaluated by the actual practices of journalists and the principles underlying them and not solely at the normative level.

This study seeks to unveil Ukrainian journalists’ reasoning behind their professional activities and their respective decisions to go beyond their professional functions. In this regard, we also rely on the concept of “journalism culture” articulated by Hanitzsch, who considers this culture as constituting a “set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others.”³¹ He distinguishes three elements of journalism culture: institutional roles, epistemologies, and ethical ideologies.

The issue of activism we explore ought to be regarded at the level of institutional roles that, according to Hanitzsch, contain the dimensions of interventionism, power distance, and market orientation. The notion of “interventionism” is particularly crucial for this study, since it shows whether journalists follow the principles of detachment, impartiality and objectivity (as journalists leaning toward the so-called “passive” agenda would follow) or instead try to promote certain values or missions (as journalists embracing the “interventionist” approach would promote).³²

Deciding which path to choose is particularly complicated for journalists working in conditions of social turmoil, high instability and threats—all observable in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Christians et al. focus on media roles in “conflicting requirements” and distinguish four of them: monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative. The monitorial media role involves “all aspects of collecting, processing and dissemination of information.” It may include some commentary and interpretation. And the media can be a watchdog to some extent. But these activities cannot turn to partisan advocacy. The facilitative role is based on the idea of the media as

28 Ward, “Inventing Objectivity.”

29 Paolo Mancini, “Political Complexity and Alternative Models of Journalism,” in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, ed. James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 234–35.

30 Silvio Waisbord, *Reinventing Professionalism: Journalism and News in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 193.

31 Thomas Hanitzsch, “Deconstructing Journalism Culture: Toward a Universal Theory,” *Communication Theory* 17 (2007): 369.

32 Hanitzsch, “Deconstructing Journalism Culture,” 371–73.

a “fourth estate that supports the debates and people’s decision making” and “promotes pluralism, inclusiveness and collective purpose.” While these two roles are prevalent in Western nations with well-developed media systems, the radical and collaborative ones currently attract interest in transitional societies. The radical role, as Christians et al. put it, serves neither professional norms nor market needs. Instead, it aims for radical changes in society, reveals abuses of power, tries to make the public aware of inequalities and malpractices, and focuses on the potential for change. The collaborative role means cooperation with authorities that is appropriate in situations of unusual crisis or emergency, such as war or terrorism or when political institutions are weak or have limited resources.³³

Though media development organizations expect journalists from transitional countries to adopt the Western professional model with a focus on “political detachment and adversarialism,” many media practitioners admit this model doesn’t fit the contextual circumstances in their respective societies.³⁴ Our study seeks to find out how the Euromaidan and post-Euromaidan challenges influenced perceptions of the normative foundations of journalism among Ukrainian professionals. The concepts and notions we discuss provide a theoretical framework for the study of Ukrainian journalists’ perceptions of their role in the conditions of a post-Euromaidan Ukraine.

Methodology

The empirical part of our study is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Ukrainian journalists. Our sample of 14 journalists was designed to focus on those media professionals who were involved in protest actions in different capacities (11 respondents). We assumed that journalists with different kinds of activist experience are likely to have a more dynamic professional identity than others without those experiences. Hence, their interpretations of professional values could reveal changes instigated by the Euromaidan and post-Euromaidan developments. Our interest in this group of journalists also stems from our assumption that changes within this group have been quite remarkable and have been influencing the journalistic community at large. To compare their responses with journalists representing different experiences, we added three more respondents to the sample. One of those journalists admitted she supported neither the Euromaidan nor Yanukovich and his government. The other two leaned towards a neutral approach; that is, although they sympathized with Euromaidan, they chose not to be there in any capacity other than to do their job as journalists. Our interviews were conducted in March–October 2016. Because of the issues’ sensitivity, the respondents were granted anonymity. Given the qualitative nature of the study, we aimed at identifying how Ukrainian journalists, primarily those involved in protest activities, perceive their role and values as journalism professionals, rather than estimating the scale of changes and defining the quantitative ratio of journalists with different approaches.

Our sample was designed to include journalists working for different types of media and representing both national and regional outlets. Thus, journalists in the sample represented

33 Christians, *Normative Theories of the Media*, 124–27.

34 Katrin Voltmer, *The Media in Transitional Democracies* (Cambridge, Maiden: Polity Press, 2013), 226.

three nation-wide TV channels, seven online media (including one online radio station), one regional online outlet, two regional TV channels, and one regional newspaper. We selected journalists who represented different experiences in engaging in activism of various kinds. Most of the journalists interviewed have been helping diverse grassroots initiatives while remaining professional journalists. Several others emphasized their adherence to professionalism and avoidance of activism, and a few respondents even left their jobs for a time to devote themselves to activist causes.

The journalists were asked questions about their experience during and after the Euromaidan and the challenges they faced while reporting on the developments in Ukraine and the conflict in the Donbas. They also were asked about their perceptions and attitudes concerning the role of journalists, the boundaries between professionalism and activism and their understanding of what journalism is.

The size of the sample and qualitative nature of this enquiry do not allow generalizing the study's findings for the whole journalistic community in Ukraine. Rather, the study's goal was to identify journalists' perceptions of their professional roles and the reasoning behind journalists' involvement (or purposeful non-involvement) in activist actions during and after the Euromaidan. This information offers a starting point for exploring further the professional values and practices among Ukrainian journalists, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Analysis

Euromaidan, Empowerment and the Rise of Interventionist Journalism

Our interviews with journalists showed that the Euromaidan protests set a benchmark for many journalists that was distinct from, if not disruptive of, their profession's routines. Most said they participated in the Euromaidan both as journalists and as ordinary citizens. Their involvement in the protest movement ranged from donating money for protesters' needs and making sandwiches to coordinating protest actions. Some said their involvement in the protests was quite irregular, since they mostly covered the events as journalists and spent substantial time fulfilling their professional duties.

I started going to Maidan³⁵ as a journalist and volunteer simultaneously. When there was something to shoot (film), I was shooting. When there was nothing to shoot, I was just distributing tea at the barricades. I was also bringing tires when there were "hot" days. I was also a participant (freelance journalist, provided content for printed and online outlets).

Overall, the journalists we interviewed sympathized with the protesters and wanted to somehow contribute to the protests.

35 An alternative title for Euromaidan.

We all wanted to be activists at that time... It was sort of an internal impulse. We all wanted to be there. We even got upset when someone had to stay in the newsroom and update the newsfeed (journalist from a leading national online media outlet).

In some cases, their sympathy evolved at the later stages of the protests in response to the dramatic development of events. Our analysis of the interviews suggested that the feeling of solidarity with the protesters provided a major impetus for journalists to engage in activism to various extents.

I went to Maidan as a citizen... At that moment we all came there to be a part of some big community, some nation that, as it seemed then, rose, got some strength and inspiration to do something, to do something great (journalist working for the online media outlet).

Their participation in the protests was also driven by their opposition to the violence against protesters and their quest for justice.

Maidan as a phenomenon — both the first and the second one — was a phenomenon of standoff between some universal truth and universal lie... Maidan boosted citizen journalism. It's kind of an urge for justice. We had something similar after the Orange Revolution, but the scale was so much different (journalist working for the online media outlet).

The Euromaidan experience spurred the personal development of many of the journalists we interviewed. Several journalists reported that they had reconsidered their views about their future in the profession and journalism in general because of the Euromaidan. This especially concerned the younger generation of journalists (up to 30 years old). For example, one of the journalists considered quitting profession, but the Euromaidan changed her view.

The situation's extreme urgency and the unfamiliar violence of the governmental forces contributed to the unprecedented tension experienced by journalists. As a result, journalists admitted they basically had no time to reflect on the professionalism vs. activism dilemma during Euromaidan because the situation was new to them and required urgent action. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the Euromaidan illustrates how interventionism among journalists evolves in response to acute challenges. This evolution was generally stronger among journalists who had less solid views about their profession and its normative foundations than those who held firm views.

Notably, some journalists admitted their sense of urgency was further aggravated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine. In response to these new challenges, many journalists continued supporting various grassroots initiatives. The majority journalists we interviewed admitted they at least occasionally donated money to aid the army, and some journalists provided ad hoc assistance, such as helping activists to transport

food to the soldiers. Two journalists we interviewed were actively involved in the activities of charitable foundations helping the Ukrainian army. One of them had been coordinating a charity for a year; another regularly cooperates with a well-known charity producing documentaries and promotional videos.

When you go to a frontline with volunteers, you can't be empty-handed. So, you put a box just near your workplace, gather sweets, money and then distribute them at the checkpoints. But that's about small things. Unfortunately, I haven't tried to collect large sums of money for particular soldiers (former journalist at the state owned TV channel).

In sum, the Euromaidan and post-Euromaidan developments created new conditions and challenges for journalists who found themselves confused, on the one hand, and eager to help a society in crisis, on the other. Arguably, at that time journalists played the radical role, as defined by Christians et al., by focusing on the abuses of power (during the Euromaidan) and attempting to inspire people to seek changes (after the Euromaidan).³⁶ Their lack of time to reflect on the new challenges, a sense of very strong threats and urgency increased journalists' solidarity with citizens. This induced a significant part of the journalist community to take a more interventionist approach.

Between Activism and Professionalism: Journalists' Reflections

Our interviews with journalists revealed several major approaches or attitudinal strands about the activism vs. professionalism dilemma among journalists. About half of the journalists we interviewed said it is possible to combine the roles of a journalist and an activist. Some even openly promoted the initiatives they supported through their media.

I don't delineate (journalism and activism). Having a contract with my TV channel, I let myself express in favor for volunteerism (activism). I used my journalist activities to promote some projects of the Foundation, promote volunteers (activists) (journalist at the national TV channel).

However, the majority asserted they try to demarcate their professional duties and engagement in activist projects. According to them, the professionalism vs. activism dilemma became especially acute after the beginning of the armed conflict. In that respect, they noted an internal tension between being a neutral observer and empathizing with the Ukrainian people and army.

Can we combine activism and journalism? ... I would have to tell you that no, we can't. But I can't say so; I can't do it, because when there's a war in your country—it's very hard to not have your own standpoint. When you see

36 Christians, *Normative Theories of the Media*, 124–27.

Maidan, Berkut and protesters—you realize that you can't delineate from that and go through it as merely as a journalist. At least I couldn't do that (journalist working for online media outlet).

While all the journalists we interviewed admitted to facing ethical dilemmas in post-Euromaidan Ukraine, their attitudes about and responses to those dilemmas varied. Based on our interviews, we identified three major approaches. Journalists taking the first approach tended to see no critical contradiction in combining professional identity with their engagement in activism. Some of them accepted activism as a sort of necessity stemming from the peculiar Ukrainian context.

We have such a situation in the country that you can't be only a journalist all the time. You are supposed to be detached from all these processes, but then you realize that you in fact act as a journalist and activist. Because, unfortunately, there are very few people ready to fight at the regional level (journalist from the regional media outlet).

Journalists taking the second approach acknowledged the conflicting nature of the two identities but were confused about the solution. Some accepted it, but others questioned it to some degree.

It is both physically and morally difficult to combine activism and journalism; it takes a lot of resources... I've tried myself in both roles and I feel more comfortable when I'm just a journalist. Journalists have other responsibilities, other skills and do other things. I like it more than being an activist (former activist and now journalist working for the international media outlet in Ukraine).

The third group of journalists rejected activism as a viable component of journalist's professional identity and criticized the increasing shift towards activist type of journalism in Ukraine after the Euromaidan and the conflict in the Donbas region. Representatives of this approach raised concerns about the demand for "patriotic" journalism from both Ukrainian society and the journalism community.

I don't think that a journalist necessarily has to be above the event that he/she is covering. Participation in the event gives an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of what's happening, a better understanding of people engaged in the event. But I'm afraid that after Maidan a lot of Ukrainian journalists did not stop being "revolutionaries"; and it harms Ukrainian journalism. I don't feel comfortable in such an environment (journalist at the news website).

The third approach was mostly advocated by journalists who either worked or used to work for international media in Ukraine. Presumably, they were familiar with the explicitly articulated journalistic standards of the foreign, predominantly Western, media, and this influenced their rejecting the interventionist approach.

Notably, even those journalists who accepted the “neutral” approach for themselves provided an explanation to the growing activism among their colleagues. In the words of one of those journalists,

Activism is a phenomenon of our time, our situation... Because when we have a dilemma whether Ukraine is to be or not be as a state, many people try to get engaged in saving (the country). This activism is aimed at survival (journalist working for the international media outlet in Ukraine).

Our interviews with the journalists showed that they all shared the sense of urgency about the situation during the Euromaidan and in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. But many noted the increasing polarization of views and the fragmentation of understandings and views among Ukrainian journalists following the Euromaidan.

There is no general understanding of who journalist is and what we should expect from him/her. Ukrainian journalism is still undergoing formation. Journalists themselves feel pressure from the society, colleagues and the state. Many people want to have a patriotic journalism. And a very limited circle of journalists resist it (now in Ukraine) (journalist working for the international media outlet in Ukraine).

Our analysis of our interviews suggests that Ukrainian journalists do not largely follow the “professional” and detached model of journalism. They are generally aware of journalism’s normative principles, but they see these principles as distant and somewhat abstract. Since the Euromaidan, many Ukrainian journalists have gravitated towards a more interventionist approach. This might be explained by the urgent situation and critical challenges for the country, including the external aggression. And it might be explained by the sense of empowerment that many journalists experienced during Euromaidan. However, this shift has not been limited to the Euromaidan and war reporting but has extended to other matters journalists cover, predominantly political developments. This, in its turn, might be explained by the lack of efficient democratic institutions, thereby prompting many journalists to go beyond traditional reporting and play “collaborative” and “radical” roles in society. After all, journalists’ tolerance of the partisanship driven by the media owners’ interests and the corresponding editorial policies was widespread in Ukraine before the Euromaidan.³⁷ That after the Euromaidan many journalists would develop another type of partisanship, which could be termed as “civic” or “patriotic,”

37 Otar Dovzhenko, “Ukrainski media siohodni: z haremu v bordel [Ukrainian Media Today: From Harem to Brothel],” *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, May 23, 2008, accessed March 13, 2017, http://gazeta.dt.ua/POLITICS/ukrayinski_media_sogodni_z_garemu_v_bordel.html; Marta Dyczok, “Do the Media

should not be surprising. Many kinds and varying degrees of “partisanship” can be included within this broad approach, and the trend towards interventionism is quite clear. This can lead to the further blurring of the boundaries of journalistic professionalism and, with it, the increasing polarization of attitudes towards professional standards among Ukrainian journalists. While professional standards had often been violated in pre-Euromaidan Ukraine, they had not been openly and publicly questioned or challenged as they have been after the Euromaidan.

Perception of Standards and the Role of Journalism

We asked our sample of journalists a set of questions to locate the views and experiences of Ukrainian journalists in post-Euromaidan Ukraine about journalism’s culture, professional values, and journalists’ role perceptions. Our goal was to gather the journalists’ perceptions about these subjects.

The majority defined the primary function of journalists is to inform the society. Some also mentioned the media’s watchdog and educational roles. Yet, informing the society was the most common answer. Though the journalists were unanimous in their definition of the journalism’s role, our questions concerning professional standards revealed more diverse and contradictory perceptions.

Our interviews revealed that although journalists accept the idea that universal journalistic standards are important, many of them find it difficult to articulate those standards. Furthermore, the question of standards is very seldom discussed in the newsrooms of Ukrainian media. Only several newsrooms have established editorial guidelines. It is thus possible to conclude that the Ukrainian media have not sufficiently institutionalized journalistic standards. Indeed, more than half the journalists we interviewed admitted they sometimes must compromise with some of the standards. For example, several acknowledged they avoided publishing information that could be harmful for Ukrainian army. They specifically noted the problem of alcohol abuse among soldiers on the frontline. In such cases, they found themselves torn between their identity as a citizen and their professional identity.

Do we have to cover everything in journalism? Do media have to uncover everything as it is? Or are there things that should rather be not voiced? It probably depends on the each particular situation and solutions can vary. But then there’s not only a professional responsibility, but that of a citizen too (journalist working for the local newspaper).

Just like we have a hybrid war, the standards should be understood as hybrid as well. Because no one has cancelled freedom of speech and those standards that require evaluation situation from another side of the entrenchment. But on the other hand, we have to understand the situation Ukraine got in now... On the one hand, we do not have to silence problems in the army, but on the

other hand we have to understand that the army is now a major pillar of Ukraine. If there were no armed forces, Ukraine wouldn't exist in our current boundaries (journalist working for the national daily).

Although most of the respondents had difficulties in identifying major journalistic standards and were confused about their applicability in the Ukrainian situation, they repeatedly referred to western media, like BBC or New York Times, as sources of standards.

If we look at the New York Times, they wouldn't do that (promote activist initiatives). But it's also hard for me to imagine the NYT in present-day Ukraine, in contemporary conditions. Who knows, maybe they would do a similar thing. Therefore we have such a standpoint: we want to keep the country, we want it to be strong, we want people to become more active and advanced citizens (and we provide visibility to such initiatives) (journalist working at the leading online news website).

In sum, our interviews with journalists revealed they were aware of journalistic standards and tended to embrace the Anglo-American model as a guide. However, they also revealed journalists have significant difficulties in articulating those standards and, even more so, they are confused about their applicability in contemporary Ukraine.

Consequently, a reasonable conclusion is that although Ukrainian journalists appear to be largely familiar with a normative idea of journalistic professionalism and standards, most of them have difficulties internalizing or accepting this idea in practice. The deficit in editorial discussions and institutionalization across newsrooms has contributed to this. In addition, the new context and previously unseen challenges caused growing confusion and resulted in the polarization of the Ukrainian journalistic community.

Conclusions

This study was based on the in-depth interviews with Ukrainian journalists. It reveals that interventionism³⁸ emerged as a distinctive feature of journalism culture following the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. The activism of journalists developed in response to a situation of utmost emergency against the backdrop of unprecedented violence towards protesters and threats of authoritarianism. This activism was later reinforced by the beginning of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which posed a critical threat to the vulnerable sovereignty of the country. In response to these challenges, many journalists increasingly turned to activism, which resulted in the blurring of the boundaries of journalistic professionalism.

Given its qualitative nature, this study cannot establish the extent to which the activist approach has been shared by journalists nationwide. Instead, it identifies major patterns in

38 Thomas Hanitzsch, "Deconstructing Journalism Culture: Toward a Universal Theory," *Communication Theory* 17 (2007).

journalists' professional values since the Euromaidan and explains resulting changes through an analysis of a sample of individual journalist's perceptions and experiences.

The analysis of Ukrainian journalists' interpretations proves the remark by K. Voltmer that journalists in emerging democracies often do not fully embrace the Anglo-Saxon model of journalism because that model does not account for the local context.³⁹ Ukraine's post-Soviet legacy and the complicated sociopolitical context in the now independent Ukraine have substantially influenced the professional culture. The instrumentalization of the media by their owners, a tradition of censorship, and weak professional standards characterized the Ukrainian media landscape before the Euromaidan, despite the seeming adoption of the western approach to journalism. The Euromaidan and later developments brought even more complex challenges to the Ukrainian media and its journalists.

The study reveals a lack of consensus among Ukrainian journalists concerning professional standards and their relevance for present-day Ukraine. Although journalists largely share the view that the primary role of journalism is to provide information to the society, their interpretations of journalism's professional standards and journalists' tasks differ significantly. Although they acknowledge the existence of some universal professional norms, many journalists expressed uncertainty regarding these norms relevance for Ukrainian journalists under Ukraine's current conditions. This can be explained by a combination of factors. Firstly, many Ukrainian journalists lack a professional education. Secondly, journalism education in Ukrainian universities often does not meet high standards and is heavily influenced by the philological tradition, as most journalism departments were established as part of philological faculties.⁴⁰ Thirdly, there is no common practice in Ukrainian newsrooms of establishing the editorial guidelines that journalists are expected to follow, which results in the lack of institutionalization of professional standards.

Our analysis of our interviews suggests that during the Euromaidan, Ukrainian journalism saw a massive engagement of media practitioners in social and political processes. At that time, journalists saw themselves as drivers of changes in which they played "the radical role."⁴¹ After the Euromaidan and with the beginning of the armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine, many journalists were leaning towards the "collaborative role," pushed by external threats and never-before-seen challenges. Both roles had significant implications for Ukrainian society and turned into a revealing feature of post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Moreover, they have led to a fragmentation of journalistic identities and to polarization among journalists. This signals a crisis in professional identity and ongoing transformations in journalism culture. These changes require thorough research and, possibly, a quantitative approach that would help to measure the attitudes and perceptions of journalists in post-Euromaidan Ukraine and to locate them into the studies of journalism cultures worldwide.

39 Katrin Voltmer, *The Media in Transitional Democracies* (Cambridge, Maiden: Polity Press, 2013).

40 "Stan zhurnalistskoi osvity na fakultetakh zhurnalistyky v Ukraini (rezultaty pilotnoho doslidzhennia) [State of Journalism Education at the Faculties of Journalism in Ukraine (the Results of Pilot Study)], Detector Media NGO, 2016, accessed December 30, 2016, http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/content/files/dm_osvita_a4_light.compressed.pdf.

41 Christians, *Normative Theories of the Media*.

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