Professional Journalism Education in Eastern Europe: Ukrainian Experience

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ABSTRACT

Ukraine's civic revolutions of the last decade were supposed to bring democratization. Highly expected were improvements in media industry and journalism education that is still experiencing follow-ups of the Soviet theory-based teaching model rather than adherence to the internationally accepted best practices. The reforms have been introduced recently with adopting of new Law of Higher Education, but they meet problems and obstacles as social humanitarian crisis is in high gear in Ukraine.

The objective of this study is to analyze how Ukrainian journalism education faces demands of the time and prepares students to successful careers. For this reason, the survey method was used. An online survey was conducted considering graduates of leading journalism schools, faculties and institutes of the country regarding how they evaluate the role of practical trainings during the course of higher education.

The study findings prove its main hypothesis that professional journalists value practice the most. Internships are among their priorities during studying at universities. The survey results showed that graduates connect high number of practical trainings with their professional growth. Respondents generally expressed the idea that journalism schools should model professional journalism environment as much as possible by providing students with as many practical disciplines and journalism internships as available. Positive correlation between a number of internships and successful job search among students-journalists has been discovered.

The study concluded that Ukraine's journalism education has to be transformed in accordance to market-driven media industry of the country. Both the survey and the analytical research of this study have shown that Ukrainian journalism education still has obstacles to overcome. Among them, there are quite theorized academic process, highly bureaucratized and corrupted education atmosphere, financial and conceptual crisis of journalism and professional education in Ukraine.

KEYWORDS: Ukrainian media; journalism; journalism education; students.

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Професійна журналістська освіта в Східній Європі: український досвід

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Резюме

Громадянські революції останнього десятиліття мали принести Україні демократизацію. Вдосконалення очікувалися у сфері медіа та журналістської освіти, яка досі бореться із наслідками радянської моделі навчання, що базується більшою мірою на вивченні теорії. Нещодавно були впроваджені реформи, пов'язані з ухваленням Закону України «Про вищу освіту», але вони наштовхуються на проблеми гуманітарної кризи, зокрема в освіті.

Метою дослідження є аналіз журналістської освіти в Україні з точки зору її ефективності, прозорості, практичності і успішного працевлаштування випускників. Досягнення цієї мети було реалізоване завдяки використанню методу онлайн-опитування випускників факультетів і інститутів журналістики України. В результаті проведеного дослідження були підтверджені гіпотези про те, що практичні навички і навчальні практики є основним компонентом академічного життя студента-журналіста, а напрацьовані під час них знання і вміння (а вже потім – портфоліо і професійні рекомендації) найбільшою мірою впливають на успішне працевлаштування випускника.

Ключові слова: українські медіа; журналістика; журналістська освіта; студенти.

Сиринёк-Долгарёва Е.Г. Профессиональное журналистское образование в Восточной Европе: украинский опыт.

Гражданские революции последнего десятилетия должны были принести Украине демократизацию. Усовершенствования ожидались в сфере медиа и журналистского образования, которое до сих пор борется с последствиями советской модели обучения, базированной в большей мере на изучении теории. В недавнем времени были внедрены реформы, связанные с принятием Закона Украины «О высшем образовании», но они столкнулись с проблемами гуманитарного кризиса, в том числе в образовании.

Целью исследования является анализ журналистского образования с точки зрения его эффективности, прозрачности, практичности и успешного трудоустройства выпускников. Достижение этой цели было реализовано с помощью использования метода онлайн-опроса выпускников факультетов и институтов журналистики Украины. В результате проведенного исследования были подтверждены гипотезы о том, что практические навыки и образовательные практики являются основным компонентом жизни студента-журналиста, а выработанные во время их прохождения знания и умения (а уже потом – портфолио и профессиональные рекомендации) наибольшей мерой влияют на успешное трудоустройство выпускника.

Ключевые слова: украинские медиа; журналистика; журналистское образование; студенты.

1. Introduction and Background

Modern stage of the Ukrainian society development is marked by substantial democratization of its information space. Ukraine was parted from the Soviet Union in 1991 and started its way of media industry modernization: increasing of number of printed publications and spreading of the internet contributed to development of transparency institutions, broader access to information, overcoming informational isolation, and thus, emancipation of initiatives and social activity of people, education of humanistic values.

In its reports, American Knight International Press Program for promoting independent journalistic initiatives and trainings noted that in contrast to other world's emerging democracies, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine were incorporated into the Soviet state, and much was done to crush their national identities. They emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union with weaker senses of distinctiveness, even less economic independence, and fewer ties to the west [1, 10]. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukrainian journalists gained the freedom to develop; censorship was hold up and media outlets were allowed to earn money from advertising. The years between 1995 and 2004 constituted the era of fast growth of media. Simultaneously, though, censorship and pressure on media and journalists grew. The death of Heorhiy Honhadze, an independent journalist, was a situation that thrust local professional matters into the international sphere [2].

All abovementioned facts influence the social changes in Ukraine and particularly Ukrainian mass media. These processes occur while transitioning from state regulated to a market kind of economy and complicate protection of proclaimed by the Constitution of Ukraine honourable and dignified values of human lives and social harmony in the land of Ukraine (Article 3) [3].

Unlike western media systems, which were going in the direction of commercialization for a long time during 20th century, Ukrainian media jumped into commercialized atmosphere only two decades ago that revolutionized not only their essence, but also journalists' minds. The absolute majority of Ukrainian mass media cultivate a role of a transmitter of an authority's power – of a business or an advertiser. As a result, mass media lack quality journalism products that would form unbiased public opinion, perform enlightening, educational, aesthetic, organizational, integration functions. In this situation, the printed press does not fulfil its main duty of mass informing and does not support citizens' constitutional right for free development of their individualities.

The recent social and humanitarian crisis and armed conflict within the country occurred after 2014 Revolution of Dignity in Kyiv, annexation of Crimea, bloody conflict with separatists in Eastern Ukraine, and self-proclamation of Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics". These events might have become the results of such dissonance in the society, breaking of citizen communications, when state authorities exist apart from the society and they do not hear each other. The biggest danger for traditional media in such situation is that they do not make positive influence on the society and society itself is indifferent and distrustful towards its "watch dogs".

The same tectonic changes have been happening in journalism education. The crisis in education itself might be a cause of the total humanitarian crisis in the country, and permanent threats for freedom of speech in Ukraine that were worsening and improving back and forth during last years of the office of the fled president Viktor Yanukovych (2010-2014) and during the newest times of political, economic, and social instability.

The recent 2016 Geneva Centre for Security Policy's report states the same ideas: "Media training has not evolved in Ukraine in the post-Soviet period. As a result, the country's media have lacked professional journalists. The media market has been developing too rapidly for schools of journalism to improve the quality of their graduates and train enough students to become journalists. As a result, many journalists have entered the profession with little or even

inappropriate training. Journalism schools were also too conservative to teach their students the international standards of journalism" [4, 3].

The **aim** of this study is to analyze how Ukrainian journalism education faces demands of the time and how it prepares students to successful careers.

To achieve this aim, there have to be done the following tasks:

1. To consider the existing approaches to professional journalism education used in major higher educational institutions of Ukraine.

2. To study, assess and summarize the best practices of Ukraine's journalism schools through surveying their graduates.

3. To analyze how Ukrainian journalism education supports the idea of preparing students to successful careers in professional journalism.

Problem Definition and Literature Review

The main difference that Ukrainian journalism education has comparing to America and other western countries is its deep roots into Soviet propaganda and literary background. State authority highly controlled and directed newspapers and electronic media (as now oligarchs do so). In late 1990s, there were only three journalism faculties at the universities of then 52 million-Ukraine (in Kyiv and Lviv State Universities, and Lviv Higher Military Political Academy). They had journalism faculties that were located and affiliated to political and Communism schools. There were no departments of Communication, Advertising or PR at all. Latter ones were considered as capitalistic pseudo-science that is why teaching of those disciplines has started only about a decade ago and is based on translated literature of western (mainly American) authors and independent trainings provided by international media NGOs based in US and Western Europe.

In order to become a mouthpiece of the only Soviet party news stories had to be very emotional and influential. That is why strong literary skills were encouraged among journalists. Many of them had degrees in linguistics (philology), literature and theatre/cinematography, not journalism itself. When new journalism departments and schools appeared in the independent Ukraine in early 1990s keeping up with demand for new generation of journalists, the main problem was the lack of qualified teaching staff. They were linguists with degrees in Ukrainian or Russian languages. Up till now, more than a half of 39 journalism faculty in the country do not have professional journalism degrees (majority of professors holds PhD degrees in Philology) or even experience working in any media – neither any kind of journalism training [5].

Nevertheless, journalism education had to transform in accordance with the society changes. One of the benefits of this situation is that Ukrainian journalism educators did not have strong background of the professional standards (not taking into consideration Soviet journalism and many positives that it had though). Thus, they were open to learning and adopting the newest trends of the industry. The post-soviet education in Ukraine had plenty of obstacles beginning from overwhelming corruption [6, 3] and lack of financial and technical resources (some universities still do not have enough computer labs, and very often high-speed internet connection is rather a privilege even now). Ministry of Education and Science still dictates the departments, what their curricula should look like, not faculty itself decides on this matter. Finally, after long fights over this Soviet vestige, educational reform led to the adoption of the newest Law about Higher Education in 2014. According to it, universities got academic and financial freedom [7] that is more than important for journalism education, such rapidly and dramatically transforming field.

Analysis of literature regarding Ukrainian journalism education shows the lack of it. There is no national theory of media studies and media education in Ukraine. Sporadically and chaotically, such tries to establish unified national journalism education system occur in major universities: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (V. Rizun [8], V. Ivanov [9]), Kyiv-

Mohyla Academy (S. Kvit [10], O. Kutovenko [11], A. Grynko [12]), and some regional journalism faculties and schools in Lviv, Zaporizhzhya, Chernivtsi, Luhansk (M. Tytarenko [13], V. Kostyuk [14], L. Vasylyk [15], L. Derkach [16], A. Lisnevska [17]).

Being involved in philological cycle of educational subjects, journalism was branched out to a separate field named Social Communications in 2008. However, Ministry of Education and Science did not provide any well-articulated definition of 'Social Communications' and why it could not be a part of Social Science or Political Science or stay as an independent field of study. Finally, in 2016, 'Social Communications' as a field of studies stop functioning. PhD and doctoral programs will be taken within the field "Journalism".

This tossing from one extreme to another shows that there is still no national vision on how journalism education should look like and what media standards we have. European scholars suggest that Ukraine refers to the Anglo-Saxon model [18, 74], which is questionable, for instance, US and British press systems differ a lot – from highly commercialized market of private media in USA to the world's oldest public media organizations that UK has. Ukrainian educators tend to state that Ukrainian standard in journalism was modeled after the British one [8].

The attempts to develop unified national standards started in 2011 and by 2013 there were prepared two draft projects: professional standards for qualifications 'Multimedia Journalist' and 'Multimedia Editor.' Employers of media industry developed these standards that have been the topic of active debates among educators. The head of a working group, the director of leading Institute of Journalism, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, V. Rizun reported: "The employer's main concern seems to be the compliance of the graduate's qualification with the professional standard. Despite that, employers cannot help but get affected by a fashionable trend of recent years: Their prospect employee should have a master's degree or even a doctoral degree! Today there is a widely spread opinion that higher education in journalism is useless – its goals, principles and content are alien to practitioners because they consider education too academic. Practitioners complain that graduates from journalism departments need long-term on-the-job training (they have to be taught basic professional skills) before they can work effectively in editor's office. This gap between journalism education and current needs of the market can be overcome by introducing professional standards into education" [8, 7].

The latter statement seems to be a long-lasting stumbling-stone between academic and journalistic professional practical spheres in Ukraine. Back in 2000s, American trainers complained that their work was necessary because the universities were not doing their jobs and were too inflexible to adapt to the rapid changes taking place in the host countries [1, 25]. This was one of the reasons, why prominent Ukrainian mass media such as newspaper "Day" [19], TV channels "Inter", "1+1", "STB", and others opened their summer schools and professional training programs for students to enhance the quality of their knowledge practically.

Nowadays, when everyone with smartphone, laptop and internet can be a journalist, the problem of journalism education got even more serious. Not having established national media policy (or having it only 'on paper') leads to legal and ethical issues in media industry. Professors Rizun and Ivanov address to the same point: "There has been a persistent problem that media industry cannot formulate a clear and concise request for education institutions to train future professionals. Some of these requests were formulated, (…) but there is no picture of a media professional agreed by all stakeholders. There are some underlying reasons for that: media community is very diverse (including in terms of professional skills). It hardly conceives the role and significance of journalists' education system. This explains the low professional and corporate culture of mass media. At present the notion of professional standards is non-existent for many journalists who do not have an experience of education as journalists" [9, 16].

We consider it problematic for the practitioners market and prospective employers as main source of professional standards since researches show they fail to stand on those standards. Expert interviews of journalists, editors, PR managers, advertisers, and other media practitioners

revealed that there are three levels of non-transparency and lack of journalistic credibility in Ukraine: interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational. The qualitative data showed that this country's media professionals as well as public relations practitioners have yet to identify the modern roles and functions of both media and media relations and have yet to find ways to underpin their professional codes of ethics [12].

An overwhelming problem of placing publicity materials as news stories – putting it simple, bribery for coverage or so called 'jeansa' (pronounced 'dzhynsa') – is common in Ukrainian media, especially during election periods. The studies show it was up to 40 percent of jeansa in national press during 2012 parliamentary elections [20, 11] and up to 21 percent on some local media during recent 2015 elections [21, 35].

2. Research Methods

One of the main goals of this study is to find out how Ukrainian journalism education supports the idea of preparing students for successful careers in this profession. For this reason, we conducted online survey (released via social networks Facebook and Vkontakte) of graduates of the leading journalism schools of the country (Kyiv, Lviv, Zaporizhzhya) regarding how they evaluate the role of practical trainings during the course of the university education.

The type of e-surveying was web-based survey "generally defined as those survey instruments that physically reside on a network server (connected to either an organization's intranet or the Internet)" [22, 2].

The method of electronic surveying was selected due to its main features [22; 23]:

1) ease of data gathering (Google Forms templates were used to create a questionnaire);

2) automation in data input and handling, flexibility of design (the responses are automatically stored in a survey database, providing hassle-free handling of data and a smaller possibility of data errors);

3) high reliability, validity and generalizability (including high level of privacy and anonymity of respondents).

As the survey was online and could be taken from any computer with Internet access, participation was confidential and offered no risk to the participants. Survey was conducted online among Facebook and Vkontakte users, who (a) showed in their profiles the affiliation to one of the journalism schools of Kyiv, Lviv, Zaporizhzhya, and (b) who showed their connection to professional journalism (either past, or present jobs in media industry). Random sampling was used (n = 105).

Outliers and cases with missing values were removed prior to the analysis, leaving the study with a final sample of 94 participants. Their average age is between 25 and 35 years old (almost 78 percent); 38 percent are residents of Kyiv, and a half of all respondents are located in regional centres. Majority has working experience in professional journalism of more than 10 years (up to 5 years – almost 46 percent, from 5 to 10 years – about 39 percent). No gender related information were taken into consideration while analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

The main hypothesis is that professional journalist value practical training the most, the internships are among high priorities during studying at the university. To examine this hypothesis we came up with following research questions:

RQ 1. To what extend are journalism internships important for influencing professional growth of a student?

RQ 2. Is there positive correlation between a number of trainings/internships and successful job search among students-journalists?

Variables

Journalism practice/internships importance. This study adapted and consolidated ideas from previous studies that discussed the role of theoretical knowledge vs. practical trainings for successful journalistic education [11; 21, 45-47; 24; 25; 26]. Thus, survey participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale [27] how much they agreed with a statement that journalism practice is a core element of journalism education. Vast majority of 95 percent strongly agreed and agreed with it. Principal components analysis found several reasons of the practices importance discussed later.

Student journalism practice/internships results. The participants were asked to share their own student experience of having internships/practice while obtaining a degree in journalism, and evaluate, which result out of four proposed is the most important for a successful career.
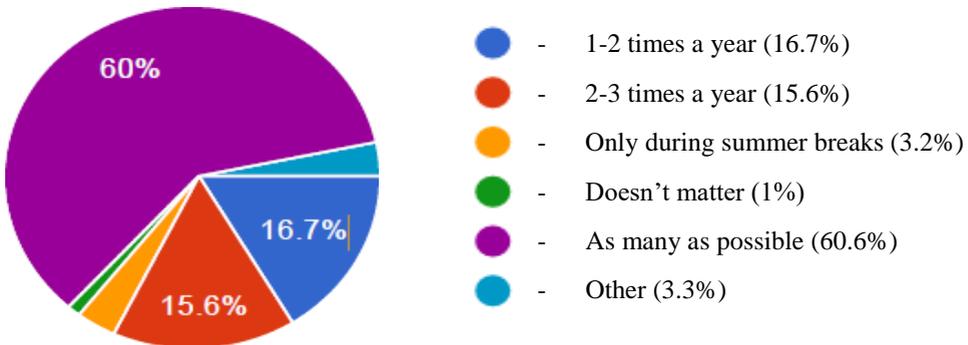
To answer the **RQ1** we asked respondents why university practice/internship is important or not. Qualitative analysis of responses showed that the main outcomes and importance of practice they associate with (a) professional in-field experience, (b) practical skills and knowledge, and (c) professional communication/cooperation. These outcomes correspond the responses to the question "What should be the main result of a practice/internship?" (see Fig. 1), which were rated as following: 1) skills and knowledge of a reporter/interviewer (79 percent of responses), 2) professional contacts and networking (47 percent), and wide professional portfolio (31 percent).

Fig. 1. Summary of responses regarding what should be the main result of a journalism practice/internship.
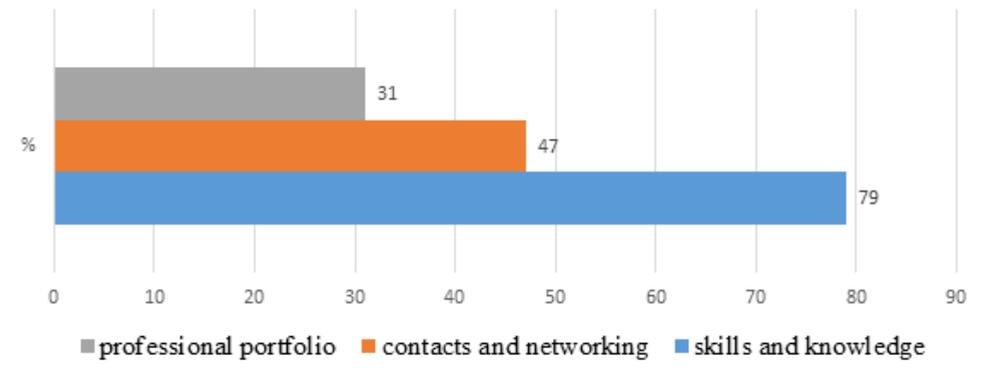
Survey respondents generally expressed the idea that journalism schools' main priority should be modelling of professional journalism environment as much as possible by providing students with as many practical disciplines and journalism internships as it can fit into their studies. The majority of respondents said there should be as many internships and practices as possible (almost 61 percent of responses). Other 32 percent of respondents think that there should be at least 1-2 (16 present) or 2-3 (15 percent) internships per academic year (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Number of journalism practices/internships desired by the graduates in journalism majors.

- 1-2 times a year (16.7%)
- 2-3 times a year (15.6%)
- Only during summer breaks (3.2%)
- Doesn't matter (1%)
- As many as possible (60.6%)
- Other (3.3%)

Overall, we suggest for journalism schools to have several mandatory internships during four years of study at undergraduate level and at least one more during master's studies. Usually, they start from so-called 'learning-discovering' internships during fall and spring semesters of freshmen and sophomore years and during summer intersessions – each one is about two months long. Generally, they are combined with studying, so students take academic courses and attend media offices at the same time. This kind of combination of studying and exposure to the professional environment is supposed to bring better understanding of theoretical disciplines student takes.

RQ2 asked about the link between practical workload in the university and successful job search of graduates with journalism degrees. Often a university's faculty debates on whether many internships are needed or not for the students to meet academic and professional requirements. In fact, not every student is responsible and capable enough to be involved in so intense professional learning and media production.

Fig. 3. Survey respondents' demographical portrayal.
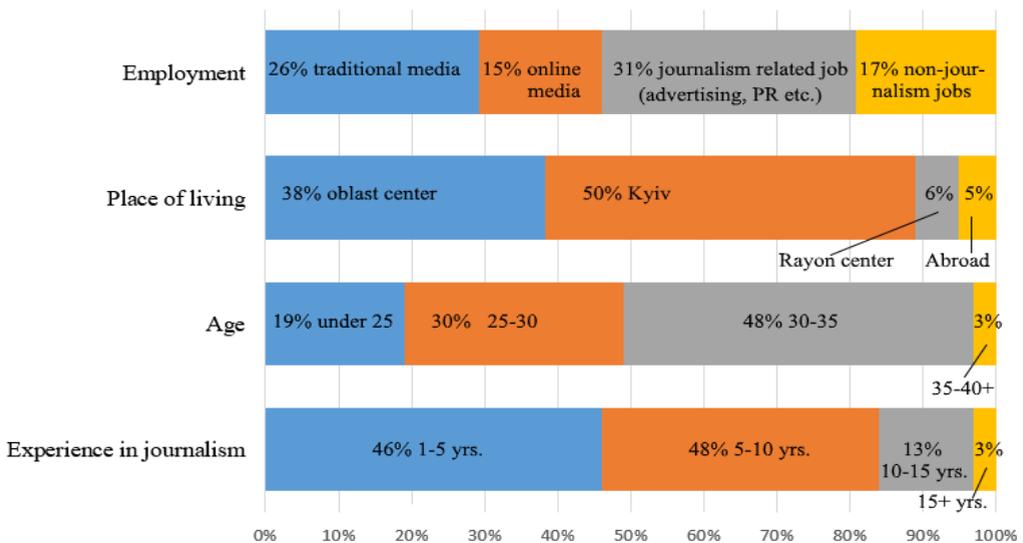
However, the survey results showed that years of such practice proved that students, who came to the university to gain not only a degree, but are really passionate to become professional journalists, enjoy this workload and get jobs faster than others do. Respondents proved that their internships after junior and senior year's helped them get job offers and start working before or right after obtaining diplomas. The majority of survey participants connect their positive internship experience with getting a job (74 percent). Nevertheless, the reality is that about a one third (31 percent) of them quit their journalism jobs and are employed in other spheres related to media such as advertising, PR, etc. (see Fig. 3). Our study wasn't supposed to discover the reasons of such movements, but exploring of these tendencies would be logical step to continue this research.

There are downsides such as hard practice load. Trying to meet internship requirements students consider learning in media offices more important than studying in class, and sometimes their academic performance gets affected negatively because of that. It is not easy to find a balance. One of the ways to reduce this large number of internships is to increase the number of courses taught by media professionals. Survey respondents mentioned that theoretical load was not so important for them in finding jobs and suggested to increase number of professional journalists as guest teachers at journalism schools. However, teaching and practicing journalism are quite different activities, which not every professional wants to combine. So usually, it is quite a challenge for a university to find qualified faculty to teach specific courses.

Another reason to have so intensive internship sessions during university studying is forming a student's professional portfolio. As seen from survey takers' experience, one third of respondents mentioned portfolio as main practical outcome of their trainings. However, they do not think that portfolio was the key element of their successful job search. More valuable were skills, knowledge, and professional contacts gained during practices. Portfolio appears more helpful for the teachers to keep track of a students' professional growth, academic performance, and provides assessments and self-evaluation of students' individual and group work.

4. Conclusions

According to the tasks set in this research, the findings of this study point to the usefulness of understanding the changing balance of theoretical/practical journalism education for the students as one of the main factors of their socialization into the profession.

This study showed that despite such fast growth of journalism schools (thirteen times from 1991 until 2016), the quality of education remains questionable. Some reasons are corruption, economic crisis, lack of equipment and trainings. Another one is that universities' desire to earn more money. It led to opening journalism departments in any wishing university with any specialization without proper accrediting, staff, and faculty preparation. Anecdotally, now one can enter journalism department in a technical university or in a pedagogical institute, but with no evidence of successful career perspectives.

Overall, in universities' curricula there are very few or none majors/specializations (hence no degrees in these majors) as Photojournalism, Media Management, Media Arts, Contemporary Cinema and Documentary (they are taught exceptionally at cinematographic universities), Media Critics, etc. There are no dual degrees and majors (except those that are gained under collaboration with other universities, mainly European ones – Polish, French, Bulgarian and some others – under Erasmus+ Program of EU [28]), nor selective courses for non-degree certificates. In majority of the universities all courses are required (there is no system for students to select courses and professors – all disciplines are mandatory).

Ukraine is lucky to be in the middle of geopolitical and cultural changes. Indeed, it is painful enough to be in the centre of such transformations. Nevertheless, journalism education as one of

the youngest developments of Ukraine's newest independent era is at beneficial side brining young, not burdened with Soviet people to university classrooms. We cannot help agreeing that "the pathway to a vibrant media system in the twenty-first century is inclusive, international, and interdisciplinary. It is guided by ethics, freedom of speech, and rigorous, independent, and critical inquiry. (…) Emboldened by a new vision, journalism and mass communication faculty, students, and alumni can provide the engaged scholarship and professional workforce to lead an effective, efficient, and vibrant media system at home and around the world" [29, 218].

New educational reform with adopting Law of Higher Education has started the process of getting autonomy and mobility for the universities but it is not so easy to transform. Changing landscape of global media, rapid development of online based, mobile technologies and media entrepreneurial models make it hard to follow traditional footprints of journalism and media education.

Mass communication educators should be in vanguard of all the transformation tendencies, but traditionally teachers tend to be the most conservative people, who keep traditions and set/follow standards. Convergence of media formats on digital platform expanded on how modern people think and blended ultra-technological features with some classical way of thinking and writing. Journalism educators are not exceptions.

Considering complicated socio-economic and cultural issues of journalism education in Ukraine we suggest for future studies to incorporate several research elements – not only media technologies and professional standards, but also philosophical, pedagogical, and psychological aspects.

Ukrainian journalism education yet to be looking for ways to find a national vision on how to teach successful media professionals, who would help to build peaceful and prosperous society. As for now, this way seems to be long, tough, but still optimistic.

Acknowledgements

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