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MEDIA TRANSPARENCY AND ITS IMPACT ON PR ACTIVITY

Abstract

This paper analyzes the issue of media transparency and freedom in the Republic of Bulgaria. It concerned particular attention to transparency initiatives both in this country and worldwide, and highlights the greatest role of the media in the democratic society. It draws attention to the specific measures guaranteeing freedom of the media, regulation and self-regulation. It focuses on the impact of media transparency and the transparency of PR activity and their intersection.

Key words: *Media Transparency, Freedom of Media, Media Regulation and Self-regulation, Trust in Media Content, Public Relations Transparency*

Introduction

The existence of real democracy includes the existence of independent, pluralistic, professional, unprejudiced and socially responsible media. Something more, the active and informed people can and have to effectively participate in the formation of the public opinion and the flow of ideas in an environment of participation and cooperation. The civil, democratic, tolerant society mainly includes the media as information environment and communication instrument.¹ It meet the audiences with the values, norms and the rules which the society considers as appropriate and right – inform, entertain, socialize, represent and interpret the images of our society. The means of mass communication “illuminate” the social structure and influence on the formation of its model. The different aspects of our habits, desires and relations, both as individuals, groups and as society are considered and represented by the media, as in this way they participate in the formation of our social values and dispositions.²

Media is an important instrument for influence, determining or changing the society’s order, agenda of the day, control over the information, propaganda and manipulation, taking the matters into someone’s own hands in respect of opponents

¹ Todorov, P., *Media in Crisis*, Sofia, 2011, p. 69

² Yankova, M., *Media Relations in Corporate PR Practice*, Doctoral Thesis, Blagoevgrad, 2015, p. 54.

and rivalry. Media in the same time serves as a connection between the political powers and people, as in this way they influence on the formation of the political structure in the state through the opportunity to serve as a corrective of power. When implemented as intended, one of media's functions is the political – it would have a powerful corrective effect over the governing persons. Today, although this function is still typical for the media, “in most cases it is strictly weighted, dosed, reasoning and avoiding the most burning issues of the day, and especially the factors and reasons which are behind one or another phenomenon”.³

Media is considered as “the forth power”. This power is given to it “not only because of the place which it (shall hold) holds in the interrelation “state power – citizens”, i.e. because of this that it (shall be) is on the side of the citizens' interests as a corrective of the three state powers and because of the circumstance that it influences by a mean that is different from the means which are used by the legislative, executive and the judicial powers. First, the media can convince and activate only through the information and secondly, only motivationally, i.e. without being able in any way to make people not only to become recipients, users of this information but even to get in touch with the media.”⁴

1. Current status of the media in Bulgaria

“Partly free” is the media in Bulgaria, as it is specified by the recent annual report of Freedom House.⁵ Our state is ranked lower in World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), than any other member of the European Union – Bulgaria is at the bottom of the ranking among the member states, as at a global level she takes 111th place out of 180 states.

Bulgaria continues to fall in the World Press Freedom Index and is ranked lower than any other European Union member is. Although the current holder of the European Council's rotating presidency (until the end of June 2018), Bulgaria is now lower in the Index than all the countries in the western Balkans, some of which are candidates for EU membership. Corruption and collusion between media, politicians, and oligarchs is widespread. The most notorious embodiment of this aberrant state of affairs is Delyan Peevski, a former head of Bulgaria's main intelligence agency and owner of the New Bulgarian Media Group. His group has six newspapers and controls nearly 80% of print media distribution. The government's allocation of EU funding to

³ Philipov, D., *The Media Revolution. Economic Theory of the Media*, University Publishing House "Stopanstvo", Sofia, 2002, p. 25.

⁴ Alfandari, E., *Social Theory of Mass Communication and Media. Journalism as a Social Phenomenon and Social Practice*, S., 2012, 245-246.

⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2017*, URL=<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/bulgaria>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

certain media outlets is conducted with a complete lack of transparency, in effect bribing them to go easy on the government in their reporting or refrain from covering certain problematic stories altogether. Threats and attacks against journalists have intensified in recent months. It can prove dangerous to be a journalist in Bulgaria.⁶

42.4% of 200 journalists who participated in a referendum to the research "Journalism without pressure 4.0"⁷ assess the freedom of speech in Bulgaria as "bad", as 27.8% assess it as "very bad". 25.3% finds it "satisfactory" and only 4.5% think it is "good". According to the journalists the political pressure is the most widespread pressure among the Bulgarian media. 2/3 of all participants in the inquiry confirm that they know about cases of exerted pressure on their colleagues. The forms of pressure are different: physical threats (it is stated by 13.1% of the inquired persons), extortion (35.9%), slanders about them (41%), online harassment (11%). 75 of the participants in the research determine the political pressure as the most widespread among the media in Bulgaria. It is followed by the economic pressure (61.6%), the pressure from advertisers (58.1%), the administrative pressure (43%) and the threats that come from criminal groups (13.1%).

And if we are really worried about the media environment and the freedom of speech, then we have to mention that here in Bulgaria the journalistic work is poorly protected, the media is in crisis mostly because of the vicious business models for their financing, political and economic dependences. The concentration of market share and the concentration of ownership remain extremely high and problematic which leads to lack of pluralism of ideas, mistrust in respect of the media and the information that is spread by it.

2. Media transparency

Media transparency is the concept of determining how and why specific information is spread through various media channels. It is necessary in order to be given an opportunity to the members of society to form an opinion on the value of the information, ideas and opinions spread by the media. Transparency of media ownership ensures the public availability and accessibility of accurate, up-to-date data concerning direct and beneficial ownership of the media, as well as other interests that influence the strategic decision making of the media in question or its editorial line.

⁶ Reporters without borders, *Corruption and collusion between media, politicians, and oligarchs is widespread*, URL=<https://rsf.org/en/Bulgaria>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

⁷ "Journalism without pressure 4.0" is a traditional research concerning the freedom of speech of the Association of the European Journalists – Bulgaria (AEJ-Bulgaria). The fourth thematic online research concerning the freedom of speech in Bulgaria is of national scope without being representative, 200 journalists participated.

This information is necessary for media regulatory and other relevant bodies to be able to conduct informed regulatory and decision-making processes. It also enables the public to analyse and evaluate the information, ideas and opinions disseminated by the media.

2.1. Factors of media transparency

In a research, commissioned by the Institute for Public Relations (USA), within the framework of the Campaign for Media Transparency, the researchers identified eight factors, which affect transparency in the media.

- Longtime tradition of self-determination by citizens
- Perception of comprehensive corruption laws with effective enforcement
- Accountability of government to citizens at all levels
- High adult literacy
- High liberal and professional education of practicing journalists
- Well-established, publicized and enforceable journalism codes of professional ethics
- Free press, free speech and free flow of information
- High media competition (multiple and competing media)⁸

In the researches of the communication any media is considered to be transparent when there are many, often competing sources of information; it is well known the method for finding information and the channels for financing the media are publicly known. Other aspects of the media transparency are the freedom of speech and the legislative initiatives, the provision of information for the spending of the financial resources etc. We will pay special attention to the last two factors of media transparency – free press, free speech and free flow of information, and high media competition (multiple and competing media), the lack of which mostly influences on the current status of the media environment in Bulgaria.

2.2. Specific measures which guarantee the media transparency – regulatory initiatives

Committee of Ministers to member states of the European Union adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership⁹. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has, in numerous

⁸ Kruckeberg, D.; Tsetsura, K. *A Composite Index by Country of Variables Related to the Likelihood of the Existence of 'Cash for News Coverage'*, Institute for Public Relations (USA), 2003, p. 20.

⁹ Recommendation CM/Rec (2018)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 March 2018 at the 1309th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies 1002

previous decisions, underlined the importance of media pluralism and transparency of media ownership for safeguarding public debate in democratic societies. The recommendation establishes a framework of guidelines for creating a transparent and pluralist, participatory media environment, both offline and online. It lays down the essential conditions to be fulfilled in order to enhance media pluralism. States are encouraged to develop strategies for increasing the sustainability of a variety of media. It encourages states to develop regulatory frameworks to promote transparency of media ownership. States are also encouraged to support quality independent and investigative journalism, whilst fully respecting the editorial and operational autonomy of the media.

Media freedom and pluralism are crucial corollaries of the right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5, “the Convention”). They are central to the functioning of a democratic society as they help to ensure the availability and accessibility of diverse information and views, on the basis of which individuals can form and express their opinions and exchange information and ideas. Furthermore, transparency of media ownership can help to make media pluralism effective by bringing ownership structures behind the media – which can influence editorial policies – to the awareness of the public and regulatory authorities.¹⁰

In the end of March 2018 and in compliance with Recommendation CM/Rec (2018)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 March 2018 at the 1309th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, the Bulgarian Commission on Protection of Competition started a research of the media sector in Bulgaria¹¹. The Commission on Protection of Competition¹² was given a claim by the minister of economics, minister of finance and minister of culture for the initiation of proceedings

URL=<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680790e13>, Accessed 15 March 2018.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Commission on Protection of Competition of the Republic of Bulgaria, URL=<https://www.cpc.bg/>, Accessed 1 April 2018.

¹² The Commission is empowered to enforce the Law on Protection of Competition, the Public Procurement Act and the Concessions Act. The CPC scope of activity covers all requests on ascertaining infringements of free market competition, direct enforcement of the provisions of Art. 81 and Art. 82 of the EC Treaty, cooperation with the European Commission and the other national competition authorities of the EC member states in conformity to EC Regulation No.1/2003 and EC Regulation No. 139/2004, conducting sector analyses and competition advocacy. Under the rules and procedures, envisaged by the Public Procurement Act and the Concessions Act, the Commission examines the appeals on lawfulness of a decision, actions or lack of actions/omissions of the contracting authorities or concessioners in the public procurement or concession awarding procedure.

concerning the making of a sectoral analysis of the competitive environment of media market in the country.¹³ The reason for this was the billing in of a bill concerning the changing and adding to the Act for the Obligatory Lodgement of Printed and Other Works, proclaiming the introduction of transparency in media ownership, financing of media and the distribution of newspapers. By Decision No. 366/29.03.2018¹⁴ the Commission brought the matter to itself and made a research within its legal powers because of the issues submitted by the complainants, and namely to:

1. examine the characteristic, structure of the general media market in the country, as for this purpose it shall be analyzed the activity of all types of media and the participants in the sector, including: print media; the media which is spread by electronic communication networks; the licensed or the registered public or trade suppliers of audiovisual media services or radio services; as well as the online news services.

2. analyze all relevant facts and circumstances connected with the media market and to understand if there is information or prerequisites for avoiding, limiting or violating the rivalry of the general media market and/or of its submarkets in the country and if “yes”, which are the reasons for this.

3. find out if there are barriers and if “yes”, of what character they are, for the including of new participants in the general media market and/or its submarkets in the country, what is the degree of market concentration in the sector and what is the dynamics of development in it.

4. find the existing and applicable regulation in the country in respect of the media market, as well as to understand if there is self-regulation in the sector and of what character the same is.

5. make the respective conclusions and recommendations about the status of the competitive environment in the general media market and its submarkets in the country.¹⁵

Several months later, by Decision No. 717 of 28.06.2018¹⁶ the Commission on Protection of Competition approved a sector analysis about the competitive environment of the media market in the Republic of Bulgaria. The analysis includes an overview of the relevant legislation and the self-regulation in the sector, it examines the characteristics and the structure of the separate media markets, their participants,

¹³ Commission on Protection of Competition, *op. cit.*, note 13.

¹⁴ Commission on Protection of Competition, URL=<https://www.cpc.bg/Default.aspx> Accessed 10 May 2018.

¹⁵ In the letter, it is not mentioned time range of the analysis, as no actions of participants or existing regulatory texts are specified and which provoke anxiety or uncertainty in respect of the competitive environment in the sector.

¹⁶ Commission on Protection of Competition, URL=<https://www.cpc.bg/Default.aspx> Accessed 29 June 2018.

it analyzes the activity of all types of media and distributors of media content, it specifies the degree of market concentration and integration, as the market trends and dynamics are described.

As a result of the study, conclusions are made about the condition of the media sector and the topical problems concerning the competition. In this regard, the following conclusions and recommendations are made:

There are unfair practices in reporting the users of the platform operators, as this practices result in worsening the market conditions and distorting the competition relating to the distribution market of television programs, as well as the market of television content.

In view of these conditions, the recovery of the market environment shall be reached by the implementation of policies for cleaning up the "gray sector" and in order the market effects to take place.

Next, in view of the established tendency for media players to simultaneously operate in several media markets, as well as to monitor the existing vertical effects and level of media concentration, the Commission considers that is appropriate to be made a register, containing information about the end-owners of all types of media and the distributors of media content.

The analysis describes another problem that relates to the focusing of the great part of advertising budgets on the large media groups, as this challenges the survival of the smaller participants. That is the reason for the Commission to consider that all the additional funding with public funds (which does not relate to the approved way of funding and/or business model) of participants in the respective markets, including assigned funds under programs, shall be made under clear rules, transparent, non-discriminatory conditions, as effective control shall be exerted in connection with the above mentioned.

When it comes to the mentioned by a part of the market participants problem relating to the lack of reliable information about the circulation of the printed editions, the Commission on Protection of Competition considers that is appropriate to recommend the competent authorities and the respective interested parties to discuss the made in this regard proposals of the branch organizations and the interested parties with the purpose to be implemented policies for its solving.

The Commission on Protection of Competition has timely informed the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Economy, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Culture about the results of its sector analysis in order the last mentioned to take appropriate measures in view of their competency and which measures to relate to the functioning of the media markets.

2.3. Self-regulation

Can governmental regulations make the press more professional or ethical? No. True ethics standards can be created only by independent media professionals, and can be obeyed by them only voluntarily. Whether passed in good will or not, any attempt to impose standards on journalists by law will result in arbitrary limitation of their legitimate freedoms, and restriction of the free flow of information in society.

Of course, taxpayer-paid public-service broadcasters are obliged by law to report and comment in an objective, fair, and ethical manner. But public service requirements, too, must be formulated and enforced by independent professional bodies, and will only function if politicians refrain from interfering with editorial work. Which comes first: freedom or quality? Quality and self-regulation must not be treated by governments as preconditions to granting full freedom; on the contrary, ethical journalism can only develop in an atmosphere of guaranteed freedom. Journalists' self-restraint must be preceded and accompanied by governmental self-restraint in handling of media.¹⁷

Within the framework of the good managing of the media as a social and business organization function different types of ethical councils and ombudsmen, as the same are important instruments for self-regulation in compliance with valid for the country national and international standards.¹⁸ Under "self-regulation" it should be understood those forms for the establishment of order where the media organizations accept rules for their guild and they stick to their strict observance. The self-regulation means that media and the persons who work there understand and realize that the accumulated by them power can and have to be controlled by the public.

If in the development of forms of self-regulation in a branch there is cooperation with the country or if these forms develop because of an order of the country, then it shall be talked about co-regulation or regulated self-regulation.¹⁹

Media self-regulation is a joint endeavour by media professionals to set up voluntary editorial guidelines and abide by them in a learning process open to the public. By doing so, the independent media accepts its share of responsibility for the quality of public discourse in the nation, while fully preserving their editorial autonomy in shaping it.²⁰ Media self-regulation is an effort to impose democracy's political culture, independent of political forces. It also advances the transition from a

¹⁷ Haraszti, M., *The Media Self-Regulation Guidebook. All questions and answers. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media*, Vienna 2008, p. 15-16.

¹⁸ Fileva, P., *Quality management of media organizations*, Media and public communications. UNWE Publishing House/Alma Communication, 2008, № 3, URL=<http://media-journal.info/?p=item&aid=60>, Accessed 11 May 2018.

¹⁹ Puppis, M., Kuenzler, M., *Selbstregulierung und Selbstorganisation. Unveröffentlichter Schlussbericht zuhanden des Bundesamtes für Kommunikation (BAKOM)*, Zürich, März, 2004, s.10.

²⁰ Haraszti, *op. cit.* note 18, p. 9.

government-owned, state-controlled press to one owned and controlled by civil society. Five reasons for the media to develop media self-regulation: 1. It preserves editorial freedom; 2. It helps to minimize state interference; 3. It promotes media quality; 4. It is evidence of media accountability; 5. It helps readers access the media.

True ethics standards can be created only by independent media professionals, and can be obeyed by them only voluntarily. Whether passed in good will or not, any attempt to impose standards on journalists by law will result in arbitrary limitation of their legitimate freedoms, and restriction of the free flow of information in society.

What can governments do to promote self-regulation? Governments can best promote self-regulation by:

- Saying no to state ownership of the media;
- Ensuring full freedom from governmental interference in the press;
- Keeping the media pluralistic through anti-monopoly measures.²¹

Media self-regulation can be successfully realized if there are stable legal guarantees concerning the freedom of expressing and freedom of information. In the media policy traditionally there is a conflict of the purposes and in which conflict the country on the one hand wants to force the expectations of society upon the media and on the other hand the media to be protected by the influence of the country. Any problem that is connected with the media self-regulation is complex and it is covered by the context of the guarantees for freedom of speech, of the economic conditions for development of the media industry, of the political and legal framework for functioning of the media.²²

In Bulgaria, the self-regulatory practices are developed and carried out by the Foundation “National Council for Journalistic Ethics”²³ – typical form for self-regulation that is met in many other European countries. The same was established in 2005 as a non-profit organization, which carries out activity in favour of people, as it created and maintains a system for self-regulation of the print and electronic media in Bulgaria on the basis of the Code of Conduct of the Bulgarian media, which is approved in 2004. The Commission for Journalistic Ethics to the Media Council represents an always acting, working body of the foundation without managing functions. Members of the commission can be: acting journalists, experts in the area

²¹ Haraszti, *op. cit.* note 18, p. 16.

²² The foundation aims through the establishment of uniform professional standards, popularization of the media self-regulation and the right of the concerned persons to a claim to help for increasing the information culture of the audience and creation of necessity for searching correct, verified and balanced information. We consider that this increase the trust in media, as well as their responsibility.

²³ National Council for Journalistic Ethics, URL=<https://mediaethics-bg.org>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

of media with high public authority (art. 13, par. 2). The commission has 12 (twelve) members of whom not less than 6 have to be acting journalists and not less than 3 – experts (art. 13, par. 3).

In the country there are two acting Codes of Conduct at the same time – the second one is approved by the Bulgarian Media Union. The mere fact that there are two codes of conduct in one and the same time and in respect of the persons who work at the journalistic guild says enough about the problematic media environment in Bulgaria.

3. Trust in Media Worldwide

Global press freedom declined to its lowest point in 13 years in 2016 amid unprecedented threats to journalists and media outlets in major democracies and new moves by authoritarian states to control the media, including beyond their borders. Only 13 percent of the world's population enjoys a free press – that is, a media environment where coverage of political news is robust, the safety of journalists is guaranteed, state intrusion in media affairs is minimal, and the press is not subject to onerous legal or economic pressures.²⁴

According to the recent study “2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report” the trust in the media as business companies remains unchanged in comparison with 2017 and this is the lowest index in comparison with other economic sectors. Nearly 7 in 10 worry about false information or fake news being used as a weapon. Media now is the least trusted institution.²⁵ The trust in all information sources is still not enough, even the trust in the business magazines or the analytical materials. Journalism is an average of traditional media and online-only media and it gets +5 scores compared to year 2012. Platforms, which is an average of search engines and social media, has -2 scores for the same period. This means that journalism is more trusted than platforms as source for general news and information in 21 countries. 63% does not know how to tell good journalism from rumor or falsehoods. For 59% it is becoming harder to tell if a piece of news was produced by a respected media organization. This means that media is failing to meet expectations. When asked „How well do you feel the media is currently meeting the obligation to society?” only 36 % answer that it Guards information quality, 50 % think that media educates people on important issues and 45 % think that media informs good life decisions. This is why there is a lack of confidence in media undermining trust and truth. What are the consequences people are experiencing as a direct result of the media not doing a good job fulfilling? 59 %

²⁴ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2017*, URL=<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

²⁵ 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, URL=<https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

are not sure what is true and what is not. There is loss of trust in government leaders – 56 % of the asked people do not know which politicians to trust, 42 % do not know which companies or brands to trust.

Where in World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) are placed countries with the statute of countries which are candidates for membership in the European Union? – Bosnia and Herzegovina – 62, Albania – 75, Serbia – 76, Montenegro – 103, Republic of Macedonia – 109, Turkey – 157.

Because of the provided data, it comes clear that the lack of trust in the traditional and online media undermines the trust both in the politicians and in the business organizations, as it poses the question about the truth as a whole. This is a problem that is not typical only for Bulgaria. This undoubtedly exerts negative influence over the work of the PR practitioners who despite the social changes continue to use the media as translator of PR messages. The transparency is undoubtedly necessary for the work of the professional communicators as sources of information.

Another aspect of media transparency²⁶ is a way how news information gets into the media. News sources may influence what information is published or not published. Sometimes, published information can also be paid for by news sources, but the end media product (an article, a program, a blog post) does not clearly indicate that the message has been paid or influenced in any way. Such media opacity, or media non-transparency, ruins the trust and transparency between the media and the public and have implications for transparency of new forms of advertising and public relations (such as native advertising and brand journalism).²⁷

4. Transparent media and transparent PR

In 2001 The International Public Relations Association (IPRA) launched a campaign to reduce the incidence of unethical and sometimes illegal practices in the relationships between public relations professionals and the media. This resulted in the creation of a Charter for Media Transparency, which has been adopted by thousands of public relations practitioners and PR associations worldwide, as well as by media organizations in hundreds of countries representing editors, media executives and journalists.²⁸

The Charter

²⁶ Tsetsura, K.; Kruckeberg, D., *International Index of Bribery for News Coverage 2003*, Institute for Public Relations, URL=<https://instituteforpr.org/bribery-news-coverage-2003/>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

²⁷ Tsetsura, K.; Kruckeberg, D., *Transparency, public relations, and the mass media: combating the hidden influences in news coverage worldwide*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2017, p. 17.

²⁸ The International Public Relations Association (IPRA), Charter for Media Transparency, URL=<https://www.ipra.org/news/charter-for-media-transparency/>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

As IPRA members themselves observe the IPRA code of professional conduct, so they expect editorial providers to observe the following IPRA Charter for Media Transparency:

Editorial appears as a result of the editorial judgement of the journalists involved, and not as a result of any payment in cash or in kind, or barter by a third party.

Editorial which appears as a result of a payment in cash or in kind, or barter by a third party will be clearly identified as advertising or a paid promotion.

There should be no suggestion by any journalist or members of staff of an editorial provider, that editorial can be obtained in any way other than through editorial merit.

Third parties may provide samples or loans of products or services to journalists where it is necessary for such journalists to test, use, taste or sample the product or service in order to articulate an objective opinion about the product or service. The length of time required for sampling should be agreed in advance and all loaned products or services should be returned after sampling.

Editorial providers should prepare a policy statement regarding the receipt of gifts or discounted products and services from third parties by their journalists and other staff. Journalists and other staff should be required to read and sign acceptance of the policy. The policy should be available for public inspection.²⁹

The status of the media industry and its functioning influence on the creation of the communication system for work with the publics and the effect of this activity. The right understanding of the situation that is connected with the relations with the media, the determination of the general trends and the evaluation of the new perspectives have to turn into daily activity of the organization. Such an analysis requires a systematic, thorough and serious supervision based on professional knowledge and experience. On the basis of this are made conclusions, which will be of service for the adequate development of PR strategies.³⁰

The media plays an essential role in a democratic society, by widely disseminating information, ideas, analysis and opinions, acting as public watchdogs and providing forums for public debate. Traditional media continues to play these roles in the evolving multimedia ecosystem, but other media and non-media actors, from multinational corporations to non-governmental organizations and individuals, increasingly carry out such roles as well. All such actors should be accountable to the public in a manner appropriate to the roles they play in relation to the free circulation of information and ideas. Effective self-regulatory systems can enhance both public accountability and trust.

²⁹ Ibid. URL=<https://www.ipra.org/news/charter-for-media-transparency/>, Accessed 5 May 2018.

³⁰ Stefanova, D., *Strategic components in PR-planning*, SWU “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad, 2011, p. 84-85.

In an age of increasing transparency, pseudo-transparency nevertheless flourishes. Public relations practitioners must strive for transparency of their organizations. However, transparency only has value to the extent that it creates authenticity, which is only possible through transparency. But public relations' ultimate goal must be trust, which is only possible through authenticity. This linear progression can be expressed as such:

Transparency > authenticity > trust

In turn, Pseudo-transparency > inauthenticity > mistrust

Public relations practitioners in today's transparent age must recognize the linear progression of transparency, authenticity and trust, the last of which must be the public relations goal of governments, civil society organizations and corporations.³¹

In the information society, the intensity of the information of all activities becomes so high that this leads to a culture, which is dominated by media and information products with their signs, symbols and meanings. Actually an important prerequisite for the reaching of success represents the carrying out of this activities namely with the idea of transparency both in the work of the journalists and in the communication practices of the PR experts. In the modern globalized and commercialized world when it is met whatever medium of information, every person has to be able to ask himself questions connected with the authorship and the possessing of a concrete media product, questions connected with the interests behind it, with the messages which are made in respect of it and their value.

The professionalism of the journalist can be seen from his/her desire and will to protect the rights and freedoms of the other participants in the communication process, i.e. to stand up for the principles of the ethics in the relations in the communication space. It is a rule that the more highly vulnerable a concrete audience group is, the easier the neglecting and disregarding of its interests and rights is, its neglecting and disposing as a subject of communication attention.³²

Both public relations practitioners (as one type of news source) and consumer news media professionals share responsibility as citizens in alleviating the social ills

³¹ Kruckeberg, D., *Transparency and its vulnerabilities: trust must be the public relations goal of governments, civil society organizations and corporations*, URL=<https://www.ipra.org/news/itle/transparency-and-its-vulnerabilities-trust-must-be-the-public-relations-goal-of-governments-civil-society-organizations-and-corporations/>, Accessed 27 May 2018.

³² Mihaylova, K., *Public Responsibility of Education in Journalism and the Media: Values, Interests, Pragmatism*, Rhetoric and Communications E-journal, URL= <http://rhetoric.bg/>, Accessed 18 May 2018.

that are created by the existence of “cash for news coverage” to consumer newspaper media by news sources.³³

Hence, it is made the conclusion about the direct connection and influence of the media transparency on PR activity and vice versa. The meaning and strength of the objective and transparent information, which the PR practitioners transmit to the respective audiences, are just as important as the accuracy of the information, which the media spreads towards its audiences, the belief in it and the freedom of speech. Such a dependency may not exist if the PR practitioners do not use media as a main channel for access to the desired audience, and if they communicate directly with it. In this way, the compromised media environment and the transparency will not categorically influence on the quantity and quality of the information and messages made by the PR specialists. By the using of different information and communication activities and channels, media would not play the role of a third reliable party in the connection between the organization and its audiences – present and future clients and users, shareholders, investors, external and internal interested publics. Here again of importance will be only the transparency of the PR initiatives and the real activity of the respective organization.

Transparency is a widely accepted ideal that involves an open, honest and accessible approach to communication. Organizations of all types are reporting on social, ethical and environmental impacts. The drivers for this disclosure include reputation enhancement, demonstrating an ethical position to stakeholders and meeting investor demand for performance information. Failing to be open and honest about the organization and its practices can be harmful to the organization and undermine its image. Not only is transparency morally correct but it makes sense from a business perspective. A client’s perception of an organization as being honest and truthful may influence their decision of where to do business and affect overall satisfaction with the organization. Transparency can enhance the organization's credibility, the public's trust and the community's commitment to the organization.³⁴ If communication is made through traditional or online media, which functions in a non-transparent environment, its authenticity will be questioned.

The specific purpose of PR is to be achieved mutual understanding, realization of the organizational purposes and servicing for the benefit of the public interest. The order that is followed for the achievement of these three purposes is of importance. It is first necessary to be achieved mutual understanding in order to be able to realize all organizational purposes. The creation of trust means that both parties know exactly

³³ Kruckeberg, D.; Tsetsura, K., *A Composite Index by Country of Variables Related to the Likelihood of the Existence of ‘Cash for News Coverage’*, Institute for Public Relations (USA), 2003, p. 15.

³⁴ Nelson, W. A.; Campfield, J. *Ethical implications of transparency*. Healthcare Management Ethics, Nov. 2006, p. 33-34.

about the opinions, ideas and the purposes of the other party. The mutual understanding can easily exist along with the fundamental disagreement. It is also important the effective communication channels to be opened because when there is disagreement in respect of a concrete question and this happens within the context of an open, honest and upright communication, it is possible to be worked for the solving of conflicts, as well as to be discussed compensation measures. But if communication is realized within the context of unconscientiousness and hiding of information, then the negative consequences will multiply in a cascade of lack of understanding and mistrust which will lead to degradation. In the long run, it is in the interest of the client the dialogue to have priority over the conflict, even in situations when the interests are diametrically opposite. In this train of thoughts, if we widen the point of view and apply it to the interactions between the organizations everywhere in society, it comes clear that the mechanisms, which advantage the dialogue, the peaceful solving of conflicts and the formation of stable individual and collective opinions, are good for the society as a whole.³⁵

The final purpose of the initiatives in respect with public relations of each organization, including the media one, has to be the trust that lies on the trust in the authenticity of one organization. Trust can only exist when it is based on the authenticity and which can exist only through transparency.

Media itself could really contribute a lot for the process relating to the change of society, as it shall provide pluralism of ideas and points of view. Media can and has to be communication channel between the persons who make decisions and the citizens. In addition, it has the power to inform, influence, inspire, educate and manage people's thinking, faith and activity. This supposes their skillful and responsible management and self-management.

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