

NATALYA RYABINSKA
Warsaw University of Life Sciences

Disengaging News Framing in Ukrainian Press Ukrainian Newspapers against the backdrop of Polish Press

Abstract: Similar to Poland, Ukraine started its media reform in early 90-s. However, different from Poland, media in Ukraine still did not become a true mediator between the authorities, the politicians and the society.

This paper is a part of a bigger study¹ which purpose was to compare news framing in Polish and Ukrainian press in 2003 from the perspective of its possible impact on people's engagement in public life. I traced the use of two news frames having a distinguished positive or negative impact on involvement, the attribution of responsibility and the powerlessness frame, in Ukrainian and Polish quality newspapers [*Den'* and *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Rzeczpospolita*]. The paper concentrates on the Ukrainian media and analyses framing in the Ukrainian news.

The results of the study presented here show that Polish newspapers more often enable citizens to participate in political decisions by critically scrutinizing the performance of their elected representatives in office. Different from them, Ukrainian news serve rather for concealment of the responsible policy-makers from public scrutiny, blurring the picture of political life and voicing public frustration with problems, which only contributes to the reproduction of people's helplessness and passivity in public life.

Keywords: post-communist, media, engagement, news, framing, Ukraine.

Introduction

This paper deals with the media impact on involvement of citizens of Eastern and Central European 'young democracies' in political decision-making a decade after the communist breakdown. What role do the mass media play in public engagement or disengagement? Do they enable citizens to participate in political decisions by bringing the elected representatives to the represented, and critically scrutinizing their performance in office? Do they allow readers and viewers to recognize themselves as potentially active social actors or disqualify them as equal political subjects by making them mere witnesses of political events?

The paper presents the results of research which purpose was to compare the discourse of the media in Post-Communist Ukraine and Poland from the angle of its ability to foster or suppress the formation and activation of people's potential to

¹ Ryabinska, N. 2007. *Media Framing and Civic Engagement in Post-Communist Countries: the Case of Polish and Ukrainian Press*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences.

participate in public life. The main focus of this study was the framing of national news in Polish and Ukrainian news media.

By framing here I understand the organization and packaging of information with the help of *media frames*, or “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (Gitlin 1980: 6). By framing news the media set the parameters in which citizens think and talk about public events. Studies of the effects of media frames show that the imposition of certain frames may affect people’s perception and interpretation of news (Price et al. 1997; Valkenburg et al. 1999), alter their attitudes and opinions towards events and issues (Cobb & Kuklinski 1997; Jasperson et al. 1998), and influence their decision-making strategies and intentions related to political life (Shah et al., 1996; Valentino et al. 2001). Some news frames may also impact on citizens’ interest in politics and either enable or hamper their engagement in public matters (Iyengar 1991; Capella & Jamieson 1997; Price et al. 1997; Rhee 1997; Shah et al. 1996; Patterson 1993; Neuman et al. 1992; Just et al. 1998).

The study concentrated on the comparison of the usage in Polish and Ukrainian news of two frames having a distinguished positive or negative impact on engagement, the responsibility frame and the powerlessness frame.² The responsibility frame presents events and issues in terms of political accountability and responsibility and assists readers in seeing the link between government actions (or inactions) and social problems (Semetko, Valkenburg 2000). Non-attribution of responsibility or attribution of responsibility to individuals or groups in society (e.g., poor woman on welfare is responsible for her poverty, rather than the government or the system) imparts rather a topical and disorganised understanding of public affairs, instead of a general one (Iyengar 1991). The “powerlessness frame” presents events as being fully settled by a relatively distant powerful elite or some other forces inaccessible for the control or influence of citizenry (Neuman et al. 1992). The tasks of the research were to assess the visibility of these frames in the news coverage of both countries and to compare the typical qualities of these frames in Polish and Ukrainian news stories.

Particular attention was paid to the analysis of specific textual elements which suggest a framework within which to view an issue and serve as “framing devices” to constitute a frame. The analysis of such components of news stories, as rhetoric, style, and choices about sources, quotations and relevant information enabled the definition of the frame-carrying elements of the news stories which served for framing issues in an “engaging” or “disengaging” manner.

The study included quantitative content analysis of frames used in Ukrainian and Polish quality newspapers as well as qualitative elements of frame analysis. From the Polish side the two most readable opinion-forming newspapers were chosen: *Rzeczpospolita (RZ)* and *Gazeta Wyborcza (GW)*. The Ukrainian newspapers selected

² The definitions of the powerlessness and responsibility frames were introduced in the studies of Neuman et al. (1992) and Semetko, Valkenburg (2000). These frames belong to the category of *common* news frames, which, different from *issue-specific* frames, are not employed exclusively for certain themes and issues but are widely used for presentation and interpretation of different national and foreign matters.

for the study were *Den'* and *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* (*DzT*). News was analyzed in the period from 1 January 2003 to 31 September 2003.

This paper concentrates on the Ukrainian part of the study and presents the analysis of news framing in two Ukrainian quality newspapers *Den'* and *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* (*DzT*).

The Newspapers and the Time Period Chosen for the Study

The time period chosen for the study was 1 January 2003 to 31 September 2003—a time relatively free from elections and electoral campaigns, which are commonly accompanied with pre-electoral rhetoric in the media, characterized by an artificial increase of attention to the issues of political accountability and responsibility.³ For Ukraine this was the period a year after Parliamentary elections (March 2002) and a year before Presidential elections (October 2004), when the full-scale electoral campaign, with its temporary enhancement of the media interest to the issues of responsibility and accountability of politicians towards citizenry, was not yet started. For Poland this was the time 2 years before Parliamentary (September 2005) and Presidential (October 2005) elections.

The data for the research was taken from the Polish and Ukrainian quality press. The reason why the quality press was chosen as material for investigation on media and engagement was the fact that the quality press addresses potentially the most politically active part of a society: those educated, professionally active and with income which is average or above average.

***Den'* and *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* (*DzT*)**

Due to the fact that the sector of the quality media in Ukraine is poorly developed, there was a problem finding full-sense quality dailies among Ukrainian newspapers. The newspapers chosen for the research (the daily *Den'* [Day] and the weekly *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* [Mirror Weekly]), though they are far from classic quality newspapers such as the British *The Times* or American *Washington Post*, are profoundly different from the majority of Ukrainian nation-wide printed outlets which are of a pronounced tabloid character. In 2003 these broadsheets published a large number of articles devoted to political, economical and social issues and offered political analysis, exclusive interviews and opinion (the character of the news in these papers did not change basically also after 2003). Their circulation was and still is rather limited (in 2003 the print-out of *Den'* was 51,000 copies, that of *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* was about 30,000 copies) but these newspapers were and still are rather influential in Ukraine,

³ To measure the visibility of the responsibility and the powerlessness frame the approach developed by Semetko and Valkenburg with multi-items scales for the measurement of each frame had been applied (Semetko, Valkenburg 2000). The variables used in the study include variables previously applied in content analysis of news as well as new variables designed for the purpose of this study (Ryabinska 2007).

especially among educated people and the political establishment. These publications are often quoted and referred to by other mass media, including local media in different regions. Both newspapers are published as in a Ukrainian- and in Russian-language version.

Both *Den'* and *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* are privately owned. The newspaper *Den'* is closely affiliated with Evhen Marchuk, one of the outstanding figures in Ukrainian politics. Before the 1999 elections when Marchuk was one of the opponents of Leonid Kuchma, the newspaper was known for its criticism of the incumbent. After the elections, Marchuk became Head of the National Security Council; and *Den'* abandoned its criticism. In the elections of 2002 *Den'* was already backing pro-presidential parties. In June 2003 Marchuk was appointed Minister of Defence; that fact strengthened the pro-presidential stances of the newspaper.

Dzerkalo Tyzhnia is owned by a journalist cooperative and is partly funded by an émigré from the Ukraine who is now a US citizen. It is a high-quality publication, focusing on economics and politics and openly critical of the government. No other national newspaper in Ukraine gives such a comprehensive analysis of public processes as does *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* (*DzT*). Intellectuals are its main audience. From the Polish side the two most readable opinion-forming newspapers were chosen: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*.

Gazeta Wyborcza (GW)

Despite the fact that *Gazeta Wyborcza* [Election Newspaper] is printed in tabloid format, it is undoubtedly a quality daily; in 2003 it had a circulation of about 540,000 copies and was one of the leaders of the Polish newspaper market. Founded in 1989 by a group of journalists and activists of the underground democratic opposition press as an information platform for the first democratic parliamentary elections, *Gazeta Wyborcza* was one of the first media outlets in the Post-Communist countries of Eastern-Central Europe to introduce the principles of fact-based, professionally responsible and unbiased journalism, led by the goal to supply citizenry with credible, complete and balanced information (Gross 2002: 109). Nowadays *Gazeta Wyborcza* is in the lead amongst the opinion-forming Polish media recognized for its quality journalism. The newspaper is known for its liberal/liberal democratic orientation, different from rivalling quality newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* which has a moderate conservative profile.

Rzeczpospolita (RZ)

Rzeczpospolita, printed in broadsheet⁴ format, maintains a more elitist and “deadpan” image than *Gazeta Wyborcza* and is arguably compared to that of *The Times* in Britain. Its circulation in 2003 was about 250,000 copies and it had 4-th wide readership

⁴ *Rzeczpospolita* switched from broadsheet to tabloid format on October 16th 2007.

among Polish national dailies. *Rzeczpospolita*, previously the official bulletin of the government and the Communist Party, after 1989 evolved into a newspaper reputed for providing reliable information. In 1991 49% of the stock was sold to Socpresse, owned by the French media baron Robert Hersant.⁵ Today it is estimated that Hersant has invested 4,5 mln USD in *Rzeczpospolita* (Klimkiewicz 2004). Foreign investment was one of the factors to shape *Rzeczpospolita* as a daily valued for providing unbiased consideration, verifiable facts and a clear understanding of the matters at hand.

Due to the supplements on economy/market and law, the newspaper is widely read by business people, managers and administrators. It is the most popular paper amongst Polish business classes. A large part of its circulation is sold in subscriptions to businesses.

Both *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*GW*) and *Rzeczpospolita* (*RZ*) are privately owned, the first one—by the biggest Polish media corporation Agora, the second—by Norwegian company Orkla Media.

The above information about *Dziersko Tyzhnia* and *Den'*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* demonstrates that there is a substantive difference in the circulation of the newspapers chosen for the analysis. This factor can be a serious hindrance for a comparative media research in the case that its purpose is the comparison of media impacts on the audience. However, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the mechanisms by which the media influences public opinion, to recreate the principles of constructing media texts crucial for people's understanding and perception of political reality. Therefore the comparability of circulation of the chosen newspapers is not detrimental to the results of the study. Moreover, as was mentioned before, despite low circulation, the Ukrainian *DzT* and *Den'* have a substantial influence on society. The newspapers are often quoted in other media outlets. In addition, due to a deep and analytical approach to the news, which is rare for the Ukrainian media landscape, these newspapers are valued by an educated audience as sources of competent opinion. What is more, media experts consider that readership of *DzT* and *Den'* is bigger than their circulation—due to the relatively high price of quality newspapers, especially *DzT*, readers often share copies with their friends, fellows and colleagues.

Several words about the time period of the research. Though free from electoral campaigns, the year 2003 was rich in both countries in events arousing all-national interest and wide public discussion. In Ukraine there occurred a range of events that could be (but rarely were) discussed by the media in terms of the responsibility and efficiency of the executive and legislators. Anyway, the newspapers paid to them much attention. The first of them was the attempt of President Kuchma and his Administration to introduce Constitutional amendments aimed at weakening the presidency. The main reason for this political action widely advertised by pro-Presidential media was the high probability of losing the presidential chair by pro-Kuchma political circles

⁵ In 1995 Hersant bought an additional 2 percent, reaching a total of 51 percent. In 1996 all 51 percent were sold to the Norwegian company, Orkla Media. In 2003 51% *Rzeczpospolita* shares were owned by Orkla Media and 49% by the Polish government.

in the upcoming Presidential elections. Kuchma and his entourage wanted to weaken the institution of the presidency in Ukraine to avoid a complete loss of power in the case of their defeat in the next presidential elections. The next event was the crisis on the foodstuff market, the consequence of the corrupt and inefficient agrarian politics of the Government, which resulted in a doubling of prices for basic foodstuff goods. Finally, in 2003 there took place several “privatization cases,” the privatization and sale of big industrial enterprises to representatives of oligarchic financial-industrial groups close to the President (the loudest of them was the privatization of the Nikopol Ferroalloy Plant, which was sold to Interpipe Corporation headed by the President’s sun-in-law Victor Pinchuk).

For Poland the period under research (January–September 2003) was marked first of all by the intensive public discussions of the corruption affair named “Rywin-gate,” which came to the fore at the end of the 2002. The affair developed around the offer to the newspaper publisher *Agora* to pay a bribe for a change of a clause in the law on media, which could be favourable for *Agora*. In 2003 a Parliamentary commission was established in Poland to investigate “Rywin-gate” and the work of the Commission was thoroughly followed by the media. The other important events that took place in the period were: Polish referendum on EU membership in June 2003; President Kwaśniewski’s veto for a controversial bill on biofuels; a series of scandals around corruption in the Ministry of Health and head officials of the Ministry; last but not least, elections to the supervisory boards of Polish public television.

Framing in Terms of Attribution of Responsibility

The results of the comparative study of news framing in Polish and Ukrainian quality newspapers showed that news coverage via the responsibility frame which makes the audience more likely to exercise control over the policies of public officials and enhances participation in democratic processes, was more frequently met in Polish than in Ukrainian outlets.

As one can see in Table 1, the mean scores of visibility of the responsibility frame in Polish *GW* (0.63) and *RZ* (0.69) exceed that for Ukrainian *Den’* (0.39), and are also higher than the corresponding rate for *DzT* (0.55).

Focus on Problems, but not on Scrutiny of Policy Makers

The main constituent of the above difference in scores was the greater visibility of the agents responsible for causing or solving social problems in the Polish newspapers as compared to the Ukrainian outlets. The biggest part of the Polish news stories was concentrated on the current activities of power officials, generally approached from the public interest perspective. Polish newspapers analyzed the bills and amendments discussed in Parliament, showed probable and actual consequences of decisions made by Parliament and the Government, commented on the appointment of state officials,

disclosed shortcomings in the functioning of state institutions, and investigated cases of mismanagement and misconduct among power authorities. The agents responsible for problems or able to alleviate them were clearly named and their role in decision- and policy-making was coherently described.

Ukrainian newspapers, in contrast to Polish ones, paid major attention to the exposition and analysis of societal problems, such as, for example, pollution, deterioration of urban planning, worsening of the public health service, pauperization of countrymen, improper functioning of municipal service, etc. A common feature of these problem-oriented stories was a “shortage of references to the responsible agents and their conduct.” In *Den*’ problems were usually analyzed on a very general, sometimes even philosophical level devoid of any mention of concrete decision-makers dealing with the problems, their relevant actions and the consequences of these actions for the problem solving.

In *DzT* the stories concentrated on impressive problem description, the search for problem roots, and the explanation of problem history and development. The main effort of the authors was to create an impressive image of disasters, to attract public attention to problems and to persuade the audience in the necessity of making some steps for the problem solution. At the same time the agents responsible for decision making related to the problems were mentioned (if ever) only occasionally, without bigger attention to their performance. Being preoccupied with a general discussion of problems, authors did not go deeply into the matters of particular political decisions which influenced the problem.

Scarce and Unclear Coverage of Government Conduct

DzT and *Den*’ brought little understanding of who is responsible for what in Ukrainian politics. Scarce information on current government conduct in *Den*’ and *DzT* news coverage was the first important obstacle standing in the way of this understanding. For example, *Den*’ rarely focused on the bills recently adopted or rejected by Parliament, and infrequently made public current Parliamentary debates on key social issues. The only debate in the Parliament which was thoroughly followed by *Den*’ was that on Constitutional reform, the issue imposed on Parliament by the President and his Administration and related not so much to the solution of urgent societal problems, but to the attempts of the President and his entourage to preserve their political dominance after the forthcoming (in 2004) President’s elections. The paper dropped or only occasionally mentioned such important for citizens issues as Parliamentary debates regarding the privatization of land, large privatization, and pension reform. Furthermore, it only slightly touched upon the Parliamentary discussion on the budget.

As far as *DzT* is concerned, it provided a rather extensive coverage of socially important discussions in the Parliament. However, the newspaper’s disregard for the issues of the responsibility of MPs and political parties for the outcomes of law-making diminished the value of this extensive coverage. When reporting on Parliamentary sessions, *DzT* focused mainly on the essence of discussions. It produced a deep

analysis of the history of the debated issue and thoroughly examined all the pros and cons of possible decisions. At the same time the newspaper was quite unclear about the role the political actors (politicians, parties, interest groups) played in a debate. When covering Parliamentary discussions *DzT* never showed who introduced the bills, who took which position in respect to the debated problems, who adhered to or opposed the proposed solutions, and, finally, how different groups and factions voted in the Parliament.

Ex.: *DzT* Natalya Jacenko “Is it our last one? For the third time the Supreme Council became concerned with a law on non-government pension provision.”

I have to apologize to several dozens of representatives of the deputy corps, who know the issue of retirement schemes inside-out, certainly much better than the author of these lines does. Yet, the experts prefer not to get involved into populist discussions—just as the representatives of the Cabinet of Ministers, who try to look at what is happening with the detachment of the doomed. To take part in a discussion means to be exposed to a storm of emotions, since the opponents make up for the unsteadiness of their fantasies by strong adherence to their convictions and even aggressiveness.

Comment: Typical of coverage of Parliamentary debates in *DzT*, the author of the story does not give names or party affiliations of major opponents of the pension reform debate. Instead, she uses imprecise definitions: “several dozens of representatives of deputy corps...” and “opponents.” Readers remain uninformed about what political groups or factions stand behind these wording.

Different from Polish dailies, Ukrainian newspapers (both *Den’* and *DzT*) scarcely reported on current decisions of the executive bodies. *Den’* rarely referred to concrete decisions made by the President, Prime Minister or the Government. If it did, these references were so short, obscure and discontinuous that they hardly allowed the tracing of the connection between the decisions made and existing societal problems.

Most of the stories were based on official information and consisted predominantly of quotations from political statements and press-releases. The journalists limited themselves to a thorough retelling of the press releases and quotation of official speeches and statements. At the same time they did not “unpack” the entangled phrases from these documents for the audiences to help them understand: What concrete actions were done in the course of the described events? Which persons or agencies were responsible for these actions? What were the awaited consequences of these actions from the perspective of the interests of average Ukrainians?

Ex.: *Den’* 5/04 “Two Problems: Roads and... Bridges”

Ukraine’s Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich is dissatisfied with the standards of the state road complex which does not comply to international requirements. He stated this during the meeting devoted to the problems of building, renovation and exploitation of roads. Prime Minister emphasized the importance of the road complex for Ukraine’s economy, and pointed to the need of settling the current tasks of this complex. “Is it funding or rather cooperation between executive power and practitioners that is missing?” he approached the meeting participants for clarification.

Comment: The quoted fragment never makes it clear who is responsible for the quality of building, reparation and maintenance of roads in Ukraine. It is also unclear what are the responsibilities of the Prime Minister with regard to the issue. The next question remaining unanswered is: what the Prime Minister actually DID for the solution of the problem by voicing his disapproval with the state of Ukrainian roads?

The deficiency of *Den’* reports which caused their constrained comprehensiveness for the audience was the way the information on government problem-related actions

was presented to the public. First, they did not bring the background data and explanation needed for placing events in context. The newspaper also did not give the contextual data which would introduce the state of affairs and enable understanding of the adequacy of the political decisions relevant to a situation. Moreover, the paper did not present the duties, competences and responsibilities of different levels of government involved in policy-making over a problem, which would be helpful for evaluating the appropriateness of their conduct.

The next drawback in the way state agencies and officials as well as their actions were covered was the lack of analysis and evaluation. The newspaper just presented the facts on governmental decisions without providing any analysis on the consequences of these decisions (both factual and assumed) for problem solving. This type of insufficient and unclear coverage was peculiar especially for *Den's* presentation of President's or Prime Minister's decrees and statements. Deprived of explanations, comments or assessment, news coverage brought little understanding of the essence of these documents and their possible effect.

One more characteristic feature of news stories presented in *Den'* and *DzT* which stipulated their lower comprehensiveness compared to the Polish *GW* and *RZ* was the absence of multi-perspective coverage of issues and events. In Polish newspapers important events were regularly covered by several news stories within a single day's edition, each bringing a different angle to the issue: reportage, commentary, relevant statistics, biographies of people involved, historical context, similar events in the past etc. The other option was placing of "windows" with different kinds of background and clarifying information (historical note, biographic profiles, expert opinion, interviews with participants) in the framework of one article. Unlike the Polish newspapers, the Ukrainian *Den'* presented each news event in a single story. As a rule it was based on a single information source (governmental background, interview or opinion of an expert) and lacked any supplementary information, in particular background information on the topic under consideration and political actors involved. As for *DzT*, it proposed a much wider spectrum of information and commonly supplied coverage of an event with historical references, statistics and analysis. However, this diverse data were fused in one lengthy homogeneous text, devoid of underline, italics or other methods of facilitating perception and understanding.

Bureaucratic Discourse as an Obstacle for Understanding

As compared to other newspapers analyzed in this study, *Den'* presented the biggest obstacle for understanding the events in terms of attribution of responsibility. The particular feature of *Den'* news stories which conditioned this distinction was the specific language and style, commonly applied by the newspaper's journalists. The language of domestic news coverage, especially of those related to the performance of state officials, was obscure, formulaic and verbose. It was overloaded with entangled syntax structures, concealing agency and causality. These characteristics are known as the attributes of so-called bureaucratic discourse, a traditional mode of communica-

tion in bureaucratic settings, used for the reinforcement of a hierarchical status quo, concealment of managerial failures and unpopular decisions, and obscuring issues of responsibility. They characterize also so-called 'ofitsioz', the bureaucratic language of political communication applied by politicians and the media in the communist period. Traditionally used by party functionaries and the official media, it served for propaganda and persuasion. It was also the means of creating barriers between the rulers and the ruled and curtaining the reality of decision-making with the help of obscure narration (McNair 1991; Seriot 1993).

The attributes of bureaucratic discourse, which are important from the perspective of media studies, are the various discursive tools (formalized obscure language, entangled syntax, evasive circumlocutions) serving for the finessing of institutional and individual responsibility (Fowler 1985; Sproule 1997). The wide use of these tools in *Den'* made the described events unclear and non-transparent for the audience.

Narrow Spectrum of Information Sources. Official Documents as a Main Resource

In comparison to the Polish newspapers, the Ukrainian *Den'* and *DzT* used on average more narrow range of information sources. As a result, they offered a less versatile and multi-dimensional coverage of news, which in some cases (mainly in *Den'* news stories) was limited to the versions of events proposed by official documents from government offices (press releases, official letters, speeches).

As any piece of bureaucratic discourse, these documents shaded the reality of decision-making, finessed institutional and individual responsibility and concealed the agents responsible for policy failures and unpopular decisions. As for the effects of governmental conduct, they concentrated primarily on future, but not past policies, and estimated their awaited results highly positively. The newspaper did not confront these self-evaluations with opinions and judgments from other sources (for example, oppositional political actors or experts).

Though *Den'* frequently invited experts to discuss various topics, these experts were rarely asked to comment on the current politics of the authorities. Instead, they considered societal problems at an abstract theoretical level without referring to everyday realities of political decision-making. Academia was represented mostly by philosophers and psychologists. Political scientists, economists, historians and sociologists commonly most awaited for bringing competent analysis of current affairs were invited by the newspaper rarely, in contrast to Polish newspapers, where area experts were regular commentators of important events.

As for the voice of civil society, it was underrepresented in *Den'* in comparison to *DzT* and both Polish dailies. Even when talking about civic actions, such as protest actions or strikes, the newspaper scarcely voiced the opinion of the representatives of civil society, such as labour unions, professional and student organizations, etc. Unlike *GW* and *RZ*, which profoundly quoted organization leaders and activists, *Den'* used at most short indirect quotations of event participants, whose names and affiliations were in addition very rarely mentioned.

Oppositional political forces were also underrepresented in *Den'*. The newspaper almost never quoted the critique of governmental decisions by oppositional political parties. This was not the case in *DzT*, where important events were in many cases commented on by oppositional politicians.

DzT differed from *Den'* by using a wider spectrum of information sources and by providing a more critical attitude to official versions of events. The *DzT* journalists critically approached general information as well as self-assessments of government authorities. For example, in interviews with responsible agents they, contrary to their colleagues from *Den'*, did not simply follow the logic of their respondents and the versions of reality produced by them, but also attempted to question and verify these versions. They asked the office holders about their inefficient or erroneous actions related to the solution of concrete problems and requested explanations and justifications of their conduct in the case of failures or incidents.

However, in comparison with Polish quality newspapers, *DzT* still was poorer in commentaries and assessment from experts, specialists in economy and law, social and political scientists, non-governmental organizations and activists.

Attribution of Responsibility to Individuals or Groups of Societal Actors

The next aspect of news framing which contributed to lesser visibility of the responsibility frame in Ukrainian news was the attribution of responsibility for social problems to individuals or societal groups. In Ukrainian newspapers the share of news stories where responsibility for problems was attributed to ordinary citizens was more than twice bigger than in the Polish outlets. The groups commonly accused of causing or aggravating problems were, for example, grain traders; representatives of shadow business; common people contaminating the natural environment; TV-makers which filled the TV schedule with low-quality production and advertisement; pseudo-patriots disseminating a negative image of Ukraine abroad, etc. A typical example was the media coverage of the crops failure and subsequent price boost in summer-2003, which saw mass accusations of grain traders by politicians and the media:

Den', 27/03 "Crop Market: Opinions of Victims"

The grain traders manipulated with low prices on the internal market and bought crops for 300 UAH. Then they sold it abroad at for 600 UAH and in addition got the VAT back. Now they are happy of superprofits at the expense of the grain producers.

Often journalists sought the causes of different societal problems in the "mentality," "consciousness," "complexes" of people. For example, among the causes of the price boost in summer-2003 *Den'* named "a deficit syndrome, ingrained during Soviet times in the consciousness of the inhabitants of Ukrainian cities." The other "national features," mentioned in Ukrainian newspapers as causes of societal problems, were, for example the "syndrome of little Russia with accompanying inferiority complex," "slavish obedience," "lack of fighting qualities" and the like. The society was presented in the Ukrainian newspapers as apathetic, weak and unable to engage in the discussion of social problems and their solution. Differently from the Ukrainian

journalists, their Polish colleagues rarely attributed responsibility for problems to the “complexes” or “mentality” of the nation. On the contrary, the Polish columnists assessed society as being more “healthy” and “sober-minded,” than the politicians racing for power:

RZ 1/03 “The Time of Civil Disobedience?”

...[the society] is sensible, educated, polished and would like to understand what is being said to it, what is being suggested and how these statements and promises relate to reality.

Framing Devices

Unlike Polish newspapers, Ukrainian press outlets rarely manifested the issues of political responsibility of the authorities in the headlines or subheads of news stories. The newspapers’ headlines as a rule attracted attention to problems, not to the agents responsible for causing or solving them. Most often the news stories framed in terms of responsibility had either neutral or problem-oriented headlines and subheads:

Ex. 1: Clean Grain. Competition on the Market Promised.

Ex. 2: Ukraine or Little Russia?

Ex. 3: Architectural Tastes and Interests.

Ex. 4: How to pay wages without money.

Ex. 5: Piggish Constitution of meat and milk prices.

Polish newspapers, different from the Ukrainian ones, commonly practiced overt reference to the themes of political responsibility and accountability in the conspicuous parts of the news stories—headlines, subheads, leadings, etc. In a number of stories, the names of the responsible agents together with positive or negative consequences of their actions appeared already in the titles (and subtitles) of the stories.

Ex. 1: That money was written off. Has the Minister of Health made a hole in the budget?

Ex. 2: Acts for Citizens: The Supreme Administrative Court will make Access to the Acts Easier

Ex. 3: Does the minister want to fleece local government?

In sum, in comparison with Polish journalists, Ukrainian reporters were much more reserved and cautious in emphasizing political responsibility in the most noticeable parts of news stories. Contrary to Polish news coverage, where the headlines, subheads or leads highlighting the issue of accountability of the powerful were common practice, in Ukrainian newspapers, especially in *Den*, they were rather exceptional.

Framing in Terms of Powerlessness

News framing in terms of powerlessness was a common feature of news coverage in the Ukrainian newspapers. The powerlessness frame was used in the Ukrainian press more often than in the Polish one. The mean scores of visibility of this frame were 0.25 for Ukrainian and 0.14 for Polish newspapers (see Table 2).

In Ukrainian newspapers, different from Polish ones, responsibility for the issues was commonly either not attributed to anybody or was attributed to some generalized

or unclear agents which couldn't be recognized and, consequently, scrutinized and controlled by the public (e.g., "Ukrainian politicum," "state policy," "the power," 'our political elites', etc.). The share of news stories where neither the agent responsible for causing the problem, nor anyone responsible for its solution/alleviation was present comprised 61% in Ukrainian newspapers, whereas in Polish dailies the percentage was much less—25%.

Typical for Ukrainian newspapers was a so-called "point-and-weep" story where a desperate picture of some key social problem (pollution, homelessness, poverty) was presented in an emotional and expressive manner; the story however, did not contain any information on ways of problem alleviation. Stories of the kind were rather persuasive in describing the horrible state of a problem (which could be illustrated by the headlines: "Armageddon for the Crops," "Sink of Iniquity," "We Confidently Step...to New Catastrophes?"). At the same time, the lack of any analysis of what has been done by responsible agents regarding the problem and what could have been done for improvement produced a sense of powerlessness and lack of control.

In cases when the news stories touched upon the harmful effects of inadequate governance or policy failures they did not clearly show which government bodies were responsible for these failures or who had the ability to improve the state of affairs. For example, in the news story "Agiotage Which is Not Sweet" (*Den*'2/07/03) the authors analyzed the negative consequences of the decision allowing access of cheap raw cane sugar to the Ukrainian market. They demonstrated that this decision had a negative impact on Ukrainian farmers growing sugar-beet. The story focused on the argument that the decision was harmful, but it never clearly showed what institution was responsible for the decision made and what were the ways of improvement:

Ex.: *Den*' 2/07 "Agiotage Which is Not Sweet"

However... ensuring access of raw sugar cane to Ukrainian market granted on demand of WTO, may have negative economic and social consequences for national sugar industry.

Comment: The newspaper did not specify, what official or institution granted this access. Devoid of explanation who made decision on a problem, the story only brought the feeling of helplessness about the issue.

Quite common for Ukrainian news coverage, especially in *DzT*, was implication (or explicit claim) that the agents responsible for improper governance or misconduct could not be found. These stories usually described the events in mysterious terms (the adjectives "strange," "unclear," "mysterious") or/and overtly claimed that the responsible agents were too influential and powerful to be brought to light:

Ex. 1: *DzT* 04/05 Alla Kotliar "On a Knife's Edge"

Too many *strange* events happened there recently. It seems that there are many people interested in their names being never exposed, and their income channels—never turned off. Therefore, the issue of the centre has all the chances of becoming "eternal."

Powerless Responsible Agent

Even in cases where the responsible agents were clearly shown and their failures/misdeeds unravelled, the news stories could be framed in terms of powerlessness.

For example, the typical attribute of *Den'* was a powerless responsible agent—an executive or organization, exercising public authority, unable to deal with a problem because of his helplessness in the face of greater forces. The inefficient conduct of this agent with regard to such problems as poverty, high sick rates, and arrears of wages or low quality of public utilities was presented as a consequence of some unfavourable external obstacles. The officials were presented as powerless to cope with problems because of ‘insufficient financing’, ‘imperfect legislation’, actions of other significant players, etc. For example, when considering the failure of the Ministry of Social Policy to ensure the raise of the average wage, the newspaper (based on the statement of the Minister of Social Policy) explained it first, by the actions of a “considerable part of enterprises,” which broke the law on a minimal wage and second, by an oversight of Parliament, which adopted the bill on the raise of wages without indicating “where the Government should take the money from.” Similarly, when speaking about the actions of the Government in relation to the crops failure and subsequent price boost in summer-2003, *Den'* justified the low efficiency of the government conduct by: unfinished administrative reform; natural disasters; considerable shadow sector in agricultural production; “indefiniteness of the paradigm of economic development” in Ukraine, and farmers’ carelessness (*Den'*/26/08/03 “Secret Presence of the State”).

Responsible Agent Beyond the Reach of Public Control

Responsible agents were also commonly presented in the Ukrainian press as mighty and influential “powerful others” staying beyond public control. Especially *DzT* carried a number of news stories revealing abuse of power and inadequate governance, often implying (or explicitly stating) that the citizens were powerless to influence the conduct of the corrupt or incompetent authorities. *DzT* paid particular attention to the fraudulent practices in the law-enforcing system and disclosed numerous cases of arbitrary and lawless actions in courts, prosecutor’s offices, criminal investigation departments. At the same time the newspaper showed that illegal practices in these bodies had a regular and recurrent character and there was little evidence that the authorities in charge could be either seized or punished.

The other group which was regularly presented by *DzT* as inaccessible for the control of the public (and also unreachable for justice) was the President himself and his entourage: the Head of the Presidential Administration Medvedchuk (the Grey Eminence of Ukrainian politics till 2004), politicians and oligarchs close to the President (Social-Democratic Party [United]), the Government and separate Ministers. The newspaper spoke about their corruption, mismanagement and misuse of office as if they were habitual and unavoidable things. The sarcasm with which *DzT* uncovered governmental infractions was close to a hopelessness about the impunity of the politicians:

Ex. 1: *DzT* 2/01 Vladimir Chopenko “MAUSOLEUM OF AGRARIAN REFORMS”

Almost all the former agrarian Vice-Premiers and Ministers are heroes. They avoided confronting erroneous strategic decisions, but no one publicly admitted their own failures. They continue to exercise power,

either bigger or smaller. The “fathers” of agrarian reforms became “grandfathers,” “children” joined in a refrain with the “fathers...”. The echo of their song continues to sound in every Ukrainian village like a knell.

Framing Devices

The framing devices used in Ukrainian newspapers to frame the stories in terms of powerlessness were more diverse than in the Polish newspapers and their “density” per story was much higher. First of all, different from Polish quality newspapers which mostly spoke about domestic news in a neutral tone, Ukrainian news outlets often resorted to an emotional and persuasive manner of narration. This was especially characteristic for *DzT*, where at least every fifth story was made in a highly expressive and emotional manner (see Fig. 1).

Persuasive Language

A particular feature of these stories was the extremely emotional and persuasive language employed to demonstrate a depressing state of key social problems and to attract public attention to them. For example, the journalists used expressive metaphors and epithets which filled the stories with a sense of despair, helplessness or outrage:

Ex.: ‘incurable soil injuries’, ‘half-dead nature’, ‘monstrous constructions’, ‘paralysis of law-enforcement organs’, ‘logic of dying world, in which the mere right to exist is usurped by a few [people]’.

Headlines and Subheads

Persuasive metaphors were often used in the headlines and subheads. This introduced the frame of powerlessness at the very beginning of news stories:

- Ex. 1: “Mausoleum of Agrarian Reforms”;
- Ex. 2: “Else’s Blood. Human Tragedy in Three Acts”;
- Ex. 3: “Rubbish Iniquity on a Scale of Kharkiv Region”;
- Ex. 4: “Requiem for a Grove”;
- Ex. 5: “Sour Bread of ‘Zarobitchanstvo’ (work abroad, predominantly illegal).”

Imagery

The sense of despair induced by “powerlessness” stories was deepened by distressing imagery:

Ex. 1: *DzT* 2/02 Sergej Zubchenko “Obolon’ Lakes—New Rubbish Ground”
These are the abandoned waste grounds around Obolon’ lakes and the lakes themselves where human corpses, or even bodies broken into parts are often found. In summer the beaches are inhabited by the homeless. Sometimes because of the sparks from their bonfires entire hectares of forests burn down.

Ex. 2: ZN 3/06 “Armageddon for the Crops,”
“If only it rained!”... The last words of Joanne of Arc became a spell in the mouths of Ukrainian farmers. Everything is burning! The earth is bursting—one can put a hand into the cracks. Crops are so sparse that at some places cultivators “cut” just the soil. It’s a national disaster!

Numbers

Numbers were also impressive framing devices which enhanced the sense of helplessness against the problems in Ukrainian news coverage. Blocks of numbers with statistics testifying reduction of birth rates, growth of sick rates or decline of economy created a depressing picture and convinced the audience of the lack of a way out:

Ex. 1: *DzT* 11/01 “The Budget Also Has... Appendix?”

For the last 10 years in Dnepropetrovsk region the death rate increased for 25% while the birth rate declined 36%. In the rural areas this gap is much bigger. For example, in Petrikov district the death rate in 2001 was three times higher than the birth rate, and in Pavlograd—2.9 times higher. Last year when rural health care was transferred under the jurisdiction of local authorities the situation worsened.

Ex. 2: *DzT* 3/01 “Pretending Prevention”⁶ (The Visibility of Fight)

As a result of weakening preventive work at the regional level, there were 3439 serious criminal offences and 250 extremely serious criminal offences committed... Small region is leading in organized group crimes, the number of which increased by 18% last year. The “flagmen” of organized crime are not only traditionally “criminal” border towns like Kovel, Vladimir-Volynkiy, Novobolynsk, where organized crime has grown on average by 38%, but also region capitals of the deep Volyn Polesie, such as Staraya Vyzhva, where only 3.5 thousand people reside.

Entangled Syntax and Unclear Wording

A separate group of language tools used in Ukrainian newspapers to frame the news in terms of powerlessness constituted the discursive devices serving for concealment of the responsible agents. They allowed speaking about social problems without making visible the levels of government responsible for the relevant policy making. They also permitted to consider the problems arising from misconduct of the powerful without disclosing the agents responsible for this misconduct.

To obscure the issues of responsibility, Ukrainian newspapers first of all used entangled syntax and unclear wording. Most often they were used in *Den'*, which commonly applied bureaucratic style for covering political events. In *DzT* these means were also used, especially by regional correspondents from outside Kiev, who preferred to write about local problems without mentioning concrete local officials or institutions responsible for the issues.

Common language means used by *Den'* and *DzT* to conceal the agents responsible for inadequate government were nominalizations and passivization.⁷ They permitted

⁶ This translation of the headline “ВИДИМОСТЬ БОРЬБЫ” is not literal. However, it most exactly conveys the meaning of the headline, which would be impossible in case of literal translation.

⁷ *Nominalizations* occur when sentences or parts of sentences, descriptions of actions and the participants involved in them, are turned into nouns. They help to impersonalise actions, to eliminate agency, to transform processes into objects. In the following example the nominalization is used to ‘hide’ the agents of unpopular measures undertaken by government and to represent the whole case as something necessary and inevitable: *The raising of taxes is being dictated by circumstances.*

Passivization is rendering of verbs in the passive form, it also obscures the agency and focuses the attention of the reader on certain themes at the expense of others. In the phrase: *Demonstrators were stopped by the police* the attention is focused on the demonstrators, not the police, opposite to the sentence: *The police stopped demonstrators.* In addition, the passive constructions permit to remove reference to the causing agent, for ex.: *Demonstrators were stopped.*

the journalists to speak about the drawbacks of governance without mentioning the names of the committers of erroneous actions:

Ex. 1: *Den'* 2/07 "Agiotage Which Is Not Sweet"

According to the opinion of the Ukrainian Academy of Agrarian Sciences and Ministry of Agrarian Policy... granting of access of raw sugar cane to Ukrainian market on request by World Trade Organization may have negative consequences for domestic sugar branch.

Comment: From this sentence one can not figure out who took the decision to grant access of raw sugar cane to Ukrainian market, because the nominalization "granting" playing the role of subject in the sentence permits to omit mention of the causing agent.

Ex. 2: *Den'* 22/2 "The System for the Sake of the System"

...the data for February indicates that tuberculosis and cancer programs were practically not funded. The centers of AIDS prevention are being opened in the cities where the number of the HIV infection cases is one or two...Budget funds are getting dispersed and it is difficult to find the ends.

Comment: After reading this fragment built on passive constructions one remains unaware, who did not fund tuberculosis and cancer programs, who opened AIDS prevention centers in improper places and who wasted the budget funds.

The next tools used by the journalists were unclear names which made it impossible to identify the agents in charge, for example: "some ministers," "ideologists of the reform," "local authorities," "certain agency which tried to legally conduct quiet privatization of the state property."

Besides, to conceal or disguise the responsible agents the papers used following discursive strategies:

- "WE" or "UKRAINE" as a responsible agent:

Ex.: *Den'* 2/07 "Agiotage Which Is Not Sweet"

This way Ukraine voluntarily and ahead of schedule, but not by 2005 as agreed with the members of World Trade Organization working group, opens the door for a destructive economic intervention. For Ukrainian farmers for whom sugar beet is one of the leading cultivations, this means the road to bankruptcy.

This strategy was widespread both in *Den'* and in *DzT*. By using this means the newspapers took the responsibility for social problems away from government and placed it on the society in general. For example, in the cited fragment the newspaper accuses "Ukraine" for the actions taken by the Ukrainian Government.

- disguised responsible agent (e.g., "certain influential commercial enterprise of the city," "influential persons continuing to 'pasture' on the bazaar," "vertically integrated groups who created the chain 'coal-coke-metal'")

Disguising names introduced some noticeable features of responsible agents (most often guilty of corruption or misconduct), due to which they could be recognized, but only by persons closely familiar with the situations in question. At the same time these names were non-transparent for the majority of readers. Usage of these 'ciphered' names bespoke that the journalists felt it unsafe to name directly the officials responsible for the issue. This implied that responsible agents were so-called 'powerful others'—the persons (organizations) who controlled the events, but in no way could be controlled by citizenry.

- generalized agent ('Files of feudal-mafiosi groups', 'state', 'Ukrainian politicum', 'the powers')

Too generalized names made it impossible to find out which particular political actors or executives were responsible for the issues. This device also widened the gap between the public and “the power,” as the authorities were represented as a big and integrated entity opposed to society.

Concentration on problems, their dramatic description combined with missing visibility of agents responsible for causing or solving these problems were distinctive features of news coverage via the powerlessness frame in Ukrainian quality newspapers. Impressive pictures of the economic, ecological and social crisis accompanied by scarce and non-transparent reference to the substance of policy making could voice people’s frustration with the problems rather than facilitate public control over the actions of politicians.

Conclusion

The results of the study presented in this paper showed that in 2003 the Polish nation-wide quality newspapers more often than the Ukrainian ones presented national issues and events through the responsibility frame, which has a potential for stimulating citizens to analyze political reality, raises public awareness of public officials’ accountability and empowers readers for the exercise of civic control. Polish newspapers more often made the process and the agents of policy-making visible and explicable to the public and analysed the conduct of different levels of government from the perspective of people’s interests. The biggest part of the Polish news stories concentrated on the current activities of the Polish executive, legislative and other authorities and discussed the efficiency and propriety of their conduct.

Different from them, Ukrainian news stories focused predominantly on societal problems which were considered in general, without touching upon political decision-making on the problems, responsible agents of this decision-making and its effectiveness. Ukrainian news was characterized by scarce and unclear coverage of government conduct. Both Ukrainian newspapers, in particular *Den’*, much less often than *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* provided background information and context for reported events. Besides, Ukrainian newspapers rarely brought explanations and commentaries of events from the perspective of public interest.

Ukrainian newspapers contained a smaller share of stories scrutinizing the actions of the authorities and paid lesser attention to introducing the issues of propriety and efficiency of government conduct to the public discussion. They used a narrower spectrum of information sources, and often limited the coverage of political events to the uncritical quotation of official statements and press releases. In addition, one of the newspapers (*Den’*) often spoke about important political issues in bureaucratic language characterised by formalized obscure wording, entangled syntax and evasive circumlocutions. All the above made Ukrainian news less understandable and appealing to audiences and deprived readers from seeing events from multiple perspectives, thus rather impeding than enabling their competence in public debates and their ability to critically evaluate their elected representatives.

The results of the content analysis showed also that the framing of national news in Ukraine differed from the Polish news framing by an excessive use of the powerlessness frame, which casts for readers the only role of witnesses or victims of powerful social forces. In the Ukrainian newspapers the powerlessness frame most often manifested itself in emotional narratives about pressing social problems combined with non-attribution of responsibility for causing and solving the problems. These stories typically presented the locus of control of the issues as lying beyond the access of average citizens, in the hands of uncontrollable forces and faceless “authorities,” “elites,” or “Ukrainian politicum.” The sense of helplessness against the state of vital problems was reinforced by the use of persuasive rhetoric, including metaphors and epithets, often used also in headlines.

The study showed also that in the period under study Ukrainian newspapers differed from each other in the way they framed news. To be more precise, there existed an important difference in the frequency of usage of the responsibility frame between the Ukrainian outlets: *Den'* used this frame much less frequently, than did *DzT* (see table 1). Most probably, this was the consequence of the close connection of *Den'* with Evhen Marchuk, who was the head of the Council on National Security and Defence up to June 2003 and then was appointed Minister of Defence. Different from *Den'*, *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, which was owned by a journalist cooperative and was partly funded by an émigré from the Ukraine who is now a US citizen, was not linked with the pro-Kuchma line and was able to provide much more independent and critical coverage of national events and issues. Therefore, it more often than *Den'* covered the news in terms of the responsibility of policy- and decision-makers.

At the same time the study showed that the powerlessness frame was used in both Ukrainian newspapers with the same frequency. A concentration on problems, their dramatic description combined with scarce and non-transparent reference to the substance of policy making were distinctive features of news coverage in both Ukrainian newspapers. The probable explanation of this homogeneity was the further adherence of Ukrainian newsmakers to emotionally loaded advocative journalism, widespread in the Post-Communist countries in the first years of transformation, but gradually substituted in many of them (among others, in Poland) by Western-style journalism, balanced and fact-based.⁸ In 2003 Ukrainian journalists still preferred journalism dominated by political attitudes or ideological stances, therefore they did not pay foremost attention to bringing the public complete and verified information and unraveling for their audiences the complex processes unfolding on the political scene. Instead they offered audiences their opinionated and persuasive “analysis” advocating this or that political line.

⁸ On the politically-led opinion-loaded journalism in Post-Communist media see: Gross (2002), Jakubowicz (2002).

Afterword

The situation of the Ukrainian media has changed significantly after the Orange Revolution in 2004. State interference in the media lessened. However, the character of journalism practiced in Ukraine before 2004 did not undergo substantial transformation. In October 2007 Natalia Ligacheva, Ukrainian media expert and editor of the *Telekritika* web-based media outlet, sharply criticized Ukrainian journalists for the way they approached and presented politics. According to Ligacheva, Ukrainian journalists do not consider journalism a “vanguard of civil society” but rather a part of this or that “political camp.” Being personally engaged in politics, they at most repeat the statements and arguments of their masters but do not bring citizens “adequate information” and analysis on “the essence of ongoing political processes,” which would help them take “adequate decisions” in the “moments when their voice matters” (Ligacheva 2007).

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Appendix. Tables and Figures

Table 1

Mean Scores of Visibility of the Responsibility Frame in Ukrainian and Polish Quality Newspapers

Outlet	Mean score
<i>DzT</i>	0.55 (0.25)
<i>Den'</i>	0.39 (0.26)
Average (Ukraine)	0.47 (0.27) (n = 237)
<i>Rz</i>	0.69 (0.28)
<i>GW</i>	0.63 (0.28)
Average (Poland)	0.65 (0.28) (n = 271)

Note. Data entries are mean scores on the frame scales, figures in parentheses indicate standard deviations and number of cases.

Table 2

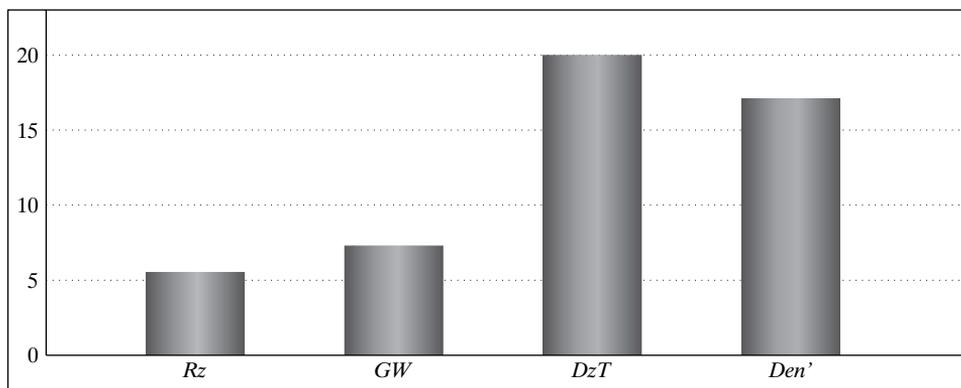
Mean Scores of Visibility of the Powerlessness Frame in the Ukrainian and Polish Quality Newspapers

Outlet	Mean score
<i>DzT</i>	0.25 (0.24)
<i>Den'</i>	0.25 (0.23)
Average (Ukraine)	0.25 (0.24) (n = 237)
<i>Rz</i>	0.17 (0.19)
<i>GW</i>	0.11 (0.20)
Average (Poland)	0.14 (0.20) (n = 271)

Note. Data entries are mean scores on the frame scales, figures in parentheses indicate standard deviations and number of cases.

Figure 1

Percentage of News Stories Containing Expressive Adjectives, Metaphors and Other Rhetorical Devices that Might Generate Feelings of Helplessness, Despair, Outrage



Biographical Note: Natalya Ryabinska, Ph.D. Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, Warsaw University of Life Sciences. Member of European Studies Unit, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Research interests: Mass Media and Democracy, Politics and the Media, Transformation of Mass Media in East Central Europe and New Independent States, Mass Communication Theory and Research Methods.

Address: E-mail: nryabinska@yahoo.com