Assoc. Prof. Dr. & Dr. Honoris Causa

Sabahudin Hadžialić

**Media ethics in professionalism journalism:**

**Avocation and professional standards (part two)**

*Part one is* [*here*](https://www.eurasiareview.com/10042019-media-ethics-in-professional-journalism-avocation-and-professional-standards-part-i-essay/)

***Concept of objectivity – confusion per se***

Nowadays, constituent part of professional standards are truth, honesty (objectivity), dispassionate, adequate relations with the sources of information, respect towards persons who are the subject of information, elimination of any kind of discrimination and the responsibility of journalists.

One of the great confusions about journalism, write Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in [The Elements of Journalism](https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/elements-journalism/), is the concept of objectivity.

When the concept originally evolved, it was not meant to imply that journalists were free of bias. Quite the contrary.

The term began to appear as part of journalism after the turn of the 20th century, particularly in the 1920s, out of a growing recognition that journalists were full of bias, often unconsciously. Objectivity called for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information – a transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work.

In the latter part of the 19th century, journalists talked about something called “realism” rather than objectivity. This was the idea that if reporters simply dug out the facts and ordered them together, truth would reveal itself rather naturally.

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Realism emerged at a time when journalism was separating from political party affiliations and becoming more accurate. It coincided with the invention of what journalists call the inverted pyramid, in which a journalist lines the facts up from the most important to the least important, thinking it helps audiences understand things naturally.

At the beginning of the 20th century, however, some journalists began to worry about the naïveté of realism. In part, reporters and editors were becoming more aware of the rise of propaganda and the role of press agents.

At a time when Freud was developing his theories of the unconscious and painters like Picasso were experimenting with Cubism, journalists were also developing a greater recognition of human subjectivity.

**The method is objective, not the journalist**

In 1919, [Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz](https://archive.org/stream/LippmannMerzATestoftheNews/Lippmann_Merz_ATestoftheNews_djvu.txt), an associate editor for the New York World, wrote an influential and scathing account of how cultural blinders had distorted the New York Times coverage of the Russian Revolution. “In the large, the news about Russia is a case of seeing not what was, but what men wished to see,” they wrote. Lippmann and others began to look for ways for the individual journalist “to remain clear and free of his irrational, his unexamined, his unacknowledged prejudgments in observing, understanding and presenting the news.”

Journalism, Lippmann declared, was being practiced by “untrained accidental witnesses.” Good intentions, or what some might call “honest efforts” by journalists, were not enough. Faith in the rugged individualism of the tough reporter, what Lippmann called the “cynicism of the trade,” was also not enough. Nor were some of the new innovations of the times, like bylines, or columnists.

The solution, Lippmann argued, was for journalists to acquire more of “the scientific spirit … There is but one kind of unity possible in a world as diverse as ours. It is unity of method, rather than aim; the unity of disciplined experiment.” Lippmann meant by this that journalism should aspire to “a common intellectual method and a common area of valid fact.”

To begin, Lippmann thought, the fledgling field of journalist education should be transformed from “trade schools designed to fit men for higher salaries in the existing structure.” Instead, the field should make its cornerstone the study of evidence and verification.

Although this was an era of faith in science, Lippmann had few illusions. “It does not matter that the news is not susceptible to mathematical statement. In fact, just because news is complex and slippery, good reporting requires the exercise of the highest scientific virtues.”

In the original concept, in other words, the method is objective, not the journalist. The key was in the *discipline*of the craft, not the aim.

This point has some important implications.

One is that the impartial voice employed by many news organizations – that familiar, supposedly neutral style of newswriting – is not a fundamental principle of journalism. Rather, it is an often helpful device news organizations use to highlight that they are trying to produce something obtained by objective methods.

The second implication is that this neutral voice, without a discipline of verification, creates a veneer covering something hollow. Journalists who select sources to express what is really their own point of view, and then use the neutral voice to make it seem objective, are engaged in a form of deception. This damages the credibility of the craft by making it seem unprincipled, dishonest, and biased.

Reporters have gone on to refine the concept Lippmann had in mind, but usually only privately, and in the name of technique or reporting routines rather than journalism’s larger purpose. The notion of an objective method of reporting exists in pieces, handed down by word of mouth from reporter to reporter.

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Developmental psychologist [William Damon at Stanford](https://coa.stanford.edu/people/william-damon), for instance, has identified various “strategies” journalists have developed to verify reporting. Damon asked his interviewees where they learned these concepts. Overwhelmingly the answer was: by trial and error and on my own or from a friend. Rarely did journalists report learning them in journalism school or from their editors.

Many useful books have been written. [IRE (Investigative Reporters and Editors)](https://www.ire.org/) for instance, has tried to develop a methodology for how to use public records, read documents, and produce Freedom of Information Act requests.

By and large, however, these informal strategies have not been pulled together into the widely understood discipline that Lippmann and others imagined. There is nothing approaching standard rules of evidence, as in the law, or an agreed-upon method of observation, as in the conduct of scientific experiments.

Nor have older conventions of verification been expanded to match the new forms of journalism. Although journalism may have developed various techniques and conventions for determining facts, it has done less to develop a system for testing the reliability of journalistic interpretation.

**Why do we need, at the end of day, ethics?**

*Because of a need* for social stability because if we do not want to have organized anarchy even within journalism. Regardless that there is no formal agreement to do that, readers, listeners and viewers, media consumers, are expecting from journalists to report about the truth.

*Because of a need* for moral hierarchy because ethical system serves as moral guard who informs a society about relative importance of certain customs & habits. There is tendency that we describe the acts with which we disagree as immoral, although most of our social imprudence pure violation of manners. Ethical system recognizes those customs & habits for which exists so huge social disapproval that can be consider as immoral ones.

*Because of a need* to solve conflicts having in mind that ethical system is important social institution for the solving of the cases that encircles opposed claims on personal interests. For example, maybe it is in personal interest of the student to rewrite paper from his colleague, but in the same time his colleague interest is not to allow him to do that. [Social rules against plagiarism needs to be considered here](https://www.plagiarism.org/) when is going to be evaluated moral practice that arises from this situation.

*Because of a need* of clarifying of the values. For example, controversies about cloning of the people – pro at contra of the scientific achievement with unthinkable ethical consequences.

As mentioned earlier, realization of proper common, joint good, is the presumption of real prosperous individual good, in general meaning.

The main question is how to define ethical joint good, which will satisfy all levels of one society, without being accused to be communist or extremist of any kind? That is the question of one million dollars, but we will try even to give, within the months to come, answer to that one as well.

Besides that, media workers are crucial for transferring of cultural and non-cultural values – depending of which kind of ethical and/or non-ethical values they are relying on within the society and of their own.

***Some questions to think and work within, above all:***

Is professional journalism utopia or the hope?

What is the difference between Ethics and Morality?

What are the functions of the media within the system of Ethics?

*Remark: Signature under the photo – 2 hours Lecture of Assoc.Prof. Dr. & Dr. Honoris Causa Sabahudin Hadžialić* [*conducted on 19.3.2019 in Lithuania related*](http://sabihadzi.weebly.com/poland-2732019.html) *to art communication, media ethics, media literacy..*