Assoc. Prof. Dr. & Dr. Honoris Causa

Sabahudin Hadžialić

**Media ethics in professional journalism:**

Tolerance as the presumption of media survival

There is an existentialistic need for social stability. Ethical system is needed for conduction of social relations. Ethical system serves as moral guardian that informs society about relative meaning of certain habits. It conducts that by warning the public on 1. Norms that are sufficiently strong to be described as moral and on “hierarchy of ethical norms” and their relative position within the moral order.

Third, ethical system is very important social institution for the solving of cases that encircles opposed claims established on personal interests and also, ethical system is functioning also to clarify to the society opposite values and principles within new moral dilemmas. Ethical system encourages debate and bringing out different stand points connected with opposite moral principles.

If the system of ethics individual and institutions provides moral cohesion, that it is most needed to professional journalists. Why? Mass media are among most influential enterprises in democratic society, at the crossroads between citizens and their political, economic and social institutions.

Ethical system must be built on joint values - At least to agree on mutual ethical norms.

**Wisdom** – standards should be based on sanity and experience. It is unreasonable, for example, to expect from journalist to be completely excluded from the involvement within the question of their local community because of possible conflict of interest. As a matter of fact, wisdom points out that involvement within the life of local community widen the understandings of the events, for journalist, about he/she is reporting.

**Justice-** it is related to the mutual relationship of the people and is very often important for solving of ethical conflicts. At the center of justice is term – honesty, based on which should not exits double standards, unless there are conceivable and rational reasons for discrimination. For example: Justice requests from journalists that journalists reports about unpleasant behavior of others, public or private persons, on the basis of what they really deserves, and not for the aim of satisfying of morbid curiosity of the public.

**Freedom**- Ethical system should be based on certain freedom of choice. Society that does not allow that kind of freedom is morally poor. Moral agents should have several alternatives within their disposal and must be able to use their mandate without fear from pressures of any kind. Without freedom there is no moral judgment. Freedom gives opportunity for the raising of ethical conscience.

**Responsibility** – We are responsible for moral acts, correct and incorrect ones, and legitimacy of any kind of ethical system depends out of his ability to subdue participants to some kind of responsibility standard. Ethical system that does not encircle responsibility encourages freedom without responsibility, and by doing that, does not have moral authority to encourage behavior with honor.

* *Ethical dilemma: conflict of values*
* *Mediamorphosis within the frame human relations areas*
* *Mediamorphosis within documental area*

One has an ethical dilemma only when there are competing ethical values at stake in a decision. On the other hand, when an ethical value such as honesty or promise-keeping conflict with nonethical values such as personal wealth, prestige or comfort, it may take a strong person to sacrifice self-interest to follow the moral principle. Thus, the moral response to a conflict in values is to choose ethics over expediency.

The problem with this analysis is that people rarely see choices as being between ethical and no ethical values. Instead, they see ethical dilemmas arising from almost every clash caused by what they *want* (often construed as what they *need*) and ethical principles that might cause them to deny their desires, especially if the ethical principle seems to require deprivation of money, power or position. An automatic rationalization process often transforms fundamentally self-interested no ethical motives into others-centered ethical ones, thereby creating a false ethical dilemma.

Thus, journalists sometimes justify deception (even outright lying), breaking commitments, violating laws, disrespecting the autonomy and privacy of others, failing to demonstrate caring, compassion and charity in order to advance a professional or personal interest disguised by noble-sounding sentiments like *the people’s right to know.*

While there are stories of monumental social importance that can justify, on utilitarian grounds, the sacrifice of some ethical principles to achieve the greater good, these are rare. The fact is that journalists, like police officers, politicians and lawyers, often operate on an instinctive unreflective level that *presumes* and invariably *exaggerates* the importance of professional and personal goals. More objective scrutiny would reveal that, in many cases, we are motivated by the desire to get the job done, to build our reputations, to satisfy our professional pride, for the sheer joy of winning (or avoiding the awful shame of losing) and that our claims of nobler motives are just excuses.

For example, responsible journalists ought to ask whether many stories that injure reputations, cause great emotional harm and invade privacy are really so socially significant that they invoke the people’s right to know – a right that, if it exists at all, is probably based on our democratic tradition that in matters of self-governance the citizenry should have all the relevant facts. Thus, the printing of names or addresses of victims of sex crimes, the cause of death in obituaries where the family would suffer needlessly (e.g., suicide or AIDS), private facts about public figures may sometimes be justifiable but hardly ever on such a lofty principle as the people’s right to know.

The fact is that people are *interested* in a lot of things that they have no intrinsic right to know, including the private lives and activities of others. If a news organization chooses to cater to that desire for entertainment value and to increase its audience, it ought to do so without the cover of First Amendment self-righteousness.

Living in virtual worlds, in the next “internet of things” where interaction of all system within our homes will provide us with all needed information, from what is missing in refrigerator up to when I should switch on oven for the lunch. Also, explosive growing of Internet shows that a human goes towards creation of new communities based on joint interests and needs than at the place of living and family connections. Professional journalists must be also e new leaders for the people to avoid having virtual world as replacement for real world. Virtual world of online news and report is not replacement for life in physical world but gives people opportunity to widen their horizons and gets some experience which it might not be available to them.

To be able to compete with existing and new media, electronic publication of the newspapers is based on digital technologies. Tablets, IPod’s, are here to offer consumers showing of all different kind of digital documents and interaction with everybody, including journalists and public. For ethics, that is great. Why? To establish and protect basic meaning of it and satisfy all mentioned values and standards of ethics.

* *Aggressive advertisement*and reality
* *Media literacy as the “springboard” towards increasing of the tolerance*

Ever since mass media became mass media, companies have naturally used this means of communications to let a large number of people know about their products. There is nothing wrong with that, as it allows innovative ideas and concepts to be shared with others.

The notion of “giving the audience what they want” is also a bit misleading because, if anything, it is more about targeting those readers that can afford the products that are advertised and so it is almost like giving the advertisers what they want!

Sometimes, news stories or editorials are often subtle product advertisements, even with a rise of new terms in critical circles, such as “advertorials.” – advertisement info the form of editorial content.

In other cases, due to large ownership, a news company will advertise another program belonging to the parent network and highlight it as a news story, as some “reality TV” programs in America, such as the Survivor series, have shown. Another example is the hype on ABC News of Disney’s Pearl Harbor movie (Disney owns ABC), which some have even described as propaganda. Examples abound, and it would be a futile effort to attempt to list them all here. Such use of news time to promote entertainment has come under criticism of late.

As globalization becomes ever more prominent, the role of media and advertising and consumerism also increases. This is ideal for the large multinationals that can take best advantage of globalization as they see an even larger “market” to which products can be sold.

However, diverse cultures could sometimes be an obstacle to easy selling. From the multi-national’s perspective, the more that people have similar attitudes and consumption habits the easier it is to sell en masse.

Aggressive advertising is like the obnoxious used car salesman. It is in-your-face, absurd and leaves the smell of stale cologne lingering in the air. Okay, so maybe the last one is a stretch, but with advertisements now taking the road toward “sponsored content,” advertising seems to be in sync with our everyday media consumption

The convergence of media and technology in a global culture is changing the way we learn about the world and challenging the very foundations of education. No longer is it enough to be able to read the printed word; children, youth, and adults, too, need the ability to critically interpret the powerful images of a multimedia culture. Media literacy education provides a framework and pedagogy for the new literacy needed for living, working and citizenship in the 21st century. Moreover it paves the way to mastering the skills required for lifelong learning in a constantly changing world.

Media literacy will foster better understanding of other and different ones and will help us properly read professional journalists as people who provides as with accurate, honest and truthful information, if they are doing so. If they don't media literacy will help us to stop them doing that – How? Reading through their so call ethical approach and striping naked their so call truth. Why media literacy is good, ethically, for both sides – journalists and readers/viewers. Simply, because it will help us to get rid of trash journalism and help building of society which will increase trust in media which will widen people's mind in regards development of real democracy – heading towards bearable tolerance of us all.

Question to think about: Is the tolerance presumption for media survival?

Next: Media ethics in professional journalism: Political marketing in media and ethics

*Signature under the photo:* ***Prof. Hadžialić teaching session at the MA study module “Art communication” (within his own Syllabus) at Kaunas Faculty, Vilnius University, Kaunas, Lithuania (Academic year 2017/18)***