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**Media ethics in professional journalism:**

**Economy and Media – Ethical questions**

*Media literacy and media business – ethical issues*

Less public is media literate than media business can gain more within the profit. More media literate public, less media business will succeed in gaining a lot of money based on small investment. That means that they would need to invest much more into media business to get more.

That is the last things the real owners of the media would do. That is why media literacy is one the greatest enemy of the gaining of easy capital. Also, we can call media literacy the lover of the ethics, because media literate person would know how to read and by that real professional journalist will not have problem that their ethically respected worked will not be red well. It would be red and seen extremely well by the public. I would rather talk about media (il)literacy than media literacy, because the first one is more stronger currently in the world than the second one, but we have to underline that media messages are not always as they looks like. Media messages can be interpreted in different ways. Some of the annotations are very unrealistic, but are intertwined with elements of reality that can every concrete message within your consciousness transfer from the sphere of “illusion” into the sphere of “possible” of “probable” or “I should taste it”.

As much you are aware of the diversity of the interpretation some message, you are more able to choose the one you want. More analyzing is the first step towards the control of the media influence on your and if you are not aware of the possibilities than media controls your point of view towards the world.

Professional journalist, dedicated to the foundations of ethical approach within his work, will always be on the side accuracy and balanced story, and by doing that give possibility for the public not just to learn more about media literacy, but also to respect diversity within the presentation of the story. Media business, in that case can win also, but this time everybody wins.

*Participants of the game*

Economy is the game of the enormous proportions with a huge number of participants and with investment of big funds. Participants of the game exchange resources for those that they need. Essence of the strategy of good players is to accomplish good exchange, and that means to give up of the relatively small own resources to be able to get relatively big resources from other participants in the game.

There are four participants within the economic game of media: consumers (readers, listeners and viewers); advertisers, media companies of all kinds and employed in or by the media.

Professional journalists, as the part of the fourth mentioned group, are playing on a very thin ethical line between satisfying wishes of the owners of the media and respecting basic professional standards which are very often in the conflict. Why? Because, media companies have three strategies:

1. To maximize profit no matter what by increasing incomes and decreasing costs.

For professional journalists that, just as one example, very often, means that will not get enough money for proper research related to the story and without that ethical essence of the story will surely suffer, not only informational part of it.

1. Creation of target group of public and based on that, their members are programmed to create habit of constant use of the media.

For professional journalists, that limits their involvement into the broader sense of journalism, which might encircle all needed parts of the society which will satisfy (if don't, then will not) already mentioned ethical reflections of the work-good for all, with accurate, honest and balanced reporting.

1. Third, media companies are glossing over the risks with the application of marketing approach.

For the professional journalists this is a direct conflict with basics of ethical reporting which has a burden directly linked with marketing regardless the ethical conflict within the story that might have an issue raised because of marketing sensitivity-in other words – limitation based on a general marketing strategy dependently or independently connected with the given story.

*Characteristics and rules of the game*

Basic rule of this economic game is that for the participation in it you must invest own resources and to be ready to exchange for the resources of other participants. If you do not have enough resources or you are not ready to exchange it, you cannot participate in the game. All other rules are established by the participants during negotiations.

For the better understanding of the economical game of mass media it is necessary to know its five attributes:

*The significance of the good assessment of the resources, indirect and direct support, complex independency of the participants in the game, types of the competition and advertising as the driving force.*

Professional journalist is the part of this game and if he satisfies from his side all first four attributes, the fifth one will come on its own, having in mind that there is nothing better for advertising than article that satisfies all professional standards. Of course, if the other side respects professionalism, and by respecting that respects the ethics. One cannot go without another.

*Strategy of media industry and ethics*

Every media industry started with *innovation phase, then penetration phase, peak phase and declining phase, and of course, adaptation ph*ase. We will talk about this later.

Of course, the main goal of media industry is the profit and, increasing of it. Of course, income depends on the size of the public and media companies are very motivated to increase attractiveness of their messages to attract more public. By attracting more public those companies gain bigger direct incomes from the consumers (by selling and prescription) as well as indirectly (by advertisers).

Also, all the expenses are minimized, but media is paying very well professional journalists of the exceptional abilities because they need them for the gaining of big incomes. Of course, that Christian Ammanpur (CNN) is much more paid than some local professional journalist, but that still does not mean that Christian is more ethical than another one. All depends of the point of view, isn’t it?

*Strategy of media consumers and ethics*

As media industries, also media consumers have their own strategies:

1. Strategy of maintaining of the habits
2. Strategy of media literacy

Strategy of maintaining of habits implies maintaining of the minimum level of their constant satisfaction.

Very rarely we are exposed (and that is our decision) to the influence of different variety of the messages, because or we do not know what other messages exists or we think that search for other messages is not worth at all. Although those messages that we are receiving now does not bring us much, those messages do not cost us almost nothing because it represents the habit. According to that, we determine the value of the messages more based on law price of exposing ton them than based on the benefit from them.

The persons who are applying strategy of media literacy understand economic game and know what is needed to be played well. That means that they are expecting that invested resources bring bigger profit. From the use of media, they want more than minimum of satisfaction.

So, what is the difference between strategy of maintaining of habits and strategy of media literacy? In the power of personal position. The person of weak personal position will, within the exchange, satisfy wish small because for the better results in the economic game is needed to invest more effort. Different than them persons of strong personal position consider very essential realization of the good results in that game. Investment of bigger effort into the better use of skills and gaining of detailed knowledge creates a pleasure for them because it brings them much more interesting experiences.

Increase of the understanding of the ethics will increase with the knowledge about both strategies. Which one will be used, depends, again on everyone on its own?

*Economic pressure and social responsibility*

Under the economic pressures connected with advertising, has started the concentration of the media, in other words – forming of media monopolies.

Since from the ashes of Middle Ages raised middle class, motive of the profit is the economic factor of the western democracy. Economic factor is assuredly strong (and sometimes irresistible) motivation and that is where ethical problem is laying.

To be able to answer on that question we will start from basic understanding: there is nothing immoral itself within the motivation for the profit or gaining wealth. Personal interest can be servant of the public interest, having in mind that race for the profit can get benefit also to the wider social community. Ethical questions, however, appears when it is allowed for commercial interests to dominate over other social obligations. Question in situation like this is how to find a balance between economic pressures and individual or institutional obligations towards others.

Moral idealist would come to temptation to say that commercial interest should be always subordinated by much honorable interests.

But let assume that big advertisers threaten small TV station anywhere in Europe that will cancel the Contract if editor insist, respecting a work of the fellow colleague professional journalist in the spirit of journalistic independence, to broadcast a story in which advertisers have been criticized for numerous reasons, without fear for economic revenge. But, if cancelling of the Contract creates financial problems, TV station might not be able to provide quality services to the public. Maybe Big TV stations, Public broadcasting services and media conglomerates have (for the last ones, although the owners of the majority of the shares are almost advertisers of similar kind) financial basis to endure with the financial pressures of that kind, but one small local station does not have.

Economic pressures that are imposed by advertisement are visible at least within three areas. First, quantity of commercial material determines the quantity of the space or time that stays for non-advertising content – news and entertainment.

Editors of the newspaper have obligation to organize their content within the space or time that is left over when advertising department lay out their advertising and ads. On TV, producers must insert their features between advertisement, so there is a limited time for every feature.

New technologies made a mass and decrease a level of ads and advertisement in the newspapers, but as every new media did not destroy previous, just adjust it, nowadays we have newspapers online in different formats and everything continues to be the same in virtual as it was in real world. Economically.

*Enlargement of the ownership over the media*

There are three different tendencies in regards concentration. First, *horizontal integration* – that means that one media company buys another media company of the same kind. Example for that is the chain of daily newspapers who buys another daily newspaper.

When it comes to ethical issues, all employees should adjust themselves to the new environment – owner, or…But, if the new owner sees beyond basic request of just gaining the profit, he might be clever enough to keep those whose ethics is not so similar to theirs, but can gain, on long term, new consumers and looks him better in the eyes of wider public.

There is also *vertical integration*. It happens when one media company buys suppliers, in other words distributors to realize integration within the production and distribution of the messages. Example for that is the publishing house that buys certain number of printing companies as well.

Third kind of integration is *conglomerate*. It came into existence when one media company buys mode other media companies and companies outside of the area of media business.

Media critics are very carefully following up the level of concentration within media industries. What especially worries them is what is more important: efficiency (that is achieved with integration and volume of the economy) or independency (diversity of the content and easier activation into the market with which makes possible publishing of the alternative stands)?

To answer on this question, we should consider first which ethics should dominate in media industry. Do we support local orientation which insists that society – through civil activism and government regulations – have an influence on media to satisfy the different needs of diversity group of people? ***Or we are more inclining concentration as the goal of the companies which wants more efficient business and realization as bigger as possible profit for the owners?***

It is the question of million dollars, depending whom you ask. Ethical answer will be for the implementation of the first question, but can we do that in this globalized world where corporations are nowadays even stronger than majority of the countries?

*Alliance of media & marketing and professional journalism*

Applied on media, concept of marketing says that all Editorial boards, including newsrooms, must contribute to the prosperity of the organization.

That is why has been requested from the editors of newsroom to pack the information in a way to attract target audience and use the economic potential of the market.

If today journalists have regrets and that is something especially inevitable collapse of “the wall” between commercial and editorial part of media business.

But, ethic scholar, [Prof. Deni Elliot (University of South Florida, USA)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deni_Elliott), from other side about “the wall” underlines. “The wall is very funny metaphor for the journalistic style of the XX century and completely is not functional for today’s corporative way of managing the news.”

She also states that editorial and business politics between themselves are depending one from another one and that good journalism and good business are not mutually exclusive. From one side this is the wise and practical advice, because to be able to compete within the economic arena of the enterprises or corporations they must overmatch the marketing principles.

But, from the other side ethical puritans, like me, of even better, idealists, always makes distinction, regardless if somebody call it a wall or something else. Why? Because, ethics will be the last thing to think about if we put before that business. Which business shows ethics within its core at the end of day?

*Challenges of Cyber space and commercialization vs. professional journalism*

Cyber space is the new frontier, unregulated mine of the information. Advertisements have become usual thing on websites, social networks and even worse, they even follow you online according to your preferences.

Ethical bells online also rings in regards „commercialization“ of the web, but homo sapiens became to be homo consumer long time ago and WEB just further developed that strategy of consumerism with the support of globalization. Amazing how, together with globalization of the real world, appears Internet for the globalization of the virtual world. So, ethics is again in question, having in mind distinction which should be made if we want to be professional. At least that.

Problem is maybe of technological nature, but the solution surely is not. All paid results of research and other advertising content should be clearly marked „as paid “, what traditional media is doing through decades. Internet is not yet regulated properly, or even if it is, not completely, so we have things like recent allegedly appeared issue of non-paid taxation of Google in France. And so on.

We have a classical example of the old wine in the new bottle. Although, ethical challenges given by Internet new one (or at least creative), values are old: truth, honesty, respect of individual dignity and candor.

Questions to think about: How does the economic game influence ethics and morality of professional journalists?...and…Ethics and business in media – can it exist within mutual interest and mutual benefits?

Next: Media ethics in professional journalism: Economic interest vs. moral obligations