Assoc. Prof. Dr. & Dr. Honoris Causa

Sabahudin Hadžialić

**Media ethics in professional journalism:**

Economic interest vs. moral obligations

Basic threat lies down within the monopoly over the information that has media corporations with personal interests, unburdened with journalistic imperatives and spirit, but lies in the fact itself that certain newspaper within the property of some business group or chain. Neo-liberalism, at the end of eighties in the previous century, made possible merging and buying of TV and Radio stations and newspapers raising the limit from seven up to twelve in each category.

However, when info-advertising starts to erase the boundaries between advertising and entertainment, and even with serious contents, than appears serious ethical questions. Some journalists, even certain advertisers, are worried that this kind of trend leads towards some kind of “editorial impurities” that jeopardize integrity of the media and conclusions appear that info-advertisement does not create difference between commercial goals and entertainment.

Every mass media industry has started as innovation, and to that phase of the development of the media is characteristic technological innovation which makes possible that channel of transmission of the information. But, technology by itself is not enough for the genesis of the mass media. Besides *technological,* for the innovation phase is important marketing innovation as well. That means that somebody has to adjust existing or establish the new company that will use new channel of the transmission of information and by doing that start to create the public for the messages which that channel is transferring.

When one innovation become to be new mass media channel, that channel, to be efficient as mass media, must satisfy the needs very heterogenic mass of the population. That is called penetration. Reaction of the public within the development of one media is inherent the wider acceptation of that media by the public. For example, social networks, especially FACEBOOK, which from 1 million users back in 2004 came in March 2016 up to 1.61 billion users and in [August 2019 2.41 billion](https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/). Can you imagine that market?

*Apex phase* appears when media reaches the peak of attraction of the public (it is going to be very difficult to defend this phase for social networks, such as Facebook, but for others is easy, because FB develops new and new possibilities to stay at the top)...so, apex phase is when media gets to the highest number of public audience.

*Deconvolution phase* is when media within the apex phase is replaced with another one, but I would even broader this definition and argue that even within the media itself can become a changes, if certain media does not sail with the flow. Example online is YAHOO who has been replaced by GOOGLE because YAHOO could not compete with GOOGLE constant innovations, regarddles that at the beginning YAHOO was the best, but nowadays nobody can compete with GOOGLE as the search engine.

Adaptation phase starts (example can be also the one above) when media approaches to redefining of its position on media market. Change of the position is realized by finding new group of the needs which that media can satisfy because those which media satisfied up to than has been transferred within the jurisdiction of other media.

Again, advertising and professional journalism are not excluding each other, but not even including, and due to the different phases of the media, also exists different approach of professional journalists within the given task for that media. Still, they can keep their ethical ability to create accurate, balanced and argumentative story, but it has to be adapted to the media presentation, having in mind that, after all economy rules…sorry, good business rules. Ethical journalism has to find a way to balance even within it, at least.

*Comparing of the mass media*

If we compare the mass media we can easily see what are the newest and when individually they were in the best position.

For example, printed media –books, daily newspapers and magazine – they are the oldest media. Computers (nowadays through the “Internet of things” getting into all our surroundings) are the latest mass media. All mass media, with the exception of cable networks and computers (when I say computers, I surely connect that with all mobile resources as well), are now within the adaptation phase. That means that they have intention to survive simultaneously with other media that are climbing as well as among each other.

Very often we hear things like the word “multimedia”. Nowadays you have your TV screen connected online and you can simultaneously watch movies from the cable networks as well as from Netflix, isn’t it? You can watch news from the 6’o clock news and live stream from the building next door.

So, indicator of the apex of the media is when media is dominant media. Cable network might be most dominant media, but slowly is losing a battle with online media last years. But, still leads, depending in which area and/or country we are talking about.

*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.

*Media saturation*

# To be able to be more familiar with the topics of this slide and involvement of ethics within it, I will just quote an excellent article from Huffington Post, from 14.3.2015, of the author [Ivan Eland, Senior Fellow and Director of Center of Peace & Liberty](https://www.huffpost.com/author/ivan-eland), The Independent Institute from USA...titled Saturation Media Coverage of the Paris Terrorist Attacks Is Unhelpful...quote:

„*Compare the worldwide saturation press coverage of the terrorist killings in Paris of 17 people, including 12 journalists at the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, with the minimalist coverage of the even more heinous mass slaughter of innocents or by innocents in Nigeria. At roughly the same time as the Paris attacks, as many as 2,000 people were murdered in Nigeria when radical Islamists, in one of the largest terrorist attacks by a group in modern history (American’s catastrophic 9/11 attacks killed a little less than 3,000 people), razed 16 villages and killed mainly young children and older people, who were not fast enough to get away from spraying gunfire from automatic weapons and grenade launchers. In addition, in two separate attacks, child suicide bombers, who may not have even known they were carrying explosives, killed at least 19 people in markets in the same northeastern region of that country. Why the disparity of the media coverage?*

*First, to be charitable, one might excuse this imbalance of reporting by arguing that more international media outlets are located in Paris, one of the most important cities of Europe, than in the more remote areas of Nigeria. Second, the Nigerian attacks, which involved people arguably even more innocent than most of the people in the Paris incident (I am in no way condoning the unconscionable Paris attacks, but the satirists at Charlie Hebdo had made fun of Mohammed and everyone else), was not perceived to be an attack on the media and freedom of expression, which is bound to raise hackles among the Fourth Estate. Third, less charitably, different expectations exist for “civilized” France vs the “uncivilized” developing world, in which violence and mayhem are expected to run rampant. The media itself fosters this expectation by reporting little else in Nigeria except terrorist violence.*

*Finally, unfortunately, Parisians are more sympathetic to Americans simply because they are more like most of us, not only in terms of race but in rough parity of economic and social condition. People empathize more with people like themselves, and the media gives their customers what they want—the searing, raw emotions of justifiable grief and defiance in those similar people in the face of heinously evil acts. And, of course, terrorist attacks against people in similar circumstances to our own generate much higher consumer interest—and viewership, listenership, or readership—because of greater fear generated that the same could happen to us.

However, despite that France, a former colonial power, and the United States, the world’s lone superpower, have similarly aggressive policies in the Islamic world—France has recently intervened in Mali, Libya, and now against the Islamic State in Syria and the United States, since 9/11, has attacked or invaded at least seven Muslim countries—France is not the United States. The Kouachi brothers, perpetrators of the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, apparently were originally radicalized by the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and Amedi Coulibaly, also involved in hostage taking in Paris, claimed to be affiliated with the Islamic State—so blowback from aggressive Western neo-colonial foreign policy in an Islamic world tired of decades of colonial intervention is usually at least one factor in anti-Western attacks by radical Islamists. Yet the United States has less a reason to behave aggressively in the Middle East than does France, which is just across the Mediterranean Sea from that country. France also would be better off staying out of its former colonial possessions, but the United States, half a world away, has even less reason to make more enemies by involving itself in local Middle Eastern disputes. Journalists have documented well the swelling of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—the group the Kouachi brothers claimed to be acting in behalf of—in the face U.S. attacks against the group in Yemen. Yet journalists, in the wake of the Paris attacks, fail to report that the United States may have made the AQAP problem worse.

Furthermore, America has done a better job of integrating immigrant Muslims than many European countries, such as France and Germany, which have large, more segregated, and more restive Islamic populations than does the United States. Also, as the founders of the United States realized, America is farther away from the centers of world conflict than are most countries, including France. Both conventional armies and terrorists have a harder time operating over those great distances; in the case of terrorists, the difficulty is compounded by having fewer radicalized Islamists to give them shelter in the United States than exist in Europe. And despite the anomaly of the 9/11 attacks, terrorism has been traditionally been much lower in North America than other continents, including Europe.*

*The American founders realized that the uniquely favorable strategic position of the United States, which still holds more than two centuries after the founding, gave them the luxury of adopting a more restrained foreign policy. Modern American leaders have forgotten this strategic advantage and have instead embarked on a costly and counterproductive neo-imperial crusade to “drain the swamp” of terrorists; instead they have helped fuel a tsunami of Islamist radicalism. Their junior partner, France, is now experiencing the blowback from a similar policy.

Thus, sensational media hype surrounding the Paris attacks, which instills excessive fear in Americans that they will be the victim of a rare terrorist attack (a chance lower than getting struck by lightning), merely leads to the perpetuation of U.S. government policies that...well...generate more terrorism...*end of quote...nothing more to say.

*Problem with information vs. Business*

Very often ethical issues of using information might harm business expectation from different angles.

Balanced information means that we should check out all sides. Business does not want to do that. It goes towards the best road which leads to profit regardless all involved sides.

Accuracy of the news means that all the facts has been checked, confirmed and analyzed. Business will do that, but only if that suites the business itself- in other words- profit.

Promotion of the understandings means that journalist will unify diversities within the story, regardless of the outcome which might not be suitable to the certain points of view. Business does not seek for diversity within understanding if that does not fit into the frame of profit.

But, what about ethics of business reporters? Ethical considerations for business reporters are not much different from those for reporters covering politics, sports or any other topic, but there are some special considerations and perhaps more opportunities for conflicts of interest to arise.

Product giveaways are a frequent enticement from companies looking for favorable coverage. While journalists may certainly accept the loan of a product to test or review it, the product should be returned to the company. Accepting gifts of computers, mobile devices or any such item can compromise the journalist’s objectivity and create a conflict of interest.

In many countries, journalists have a long tradition of accepting “envelopes” containing money, sometimes ostensibly to cover expenses. Most international news organizations forbid their employees from taking such gifts. But the tradition persists in media companies where reporters are paid little and regard the favors as a supplement to their salary.

Journalists who resist the temptation to take gifts or favors are in a much better position to win the trust of their audience and establish credibility.

Most major news organizations do not allow business reporters or their immediate families to own shares in the companies they cover, or any companies they might cover in the future. They must not privately divulge information they pick up in the course of covering companies to others who have some interest in the companies, whether investors, analysts or anyone else.

Share prices can move up or down solely on news or rumors, providing another reason journalist need to be especially careful about verifying all information thoroughly. Consumer views, investor actions and the reputation of managers and board members can all be affected by what appears in the media. That doesn’t mean reporters should be overly cautious, only that they need to apply the highest professional standards to their reporting and writing.

Such considerations also point to the critical importance of writing fair, balanced stories that adequately cover all sides.

Questions to think about: Can the commercialization of the media become a huge obstacle for the job of professional journalists?...and…Is the media business suppressor of media literacy of...?

Remark (End of the Cycle 4): All the essays published in Eurasia review since February 2018 and December 2019 you can find, through this [link](https://www.eurasiareview.com/03112019-new-book-from-member-of-eurasia-review-editorial-board-sabahudin-hadzialic/) within the book „Media Literacy and Media Ethics, the only way out“ in print or in e-edition, published by Eurasia Review and promoted so far in [Lithuania](http://www.diogenpro.com/promotion-of-the-book-2019_editor-in-chief.html) and [Poland](http://www.diogenpro.com/promotion-of-the-book-2019_editor-in-chief_2.html).