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**Media ethics in professional journalism:**

**Freedom and misuse of freedom in media**

Treatment of public and private in media

Freedom is holy principle on which human life is based, for which people are fighting for within the historical and personal development. Freedom shows a quality and beauty of life, but it is not easy achievable.

It is very difficult to gain it and even more difficult to maintain. Only developed person can express freedom up to the end. For the maintaining of the freedom knowledge and experience is needed, responsibility, and, of course, courage. Without mentioned there is no freedom. Knowledge and experience enrich human life and only that abundance makes possible independency. Without that kind of abundance there is no freedom, only combat.

Of course, it is needed to make difference the freedom of expression from the freedom of the press. While the freedom of opinion and expression is unlimited, problem with the freedom of the press is little bit different. Question arises: How to find balance between ensuring to the press to inform the public about the events and in the same time to stop appearances of the information that jeopardize integrity of the individual and social security. Difficulty lies down in it that both extremes will damage society interest. It is bad if too much wrong types of the information become public and if too many persons or social structure as the whole would be jeopardized by that. In the same time, it is equally bad for the social structure, as the whole and by that for the individuals, who are living in that society, if government conducts too much control over the media. Somewhere between those two extremes we can hope and expect to find real balance.

Media must be free, but responsible in front of the public, and not in front of the government.

Please, do hear the following sentence…quote..: “*Every man may revise constitutional principles on which authority is based on, draw attention on its mistakes and disadvantages investigate and reveal its mistakes, and warn fellow citizens on its baleful consequences*”…end of quote. This was told by [Thomas Erskine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Erskine,_1st_Baron_Erskine), Scottish jurist and historian at the end of eighteen century. So, today, almost 250 years later, we are still combating for the mentioned rights. At least on certain areas and within certain ideologies of the prevalence.

About government regulation and control of the media there is no complete harmony even in the most democratic society. Problem arise not within preventing the government to be involved in freedom of the media, but what to do and in which way prevent that journalists and media abuse and misuse that freedom. Who need to regulate, control and penalize them? Can public do that?

Of course, here we have a problem of public capacity to do that – its consciousness, knowledge and awareness. It can happened that public is manipulated by the reason of egoistic and special interests, but also because of the ignorance and immaturity. Public is not something that is unique and compact. Public is divided, complex and uneven within the competency. Another quote is the following, and it comes from [“Cannons of journalism” of the American society of journalistic](https://macyburford.wordpress.com/2013/10/09/the-7-cannons-of-journalism/) editors, back in 1992…quote: ”*Trust between journalists and the readers is the foundation of good journalism. All efforts must be made to ensure that the content of the news is correct, immune on prejudices, and that all sides are equitable presented. Comments from Editorial board, analytical articles, should keep up to same standards in regards facts, as the news reports. Significant mistakes in regards facts, or omission, should be corrected immediately and flaringly.”*…end of quote.

*Media content and youth: special ethical issues*

Public as the whole, researchers and creators of the politics treats the youth as special type of the media consumers. Children are much more exposed to the risk of negative consequences of the influence of media messages because kids are on much lower level of development – in cognitive, emotional and moral point of view – and does not have experience in real life for the adequate processing of media messages.

But, when we leave childhood and entered growing stage, that does not mean appropriate media literacy by three reasons: First, many young and adult people does not make progress in development much more than from the level achieved in childhood. Secondly, life experience of many adults is not so various and substantial to make possible rising of the level of media literacy. Third, gaining of media literacy, and through that proper ethical approach, requests also development of special abilities and active application of the skills – and that does not come automatically with the age.

It can be seen that media professionals are recognised as having a vital role to play in social mobilisation around the rights of children. They may be involved primarily as reporters of the misdeeds and omissions of others, but they are catalysts nonetheless. As watchdogs in the public interest and promoters of democratic exchange they have a distinct role in the process of improving the image, rights and prospects of children.

One of the difficulties facing journalists is that they operate in an increasingly commercial environment. Children have a universal appeal, and, in theory at least, are cherished in every culture. They also constitute an important segment of growing advertising and consumer markets.

Threats to children generate emotive responses which can be harnessed to capture readers and audiences. It follows that there is always a risk that stories and images of about children will be valued as much for their marketing potential as for the social significance of the stories themselves.

Media professionals are able to stimulate public outrage by the use of children to illustrate the traumas of illness or abuse, and the horrors of war, starvation, poverty, etc. This ‘shock value’ is often seen as a valid technique to cut through the protections that otherwise cushion people from the harsher realities of life, and especially when seeking to expose the relative deprivation suffered by those who live in the southern hemisphere or in the less well-off communities of Central and Eastern Europe or the run-down suburbs of the developed world.

As a result children are often represented in the media as victims, villains, or as ‘cute’ attachments to adults. Identifying specific children considered to be at risk of harm, exploitation or abuse, can bring danger to them and their families. At the same time the denial of children’s identities by treating them as icons can be problematic. Such ‘iconic’ representation does little to improve recognition of their rights and dignity as human beings.

How well they do their job depends as much upon their personal skills and knowledge as it does upon the medium they work through. Journalists most often communicate by producing ‘stories’ that help people to understand the world around them. The ‘human interest story’ is a dramatic device to capture people’s interest/anger/sympathy and so explain a wider ‘truth’. So, if journalists are to play a part in improving public understanding of children, they need access to ‘good stories’. Often their sources will be NGOs working among children or on their behalf.

A particular area of concern that needs to be addressed is the access which children have to potentially harmful material, including the depiction of violence, sex, and ‘sexualised’ images of children – especially in advertising, and fashion and pop music marketing. While controversy may continue about the extent to which such material directly influences the behaviour of children, it should remain a priority among media producers to ensure that children are not brutalised or otherwise put at risk by easy access to material, including imagery that appears to condone or encourage violence or inappropriate sexual activity.

Media professionals have a significant role to play in developing effective media literacy programmes within schools, as well as a vested interest in ensuring that future generations recognise the value and come to trust the mass media as a source of reliable information. Media literacy will also enhance the vested commercial interests of the media, as well as encouraging the development of future generations of competent media professionals.

*Ethical and moral treatment of public by professional journalists*

*and/or*

*Ethical and moral treatment of private by professional journalists*

Privacy is undefined concept and it is not easy to defining it. General stand is that right on privacy means the right of the individual to be leaved alone or the right to have control about unwanted publicity in relations with personal issues. Of course, media business is not leave people alone. Their work goes towards discovering and not concealment. Because of the, the finding of the balance between the interest of individual for privacy against the interest of the public for the access to the information about others, one of the most ethical questions of our time.

Ethical dilemma appears when it must be decided where to draw the line between reasonable and unreasonable behavior of the media.

Majority of us appreciate privacy, but we are not sure how much privacy should be kept and how much should give up. We are against when government is spying on their citizens, but we are ready to tolerate TV cameras and two-ways mirrors that deters from the stealing in the shops.

Professional journalists have a great responsibility when they have to make tough decisions under the pressure of deadlines. Most important is the awareness about other people’s interest for the privacy that represent essential ingredient of moral judgments.

We have to, ethically, consider that all humans are private, but also social beings, and when those two beings are in collision, the questions arises to professional journalists – How much should I relieve to public and avoid harming somebody’s else privacy? The question is tough one, really.

Right on privacy becomes ethical question within complex, urban society which still appreciates individual autonomy. Within the modern society right on privacy became to be legal, but in the same time, also moral concept.

Euthanasia in prime time, pornography in cyber space, terrifying photos in local newspapers, – those are just some of the controversial themes reflects sensitivity of the people that might be described as morally harsh content.

The newest, and could be said, most blooded combat with pornography and obscenity is within cyber space...Internet is endless market of ideas, most purist shape of democracy. The biggest part of debate is about possibility that children easily can access to pornography, and many of children has more computer literacy than their parents, but not emotionally ready for what they are going to see. The whole world is divided due to this question, but from ethical perspective, solution, if there is any at all, is not different too much from the one recommended for the combat with influence of sex and violence on TV: control and supervision of the parents.

When we speak about offensive speech in media, we have different kind of alliances, interesting ones. Requests for censorships comes from conservatives as well as from liberals. Many institutions for the higher education have imposed codes about “hate speech”, limitation offensive phrases for minorities and woman. Interesting is that censorship is not legal (constitutional) issues and it is more ethical issues because public opinion and managed action can equally be efficient as well as regulation by the state within shutting up of unpopular and offensive speech. Although, advocates of the social regulations claims that the freedom of speech is only one within hierarchy of the values and request that our growing up cultural diversity need more emphasis on racial, ethnical and religious tolerance.

For the moral journalist, reaction of public and consequences for the family and friends of the people mentioned within the story should be the main concern during the decision making in regard writing about certain issues. Within the decision making in regards including offensive material in the news, we have to have on our mind one guideline: that kind of photos are in use for the increasing of circulation or rating. Is the visual version, for example, gives significant information or understandings of what is missing in the story? Those factors should be, after that, balanced regarding other values, as good taste and respect of decency is.

Question to think about: Is there a contradictio in adiecto if we say that “public and private should be protected” and in the same time we say that we have to know and how to bridge it, if any?

Next: Media ethics in professional journalism: Machiavellians selfishness & Public service Kautilyans

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