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**Media ethics and professional journalism:**

***Media literacy and professional journalism***

The purpose of [media literacy](https://sabihadzi.weebly.com/knjiga_bih-3132018.html) is to warn the people, through the creation of critical thinking, on caution and a need to confront the influence of media companies and media messages.

We are not gaining [media literacy](https://9to5mac.com/2019/03/19/apple-combating-fake-news/) through getting closer that and of spectrum that marks the reality – that would just limit our volume of information and emotional reactions. We are gaining with flexibility and consciousness.

Professional journalism has a great role in protecting and developing media literacy only if it is devoted exactly to the mentioned points – if it is truthful and honest in a sense of providing objective and accurate information to the public.

But there is always but…It is widely believed that media make possible, or at least foster, democracy. They provide, it is said, the information needed for the public to understand their society and to make intelligent decisions as to elections and the conduct of public businesses. This, of course, is worthy objective. But it is little more than a myth, constructed mainly by the media themselves – especially by the so-called news media. Let’s see, for example, USA – where we have major players in politics-namely two parties – crowd out other political entities in the media’s coverage. Those media with ideological identities are little more than platforms for a narrow-focused propaganda, either praising Democrats or the Republicans, the liberal or the conservatives. The people do not rule, really. What we have over there is a “lobbyocracy” rather than democracy. Or at least we have a system where our elected plutocrats too often are bought off by the lobbyists of the big corporations and institutions. Young aspiring professional journalists, instead of being language-lovers, have become “technologists”. Instead of jousting with windmills, they are largely satisfied to blow about on the winds of nihilism. Instead of public servants, they have become corporate functionaries or private entrepreneurs. Instead of objectivists, they have become subjectivists and relativists, and instead or journalists they have become communicators.

Media literacy properly injected into the society of the world through adequate educational period might be of help to define make distinctions between real, ethical journalists and other ones, whom we mentioned above. For that, we need a starting point and it is exactly this Media ethics course.

***Aestheticization of the public***

[Martin Luther](https://www.biography.com/religious-figure/martin-luther) has sealed the end of visual culture of metaphysical age in which the people has not been reminded on divine order with listening Latin articles but with watching of the painted biblical messages, with the saying: *“Empire of the Christ is the empire of listening and not empire of watching.”*

But today’s thinker who has established revisualization of the communication culture as the promises of the future was [Hungarian artist Bela Balasz](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bela-Balazs). He underlined visuals as the new truth, and it is visible that we have anesthetization of the social world as domination of the visual in comparing with said and/or written word. Then it came up to social media which encircles visualization with written and said words within virtual reality. Sometimes we must wander if our life is the everyday life or the one within the virtual online world. However, professional journalist must be ready for both, taking into the consideration that anesthetization of reality as visualization of the forms of social experiences and cognition means the staging circling around of the pictures without firm social ground and ethical responsibility of the professional journalist lies within that as well. Also, for the political culture is extremely important, that style o visual impressiveness suppress discursively experience of the social world, rational communication and critical discourse from the public media stages.

*The world of pictures is the world of iconic signs.*

Anesthetization of political public is the reflection of previous staging of electronic media stages, as well as visual shaping of the social power for judgment. Professional journalist who follows the basic ethical standards will make division between anesthetization of public and accurate informing by following the visible reality instead wished visible reality with which we have been bombarded on everyday basis through spectacles realized through the sensational and yellow media.

***Theatralization Strategy of mediatized politics***

Electronic stage produces anesthetization of the message which can be based on attentive communication customs within the world of living.

Theatralized mediation of the politics has three basics strategy of staging that are presented mixed with real political events or completely separately from them:

Political of the events (bogus/apparent events), image projections and bogus/apparent acts.

For example, classical case of the symbolic bogus/apparent politics when President Reagan, in front of TV cameras, seating at the classroom of one class just apparently immersed into the conversation with teachers and students and for the eyes of the observes has been staging the biggest interest for the school system of the country, while really he, in the same time, drastically decreased the budget for the education.

Professional journalist, within his obligation to serve the public, in the same time serving the overall interest of the society, has obligation to separate all above from the real ethical appearance of the politicians, if there are any, and present it to the public accurately.

***Ethics and politics of the media: the quest for quality***

The dissemination and discussion of information concerning the major problems the world and its people face is necessary to both the democratic understanding and the democratic action without which the problems cannot be solved-without which, in fact they will escalate. So here is a great opportunity for the media to contribute to the advancement of peace, prosperity and progress. But can the media respond effectively? For they themselves are not free from many of the problems that contribute to the world's difficulties.

It is anothe cliche that the question of the relations of productions has been replaced by the question of the relations of information and communication.; but as is the case with many political cliches is a good deal of ideological fog about this one. With one fifth of the world's population-for example-one billion people-in a state of dire physical need, questions about the production, distribution and consumption, the ownership and control, of the world's material resources will continue to be of central relevance and importance to the political agenda.

Ethical discussion is essential because there are many ways in which the media can offend without staying beyond the law: in-accuracy, lies, distortion, bias, propaganda, favoritism, sensationalism, trivialization, lapses of taste, vulgarity , sleaze, sexism, racism, homophobia, personal attacks, smears, character assassination, checkbook journalism, deception, betrayal of confidences and invasions of privacy. And this is not a complete list at all.

Take honesty for example. Yes, journalists should certainly be honest in their activities, in both investigating and reporting. But suppose some public corruption can be investigated only under cover, with the journalist pretending to be someone ready to make a corrupt real?

Ethics is not (just) a matter of codes of conduct (plus or minus sanctions), not just a matter of rules to be followed. It is more to do with principles concerning the rights and wrongs of human conduct, principles which have some reasoned theoretical basis, and which therefore apply objectively and impartially.

What is important is that the activity that wishes to call itself professional be conducted on an ethical basis and that its practitioners be accountable for their actions.

What is true on a national level is also true internationally. A commitment to quality of information and information flow to meet the urgent and demanding need for action in a troubled world is required on a global scale. To ensure freedom of information on this scale both global networks a perhaps even more and democratic access are essential. Here the enemies of freedom are perhaps even more formidable, though intolerant or totalitarian governments and transnational capitalist corporations are not natural allies, and to some extent their interests’ conflict. But whether censorship – ideological, religious or commercial – can prevail against the need for quality in the global media is not something that can today be predicted.

***Honesty in investigative journalism***

The topic of honesty in investigative journalism covers questions about what honesty requires of permits journalists to do, first to get their stories and second in communicating their stories (for example, whether, in the second case, it is dishonest deliberately to suppress a suspect’s racial identity so as not to incite racial hatred, though doubtless the public would be keenly interested to know).

So, lets ask the question: Just what can the reporter or the audience member know for certain? What is the true story? It seems that the old Miltonic belief that the truth will win out in a contest with falsehood has vanished. How can one know the truth? How can the news consumer separate the truth from the interpretation?

Fraud destroys trust. We can trust one another only in so far as the duty to be truthful, i.e. not to lie, is generally acknowledged.

But circumstances may make it not just permissible but morally necessary for us to lie.

Here then are three different types of justifications: for lying to liars, for lying to “consenters” and for telling morally necessary lies.

***Let’s see – LYING TO LIARS***

For journalists lying in the cause of informing the public of important matters, for example, of corruption in high places, the argument that those to whom the journalists would lie are themselves liars is doubtfully relevant and, in any case, not conclusive. It is hardly relevant unless those to whom the journalists would lie have lied specifically to them – otherwise the justification for lying to liars (by way of retaliation) does not apply. And even if the journalists are entitled to lie by way of hoax plotted, the less feasible is such an economy in lying. Then further we must ask what other harm can be expected to result from the lies to be told and whether these harms would be sufficiently compensated for by the benefits aimed at-whether, for instance, there are no alternative ways of discovering the truth that would not generate (so much) distrust.

***Let’s see- LYING TO CONSENTERS***

Rights may be waived. You may thereby be justified in doing what would otherwise be contrary to duty. But only if the waiver is acting *reasonably* in giving consent, otherwise the genuineness of the consent becomes doubtful: is it free? Is it informed? On other hand, someone who withholds consent unreasonably cannot all the same be deemed to be consenting-you would need some other justification for lying to such a person. Presumably, we act in waiving our right not to be lied to only if the permission we are extending relates to a quite clearly defined area of intercourse – as in games of bluff where the permission relates only to the playing of the game: you ma lie to your opponents about the cards in your hand but not about the content of the drinks you put in their hands.

Clearly, since a lie is ineffective if it is recognized when told, there has to be some distance between the time at which permission is sought and that at which the permitted lie is told: consent must be either in advance or retrospective.

Honesty, it has been argued, and I can argue that as well, requires that you never tell a lie but that you tell a lie only if in the circumstances it is justified. Because of the difficulty of precisely targeting your lies and of the general penumbra of deception that surround and sustains their telling, it is not enough to justify a lie to establish that it is aimed at liars or consenters only.

There remain two forms of justification for telling a lie: that your duty not to lie is overridden by another perfect duty more pressing in the circumstances, which makes telling the lie morally obligatory, or that your duty not to lie is overridden by another imperfect duty more pressing in the circumstances, which makes telling the lie morally permissible.

***Media democracy (or mediocracy) and ethics***

Colonization of politics through the means of media?

Media democracy serves, first of all, to the characterization of the new basic political constellation, and after that to possible critics of certain, connected with it, development tendencies…namely, as much as they are inconsistent indispensable legitimating requests of the democracy.

That is why new questions arises within the Ethics when media became to be more important than the sources of the news, having in mind how much politician loves media, especially in XXI century and new media technologies.

About colonization of the politics through the means of media we can talk within the description sense when some rules related to the media are entrenching into the political system and dominate its own rules or even makes them invalidate. Towards that status, after American democracy, very fast are approaching or already are, also other western democracies.

Term mediocracy is wider term than media democracy because it includes political-cultural diagnosis that on stage and for the stage of mass media will come into the consideration only what is coinciding with political and cultural taste as wider as possible cross section of the society.

Mediocrity that is slipping down below and progressively is becoming intemperance, which is wished by the side of many, dominates the way of communications even among professionals and their contextual offers.

Ethical issues have been put aside such as responsibility, accuracy and objectivity and on the scene we have half-truth, irresponsibility and bias.

***Mass media logic and Ethics within conceptual uncertainty***

I agree with those who see the media as mechanistic extension of human morality, in some cases socially productive and civilizing and in other cases promoting degrading and uncivil activities.

The institutionalized communicators in the United States, for example, the public media, have a basic problem: They are hanging somewhere between being responsible for public enlightenment and democracy and being a part of a successful business.

Entertainment in the media has mushroomed. Even the news magazines look like *People* magazine. And media directors know that entertainment sells their products. News may be important to a handful of audience members, but what sells publications and programming is entertainment. Institutionalized communication enterprises-that is what media are.

[John Merrill, author of “Media, Mission and Morality”](https://www.mediaethicsmagazine.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3998680:merrill-john-calhoun-merrill-a-legacy-of-wisdom&catid=158,100&Itemid=486) said…Quote:” *Various studies that my students and I have conducted through the years have shown clearly that the media contain very little substantial news about democratic process, about alternatives to the status quo, about the background and characters of candidates, about complex political and social issues, about ways citizens can have a regular impact on government, about the workings of various government agencies and organizations, or about the moral ineptitudes of “public servants”…*end of quote.

Media have largely determined “social and political realities” and have increased knowledge in every area, but they failed, as communication scholar Hanno Hardt has written, to improve the intellectual level of the public to a point that society can deal with the world’s complexity. American media rankle at being called “propagandistic”, although there is little doubt that they are.

Question to think about:

*What does it mean when we say that news today has lost its primary status?*

Next: *Media ethics in professional journalism\_Moral virtues of professional journalism*

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Signature under photo: Prof. Sabahudin Hadžialić, together with his students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences during spring semester lectures of the 2018/2019 Academic year at Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, Polad