

PARTICULARITIES OF ETHICS IN THE MASS MEDIA

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Abstract

Mass media is the main means of communication, information and education of the general public. The key elements of media practice are ethics and social responsibility. Ethics in the mass media first of all implies the assumption of always telling the truth. Presupposes respect for interlocutors, respect for private life. It presupposes, not least, compliance with the legislation in force at national and European level. Due to the rapid development of the media in recent years, the ethical and deontological rules of the media have become a priority. These must be respected. It is the ethical and moral values of the media specialist that can maintain the quality of the information provided.

The purpose of the article is to present ethics in the mass media. The theoretical research on ethics and communication in the mass media includes the results of the critical analysis of the specialized literature.

The results of the critical analysis of the particularities of ethics and communication in the media, especially during the pandemic period, reflect the result of a thorough study of the specialized literature to which is added the own contribution regarding the role of the media in the coronavirus pandemic, stigmatization and measures against disinformation in the pandemic.

Keywords: mass media, ethics and social responsibility, always telling the truth, respecting interlocutors, respecting legislation, ethical and moral values of the mass media specialist

1 Introduction

Mass media is an extremely vast field. It includes several categories of channels through which information reaches people: Press Agencies, Social Media Pages - Media Trusts, Online Press, Print Media, Radio, Television. Added to all this is the power given by the information published and spread with the help of the social media pages of the media trusts: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.

Mass media is the main means of communication, information and education of the general public. Ethics and social responsibility are key elements in media practice. Media ethics, as well as journalistic ethics, primarily means the commitment to always tell the truth, to respect interlocutors, to respect private life, to respect the legislation in force at national and European level.

In recent years, there has been a rapid development of mass media due to the expansion of the Internet and social networks. This determined that the rules of ethics and deontology became a priority. These must be respected. Due to the amplitude of media development today, the control of information is made difficult by the large volume of data circulating on the Internet. Only the ethical and moral values of the media specialist can maintain the quality of the information provided.

2 Results and discussions

2.1 Media ethics

Media ethics boils down to the moral capacity of the media specialist to contribute to the democratization of society, to supporting free expression, to encouraging citizens to get involved in changing society, to take a stand, by providing correct information. Honesty with which to treat and inform the public must be one of the basic pillars of the media man. Integrity, honesty, credibility are the most valuable things a media specialist can have. Thus, a media specialist who no longer enjoys the credibility of the public can no longer have representativeness with what he says or does. There are a number of ethical obligations that a media specialist must know and respect in their day-to-day work.

There is a strong connection between ethics and social responsibility. The job of journalists, of media people, is to always tell the truth. The primary role is to educate, to culturalize the public. Assuming this role requires compliance with an ethical, moral and deontological code with respect to the principles of social responsibility.

Mass media cater to communities of various sizes, especially large communities. That is why media people must provide correct and relevant information. Besides these, media people are the ones who can capitalize on

their public influence through various campaigns and social responsibility projects. We can say that assuming the simple fact that each of us is responsible determines involvement in what is happening around. Journalists are the ones who own the information. With this I am in control. I can get communities of people to bring about change. It gets people involved, aware of the problems and how to solve them.

Media ethics refers to freedom of expression as well as the freedom to inform the public correctly. It can be seen as a powerful weapon to defend democracy, to defend the right to have access to correct information. Moral and ethical requirements in the mass media contribute to the protection of civil rights and freedoms. It contributes to maintaining an active, vigilant society where normality and freedom are defended.

Looking at the media professional from the point of view of the ethical ideal, it can be seen that he is perhaps the least constrained by a code. It is observed that many of the ethical norms that the media specialist should respect are often not found in the legislation in force. Thus, under these conditions, being ethical in the media is largely determined by the honesty, the degree of professionalism and the morality of each media specialist. However, today there are media institutions where media specialists are obliged to comply with a code of ethics specific to the institution in their day-to-day activity.

Often the media specialist is considered the "watchdog of democracy". This association makes us see a great connection between the moral structure of each professional in this field and the ethical norms they must respect. The media specialist's fight for democracy also means respecting ethical and deontological norms.

Several theories have been formulated over time regarding the ethical norms that the media specialist must respect. The ones that inspired models adapted by each media trust are the codes of professional journalists in the United States of America.

The main ethical and deontological norm of the media specialist is the desire to find out the truth in any situation and make it public. Having the right information, not being influenced and/or bribed is about ethics and morality. It is a powerful weapon in the hands of the media specialist. He has the opportunity to have access to information that a simple citizen does not have access to. Under these conditions, the media specialist must seek the truth, present it realistically and correctly, thus creating an overall picture for the simple citizen. He must find the correct information, filter it and present it in the most accessible form. Only in this way can it help people in the communities to clearly understand what is happening. The correct presentation of information determines the future actions of people in the community/communities.

A media specialist must have integrity and honesty. He must be honest and courageous in discovering the truth, as well as in reporting and interpreting it. In everyday practice, these qualities help the media specialist in searching for new topics for the general public. It helps him in his search for new credible sources.

A serious documentation respecting journalistic principles ultimately leads to correct information of the public. Ethics and deontology oblige the media specialist to provide the general public with an overview of the subject being presented. Obliges the provision of clear and pertinent explanations, clear evidence. Obliges the provision of details to help outline the case presented as correctly as possible.

The second main ethical and deontological norm of the mass media specialist is his power to remain impartial and integrity, only in the service of the public and not in serving certain interests.

The third main ethical and deontological norm of the media specialist is the ability not to minimize harm. There are situations where telling the truth means harming someone (eg sending them to prison, closing their business, etc.). Is it ethical? Ethical and moral is the search for the truth and its presentation without hiding the evil under the rug. The difference between behaving ethically or not in such situations comes down to media ethics.

The media specialist has at his disposal the most powerful weapon: journalistic independence. The media professional is only responsible for correctly informing the public. It is ethical for him not to respond to the interests of the employer, the collaborators and/or the interests of some political parties. He must answer only to his audience but without violating the contractual conditions of the workplace. The specialist must follow the rules of the workplace but present only the truth to his audience.

Freedom of communication is expressed through interpersonal communication and media communication. In interpersonal communication, the rights and freedoms of the individual represent ethical foundations. In media communication, the autonomy of the institutions must be correlated with the freedom of expression as well as with the responsibilities of those employed, in the functioning of the right to information.

2.2 The impact of COVID-19 on media ethics

The World Health Organization in February 2020 announced that the COVID-19 pandemic was also followed by an "infodemic" of misinformation. Since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing measures

have been imposed. These measures were considered the only effective ones in the absence of a vaccine and/or an adequate treatment already in use.

Thanks to highly accessible mass media and social networks, people have been more connected and united than ever before. Thus social distancing measures have become limitations only on a physical level. The power of influence through media channels has proven to be extraordinarily high. More or less verified, more or less correct, more or less true information has been widely spread through the mass media. These have often led to the threat of compliance with the restrictions imposed and assumed by governments, globally.

Social media use has increased greatly during the pandemic. It emerged as an alternative to the limitation imposed by legislation when people were forced to stay indoors. Digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc. have become the main place for socializing. These digital platforms have rapidly turned into a large marketplace for discussion and information sharing. During the pandemic people have become accustomed to posting every aspect of their lives on social media. Simultaneously with the posts, they began to collect information already posted on unknown groups and pages. They started to collect information from all fields but especially about the COVID-19 virus. A change in preferences among users was also noted.

During the pandemic, there was a lot of information circulated in the media that was not verified. These often caused a strong negative impact on people. False information, especially related to the COVID-19 virus, spread on social media or certain media channels regarding the virus has brought confusion to people's minds. A large part of the people began to reject the importance of the aggressiveness of the disease. Some even stopped following social distancing rules.

The interruption of professional life has led to spending more time on all social networks. This led to an increase in the problems of racism and social and economic inequality. This has led to an increase in cases of depression and anxiety among the population.

Governments as well as public authorities have tried to intervene quickly in the problem of disinformation and its consequences. They took administrative measures. The methods were diverse, depending on the specifics of the population in each country. The case of Germany is eloquent, where then-chancellor Angela Merkel urged citizens to disregard misinformation appearing in the press and/or on social media regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Angela Merkel invited all citizens to get information only from official sources.

In Romania, the decree declaring a state of emergency allowed the Minister of the Interior to suspend access to online media and/or the license for traditional media in situations of misinformation about COVID-19.

An example in this sense is that of the website stiridemoment.ro. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is the one who requested the closure of the site. The site has repeatedly published materials with "alarmist" expressions that "generated panic". The materials had "completely false titles". This was also the motivation of the Strategic Communication Group.

The reason for the decision, according to the Strategic Communication Group, was that the titles of the posted materials are completely false. The headlines are not related to officially announced decisions.

A concrete example is the article with the title "Kaufland, Auchan, Metro, Carrefour and Lidl are closing on Monday", dated March 15, 2020. The article was accessible at the following link: <https://stiridemoment.ro/se-inchid-de-monday-kaufland-auchan-metro-carrefour-and-lidl/>.

The title of the material had nothing to do with the content of the article, namely a statement by Mr. Dan Șucu, owner of the Mobexpert group. The information presented in the title of the article was officially refuted by the press release published on March 18, 2020 by the Association of the Large Commercial Networks in Romania.

The ethical slippages of the Romanian media regarding the subjects related to the COVID-19 pandemic were frequent. Words intended to alarm the population were used. It was exaggerated. A serious tone was used by some presenters of news bulletins and/or shows. These represent only some of the elements that show the violation of ethical norms. It shows a violation of the main role of the media: to INFORM correctly and truthfully, not to alarm, not to shock, not to misinform the population.

3 Conclusions

The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has also brought a communication crisis, often causing chaos among the population. From one day to the next, new data was discovered. Some of these were wrong. Others were uncertain. What is certain is that everyone has run into the unknown.

Always soliciting and presenting expert opinions and information is the most ethical course a media professional can take. Not to make assumptions related to a certain species, not to create panic among the population through alarmist stories, are simple rules related to deontology and media ethics.

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