

# ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDIA

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## **Abstract:**

Nowadays doesn't exist general concept of ethical principles which the society should use as a basis. The basis of this paper is to present what is the current status of the society to the ethics, specially ethics of the media and how the media face and co-create themselves. Special attention is kept for the ethics in boulevard.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Tabloid, Media, Social

## **1. Introduction**

The media, as bearers and information intermediaries play in the lives of the citizens of developed nations a significant role. It is almost impossible to completely avoid a long-term contacts with them.

Media have a big power – to inform in a short period, practically immediately, a huge amount of people. The power is also in influencing the public verdict, in providing information in a manner which is beneficial for particular object. Therefore social responsibility of media is in informing public objectively, correctly, media should provide audience with all information with the space for creating their own opinion.

## **2. Objective**

The target is to present and show that media are social phenomenon which essentially influence the quality of life of many people. From the role of media in the society arose the demand of the society on compliance of ethics in the area of media. The basis is to present what is the current status of the society to the ethics, specially ethics of the media and how the media face and co-create themselves. Special attention is kept for the ethics in boulevard.

## **3. Ethical responsibility of media**

Ethical responsibility of media is based on the ethical responsibility of the society and arising from the ethical, responsible and correct entrepreneurial environment. One of the objectives of the entrepreneurial subjects is to follow their matters of interest – the cumulation of the profit which can be positively satisfaction of their customers and

business partners. The good relationship between business partners, between co-workers within the company should be anchored in the internal rules and principles, which should be valid and obligatory for each employee and business partner. Internal principles and rules of the company represent the basic part of the corporate ethics, the higher level represents principles and rules of the society which should be reflected in the laws.

In the field of the media, the set of rules represents ethical principles of media organizations, ethical codexes which are subordinate to the local law. Within the European Union is then local law subordinate to the directives and recommendations of the European Union.

The document of the European Commission, mentioning problematics of social responsibility, is the document Green Book, which defines corporate social responsibility as "a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society ... an increasing number of European companies recognise their social responsibility more and more clearly and consider it as a part of their identity." Here is important the expression voluntary, which means that is more the issue of the personal responsibility and personal ethics. In fact it should be long-lasting and persistent commitment of the companies, which should lead to a better working environment, better working conditions of the employees and through this to a better society.

The reason thanks to which the ethical principles are broken most often is above already mentioned objective for existence of media corporations – profit. For individual employee can be beneficial winning of personal advantage, personal benefit or financial profit. In order to meet the highest interest – viewer rating – of the audience, the media workers recourse to the permanent criticism. It's really very easy to find fault with members of government, private or public companies or the situation in the society. Big fault of today's media is hint for stunts, through showing negativism and simplifying facts.

Information ethics is based on the general principles of ethics. As Karel Janos already wrote in his book: "Information ethics is defined as the area of morality applied in the creation, distribution, transformation, storage, searching, using and organizing of information." Information ethics is based on the basic rules how to behave when working with information.

The target of information ethics is not only correctness or incorrectness of a certain way of dealing with information but also broader implication of certain structures used to transform information. Information ethics examines the influence of information on humanity and society. We distinguish microethics and macroethics.

Macroethics problems relate to the entire society and are concerning to impact of information technology on the society. Typical macroethics problem is unequal access to information, vulnerability of information societies. Macroethics morally assesses practices and rules which coming from microethics.

Microethics is associated with the individual behaviour of individuals and own imparting of information, typical example is protection of privacy, intellectual property protection the issue of data security.

Information ethics explains and evaluates the evolution of moral values in the information area as well as development of ethical conflicts, discusses hidden contradiction in the information theory and practise, dispel myths and correct false and incorrect information.

I would like also to mention the most common wrongdoing against the information ethics according to K. Janos:

- From position of creator – publication of misleading information, bad or missing citation, needless to increase the prestige of publishing
- From the position of intermediary – incorrectly provided information, incorrect usage the rules of spelling, disregard of copyright, censorship
- From the position of user – non using of received information (e.g. managers)

The ethical problems of information ethics is concentrated mainly in the following principles:

- Impartiality of news service – transparent, objective, balanced and true
- Personal responsibility of the journalist – journalist responsibility to the employer and also to the audience. Sometimes happens that the journalists becomes more of the direct participant of the report, than a disinterested observer. We can ask ourselves e.g. if the reporter should continue in the preparing the news or try to avoid suicide attempt.
- Conflict of interest – is in case when journalist is involved in multiply interests, except of having personal interest in his reportage has simultaneously other - also non working interest – however closely linked with his job as a journalist.
- Invasion of privacy – the right to privacy is one of the fundamental human rights and media often violate it. It's not just tabloids which are searching hot details from the lives of celebrities, very often we can see violation of privacy in news concerning victims of crimes.
- Bribes – we can speak about bribes when journalist is expecting for his work financial, material or other benefit in case that he will give a good account of themselves
- Plagiarism is closely related to the citation ethics. We speak about the copying and plagiarism if journalist copy somebody else's texts and present them as his own texts
- Falsehood – is such procedure of a journalist who can deceive the readers , viewers or provider of information, for example if for obtaining information is pretending to be someone else.

The controversial method of obtaining information is also mentioned in the book Media ethics by Phillip Patterson and Lee Wilkins. Journalist Nellie Bly should write for tabloid New York World story about the practices in the mental institutions Blackwell's Island. To get there, she was pretending madness, after getting into this

institution, her role was to stay there as long as possible to observe rough treatment that allegedly in this institution flourished. The published stories attracted a lot of readers and made from her a celebrity.

One of the serious ethical problems in media is choosing of news, concealing of real problems and replacing them with the pseud problem and empty information. The main news in almost all mainstream television channels have the same content and present to the audience 5 - 7 events that happen in the world added with the news from local country. The main news are full of sensations, family tragedies, traffic accidents, hot news from the life of celebrities, at the end finishing with something positive – very often the story of animals. Penetration of entertainment genres into the news called infotainment is used to keep audience interested in news. This wave came from US into Europe and quickly found its sympathizers among professional news journalists and also audience. Infotainment is link between information with entertainment which is in conflict with traditional understanding of news which should bring correct information about serious social and political events which happen in the country and in the world. There is several reasons why infotainment is so popular in news:

- News should be attractive for the audience
- News must generate profit, news is part of showbis and must apply its rules, in the past was not expecting that news should generate money – for this purpose was transmitted other entertainment programmes
- To write about the serious problems is exacting task, there is no demand to go deeper into social and cultural problems – bring information from air crashes, press conferences, traffic accidents is much more easier and cheaper
- It is not attractive to write about the serious problems
- Popularity of the news and anchorman – anchorman, same as the politician, is struggling for the favour of the audience and doesn't want that he will be connected with the themes that the audience rather would not hear

The basic answer of representatives of media sector to the disgruntlement with the news is, that if people would not be interested in this kind of news, they would not watch it. Viewer ratings is for each medium the measurement of the success and quality. If people watch our news – then this news are correct.

The sad truth is that management of the media companies is not willing to spend more sources, and also money to produce high quality news, because wide audience will not recognize it.

Solution from this situation could be partially internet and new media, which allows a better choice. Thanks to new communication channels and online TV's on internet can viewer obtain information about anything from any part of the world and choose programmes which best fit his interests. Information are still more often obtained from internet, blogs and social networks and the official news are going to be ignored.

It's not unusual to see people in front of the screen with the tears in their eyes watching their favourite soap opera. It might seem that they believe everything what they see in the TV. As Anna Remisova wrote in her book Media Ethics: „Everything what brings media is not a reality, but just the image of the reality, which somebody

intermediate to us. Also the facts which are objective, are incorporated into a context and different people might understand them differently. Media does not represent real world, media even with greatest effort of truthfulness intermediate just some facts and events through someones view, opinion. It is than very important to assure audience about the fact that media does not represent reality, but only images, representations, recordings, reconstructions of events.“

New technologies and media essentially influence and spread the possibility of choice for the audience and with this also his freedom of choice. For the possibility of the high quality media products is also important increase in standard of living of audience. The audience should be financial independent and afford to pay extra money for channels which are not interrupted with commercials and are intellectually beneficial.

Very often in the context of media ethics is mentioned tabloid. Tabloid is a medium that brings themes which are sensational to engage attention of the widest audience. Tabloid editors are actively seeking out for news about so called celebrities, information about their privacy, publish unauthorized, partially and very often false reports and articles referring to unidentified source who asked not to be named. Tabloids have bold graphic colouring, prevailing pictorial and graphical part above the text.

Tabloid crosses any rules which is dangerous for politicians, celebrities, owners themselves and for all citizens. It becomes inpredicable power. What is on yellow journalism so interesting? Boulevard offers stories that people are interested in, which entertain them and inform which astonished us. Inaccurate investigation, one-side reporting, incorrect handling with information and facts is the best way how to disappoint the most sincere reader. The main principle of all the newspapers and magazines says, that everything what is inside, must be true.

Boulevard cross the borders of the ethics very often. Research of the media shows that people boulevard read and want even if they don't trust it.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Generally people and media feel the need for existence of moral rules, and therefore they are looking for it. Media as the institutions which report and also creates the meaning of the public, create a lot of ethical issues. Media inform us about events but also about ethical standards, which also co-create. Specially electronic media which are dominant in fastness, interactivity, the power of screen displaying, attractiveness enables them to compete with reality.

In today's global economic environment operates a big number of economic subjects oriented primarily not only into generating profit, but also for serving with their products to the public. They are applying ethical standards in their activities. One way orientation on profit does not correspond with long term profitability of the enterprise and also to good reputation to its customers.

Media represents risk industrial sector. It represents quickly developing sector of industry with constant and many times unpredictable changes. Specific for this branch is also unstable audience, majority of products with short life timespan. Media are facing two spheres of social life – media and economic. As of its originality, media didn't come into existence to generate profit, but during its evolution they became one of the prospering part of entrepreneurship. Key social challenge in front of which media stand is such integration of entrepreneurial and media activities, which should keep basic mission of media, which should be serving in public interest. A lot of media concerns ignore this challenge and their activities are primary targeted on profit.

Ethical code represents document which contain ethical requirements of each one, who works or represent the company. As per business dictionary is defined as: „a written set of guidelines issued by an organization to its workers and management to help them conduct their actions in accordance with its primary values and ethical standards.“ Ethical code should be part of company culture and should be followed by its employees and representatives.

Unusualness of media ethics code lies in that it is applied for a big number of people, who represents media company, but are not employed in. Basic functions of media enterprise are:

- Regulation of behaviour of each individual of media enterprise in accordance with professional ethical norms and media code
- Help in solution of conflict moral situations in which have individual problems to get his bearings
- Form of habits to assess his acting and acting of others in accordance with ethical code
- Help in solution of conflicts in interpersonal communication in the workplace, also between the enterprise and other group of interest – for example audience and channel
- Limit for generating profits of media enterprise

Each media enterprise should have its own ethical code. These codes are very important for doing of this profession. The code should be in accordance with Principles of International Federation of Journalists.

Ethical codes of media enterprises should respect national and international ethical codes, which regulate professional behaviour of workers in media. Respecting of these professional codes should be inevitable part of media enterprises and breaking of rules and principles included in the code should be sanctioned inside of the company. This will be differentiating point which will distinguish ethical code of media enterprises from other enterprises.

Incorporating of the ethical code in the media enterprise is necessary, but not sufficient. It is required to create other forms of development for ethics. First if all must exist ways thanks to which employees of the media company but also freelancers working in this area can ask questions about ethical code, to find help in solution of moral issues or report breach of ethical code. Company can establish free hot lines.

For solving of the issues and assessment of suggestions could be establish ethical commission, ethical council or whatever we will call it.

In companies where ethical code have been introduce should be help regular trainings and courses from the ethics, ethical principles and standards. The employee who is educated in the ethics, better understand why it is importnat to take into account others and prevent harming of them with his activities and behaviour, do not generate profit based on this.

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