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MODERN MEDIA REALITY AS A CHALLENGE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

This article presents the problem of ethical values presented by the world of the media in relation to the life of social units and their adaptation to life in society. The challenge for education today is not only to teach young people the selection of information received from the media, but also to educate young generations of journalists who will be guided by specific rules and codes of ethics.

__Keywords:__ ethics; higher education; media; media ethics; society; journalists; consumer rights.

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СУЧАСНІ МЕДІА РЕАЛІЇ ЯК ВИКЛИК ДЛЯ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

У статті висвітлюється проблема етичних цінностей, представлених світовими засобами масової інформації щодо життя соціальних одиниць та їх адаптації до життя в суспільстві. Завдання сьогоднішньої освіти полягає не тільки в тому, щоб навчити молодь обирати інформацію, отриману від засобів масової інформації, а й виховувати молодих поколінь журналістів, які будуть керуватися спеціальними правилами та кодексами етики.

__Ключові слова:__ етика; вища освіта; ЗМІ; медіа-етика; суспільство; журналісти; права споживачів.

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СОВРЕМЕННАЯ МЕДИА-РЕАЛЬНОСТЬ КАК ВЫЗОВ ДЛЯ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

В статье представлена проблема этических ценностей, представленных мировыми СМИ в отношении жизни социальных единиц и их адаптации к жизни в обществе. Задача образования сегодня заключается не только в том, чтобы научить молодых людей выбирать информацию, полученную от средств массовой информации, но и воспитывать молодое поколение журналистов, которые будут руководствоваться конкретными правилами и кодексами этики.

__Ключевые слова:__ этика; высшее образование; СМИ; медиа-этика; общество; журналисты; права потребителей.

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Introduction. The following article consists of two parts. In the first part, I am going to discuss the critical attitude of media employees when it comes to professional ethics, trying to identify the main reasons for such an approach. I am then going to point out to those areas of media activity which are in general either not covered by the codes of ethics or are treated insufficiently and inadequately, particularly when the modern conditions of the functioning of media are taken into account, what of course affects every area of human life, especially in relation to the education of new social units through schools, universities and other educational institutions. In the second part, I am going to discuss a few examples of ethical codes, expressing at the same time certain criticism with regard to some general concepts of the ethics of media.

It should be noted that professional codes of ethics determine the rules of conduct of certain professionals, whereas their purpose is not the welfare of these people as such, but rather the wider good of a given social group – the recipients of services in question (e.g. students). The code of ethics would be therefore designed specifically for media professionals, but it would serve the well-being of media recipients. In other words, the aim of any media ethical code should not be the protection of journalists, publishers, editors or managers from various temptations, so that to keep their conscience clear of besmearing, but rather the safeguarding of the rights of their recipients. The existence of clearly formulated ethical principles allows the recipient to realise what they can actually expect from media and they can also understand to what extent their consumer rights might have been violated. What therefore follows from this point is that media codes of ethics cannot be confined to a category of prohibitions and obligations, but they should also take into account the rights of the recipients, in other words, actually every member of the society, which results from that today we cannot imagine our life without a mass media.
Another reason to support the practicality of the ethical codes in this context is the education of future journalists. Getting to know the code, analysing its specified rules and discussing them with a lecturer or other students might allow the prospective media employees to become aware of the existence of moral conflicts typical for the media world, what might allow them later to anticipate and avoid any such encounters. The precondition to provide a solution to any given moral conflict is, first of all, to become aware of it and to word it clearly. Many mistakes and glitches occur due to the haste and fatigue, what seems to be more characteristic of a media employee than an office worker. It should be said that a college course of ethics preparing for working in media (journalism, public relations) is for many prospective media employees the only opportunity to consider certain ethical issues in a more depth. The lack of professionalism of the Polish media was evidenced when they became the only broadcaster to report that it could have been possible to avoid the victims of tsunami that had hit the Maldives, had not an employee of one of the Maldivian ministries

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confused the word 'tsunami' with the name 'T. Sunami'. The message, reported by the Polish Press Agency, was taken from one of the websites that opposed the dictatorial government of the Maldives [18, p. 88].

It seems that the type and extent of the impact of media on consumers is a debatable matter. If, however, we were to accept that this impact is rather negligible, then the creation of media ethics would make no sense. The disputes concerning the way in which media impact their recipients do not mean, however, that the formulation of ethical rules and their compliance becomes less important. The sufficient condition for the application of ethical standards in this case is the very probability of such an impact. We also have to realise that a large part of our knowledge about the world as well as our perceptions and stereotypes come from media. And because we make decisions based on our knowledge of the world, the mere existence of media message is sufficient to consider media as capable of 'influencing' if not the course of events, then at least the mentality and spiritual condition of the society.

In order to formulate ethical principles, it is therefore necessary to determine the type of influence of the media in question. Sometimes mass media might directly arouse certain political events. Media experts draw attention to the stimulating effect of television on the revolution in Romania in 1989 as well as on the genocide in Rwanda. Also the press is able to play an important role in this regard. It was the press that became the primary forum for political discussion in Spain during the reign of general Franco [4, p. 17, 23]. However, the ability of media to influence the course of events is exaggerated sometimes. An example to this could be the mounting expectations focused on media in the post-communist countries immediately after the fall of regime [12, p. 33]. Such a form of enthusiasm combined with an idealised image of media and their impact on the social life of a country could also be observed in Ukraine. A Ukrainian media expert, Taras Lyko, wrote immediately after the victory of the 'orange revolution': "the true mission of journalism is to ennoble the souls, awaken sensitivity to the painful areas of our era and strengthen the highest values. This task has stood in front of the journalism for centuries and will always do. We cannot talk about human rights, while at the same time forgetting about the right to defend oneself from demoralisation" [10, p. 26]. It is a sad sign of our times that there is almost no one to set such ambitious goals for media in Poland today.

The impact of media on the opinion and behaviour of consumers is not in general very direct, as evidenced by numerous examples (for example, in spite of a slew of one-sided messages in the American media about the relationship of President Clinton with Monica Lewinski, around three-quarters of Americans did not lose their confidence in the president [2, p. 51]). When it comes to the process of transmitting the message, the recipient is not passive (just like the sender), but is actively involved in its interpretation. The final impact of media

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messages would therefore depend on their actual content as well as on the type of recipients in question, representing a defined type of personalities, experiences, education, etc. [2, p. 51]. On the other hand, however, according to a classic thesis by B. Cohen, media do not decide what people think, but rather what people think *about*. In other words, media are often the only source from which we derive information allowing us to build a picture of the modern world. This has important implications for the assessment of the quality of media by the public.

Yet, still much more dangerous seem to be the unintended effects of media. These effects are difficult to predict and it is even harder to counteract them. They are associated mainly with the mechanisms of media functioning, which have recently undergone a form of sudden transformation, and additionally in Poland they took place at the time of the political transition. Some major changes in the way that media function have been caused by the development of technology. As J. Volek states, "hasty computerisation or mass application of new information and communication technologies produces unintended consequences" [17, p. 37]. And it is not only about the creation of the Internet, which on one hand overcomes certain obstacles when it comes to the access to information, but on the other it leads to social isolation. The argument here is also about the creation of satellite TV, which allows reporters to broadcast live from remote locations with no time for a critical reflection and editorship of the transferred material. Modern technologies have significantly reduced the costs of media functioning, what has in turn contributed to their expansion (for example, in Poland, in the early nineties of the last century, several thousands of new press titles were created, most of which have gone bankrupt, however, in a very short time).

According to J. Volek, one of the unintended consequences of an increased presence of technology in media is 'the electronic isolationism'. The author also draws attention to some key assumptions, typically of Western origin, on the positive influence of mass communication[1]. These assumptions are linked to the concept of maximum openness and pluralism of media, but it merely leads to the disintegration of the society-wide communication space into a number of isolated communities ('non-communicative islands') showing a decreasing interest in a broader debate (political, religious, trade union, etc.). According to J. Volek, the public sphere is increasingly shrinking now and the main reason for this contraction is the emergence of new technologies.

There are also many other negative and unintended impacts of media. Television is generally accused of being 'a drug and tool destroying and depriving people of their human ability to imagine and picture', while at the same time some people postulate to subject it to a strict supervision [7, p. 71].

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[1] Communicating has thus by itself become a social virtue [17, p. 40].

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Media are also accused of creating a complete and homogenous image of the reality, one for which there is no alternative (Adorno and Horkheimer).

The development of electronic media has also caused changes in the way we understand information. According to research, analytical thinking is being progressively replaced with 'emotional thinking' [11, p. 67]. This might in turn lead to some profound changes in our system of values, the first manifestation of which, according to Z. Sareło, was probably the emergence of rebellious youth movements in 1968. The crisis of values has also contributed to the perpetuation of the consumptionist way of life, on the other hand though, it has also led many people to search for values in the realm of esotericism. Z. Sareło mentions also about the "growing aspirations of one's autonomy, which among other things are expressed in claims to one's own personal morality and the right to be different; suspicion when it comes to the ideology and unwillingness to get engaged in politics; the loss of our sense of security" [15, p. 34].

The impact that technology exerts on media should make us think whether certain rules on the use of modern technologies should not be put into effect. This refers to both direct (e.g. the aforementioned live broadcasts) and indirect, long-term effects of the presence of technology in media. It seems that the ethical codes in this context should also take into account the unintentional, and typically associated with the development of technology, effects of media on their varied audiences.

One of the ethical norms is the principle of serving the interests of the society. It turns out, however, that the concept of public service, even if it is not immediately discarded, is sometimes perceived far differently as compared to the understanding attributed to it by the fathers of ethical codes. First of all, at least in the political transition countries [2], public service is understood by media as a quest to build civil society. By burdening the media with the task of shaping a particular model of the society, however, we agree in fact to promote a certain vision of some ideal concepts, which do not exist in the real world. As noted by K. Ogorzały, the term 'civil society' takes the form of a postulate in the Polish press that is based on certain normative assumptions. The author believes that this concept is used in the press for 'diagnostic' reasons, because with its aid one can determine how democratic the Polish society in fact is. The definition of this concept is also based on the assumption that there is a clear line of division between the society and the state, which can be presented "as if these two entities could not be reconciled in the same arena, thereby suggesting that the

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[2] The temptation to burden media with the task of mobilizing the society to undertake various grassroots activities does not seem to be typical of countries in the transition period only. Already A. Tocqueville claimed: "when people do not have strong and enduring ties, one can induce them to cooperate only by persuading each individual that their very personal interests require voluntary efforts with those of others. This objective can be fully achieved only by means of the press (...)" [3, p. 121].

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state exists outside of the society and is not one of the functional social systems"
[13, p. 82].

It should be also noted that media are not outside of the society and that
one of the elements of civil society are civic media [8, p. 76]. In other words,
one cannot have civil society without civic media, and the other way round –
civic media cannot exist without the civil society. From this point of view, to say
that the duty of media is to build a civil society is a form of truism. One can
certainly assume that media have gone faster than the rest of the society from the
realm of totalitarianism to democracy, but this assumption treats media as an
intellectual and political elite[3], what might actually raise a number of further
problems. Perhaps, therefore, that overall postulate[4] for the creation of civil
society should be converted into a minimalist postulate, according to which the
role of media is not to get actively involved in the process of building the civil
society, but rather to remove obstacles, should they appear.

The gap between the society and the state is not merely a theoretical
construct propagated by media to create a space for discourse, but it actually
manifests itself in practical situations. According to B. Dobek-Ostrowska and
R. Wiszniewski, "the lack of understanding of social, political and economic
phenomena and processes as well as the lack of identification with public
decisions and choices by the citizens generates a form of conflict between them
and the authorities" [5, p. 25]. Media do often become an area of manifestation
of these conflicts, because both sides are trying to win their sympathy[5]. This in
turn puts media under a strong temptation to advocate for one of these parties.
This temptation is twice as strong when media get entangled in various political
and economic affairs and when they try to meet certain expectations of the
society.

When watching various entertainment programmes (for example, in both
commercial and public media in Poland), it is fairly hard not to get the
impression that the term 'aesthetic mediocrity' might actually refer to their vast
majority. We can obviously expect media to raise the aesthetic and intellectual
level of their entertainment programmes, but one should remember that we shall
not express this desire in a form of moral order, as there will always be a group
of customers who will treat any disappearance of worthless content as a
limitation upon their right to entertainment.

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[3] One can have the impression that this was the way that the editors of 'Gazeta Wyborcza' magazine
comprehended the task of media, which as it seems, at least in some areas, has contributed to a decline
of social trust in it.
[4] "The 'civil society' concept is gaining the form of a postulate in the press, behind which there are
always some normative principles understood as the most basic values for the functioning of
democracy" [13, p. 82].
[5] An example here could be the conflict concerning the construction of a road through the valley of
Rospuda.

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To impose the duty 'to create and shape the taste' as a moral obligation on media is not only equal with granting them with the right to decide what is valuable and what is 'aesthetically mediocre', but in fact it is also the first step towards transforming media into an instrument of transformation of the world[6]. Linking media with the world of politics and business might lead to a situation where there are various ideas as to how media coverage should look in terms of its aesthetic as well as intellectual and moral value.

One of the reasons why media are allegedly biased because of 'their very nature' is the need for information selection. This is carried out according to various criteria, whereby the standard of 'media attractiveness'[7] does not always turn out to be the most important one. One should also notice that this criterion of 'media attractiveness' of a given piece of information (just as any other kind of media message) derives from the very fact that media recipients draw their attention to the content "from the field of interests which have been reflectively thought-out and freely adopted" [15, p. 37]. Those interests, as claimed by psychologists, can be awaken and nurtured. On the other hand, one cannot deny that very often the general subject of media discourse covers topics which are considered important by the public, with issues not meeting this requirement appearing in media only occasionally [9, p. 43].

Another important selection criterion of information is to what extent it is intelligible by the recipients, what among other things involves the degree of the latter's mastery of the language in which the information in question is expressed. Contrary to the opinion of some journalists[8], this does not mean that media content should always be adapted to the intellectual level of its recipients. Since media provide for one of the main sources of the knowledge about the world (apart from the education system), so it seems that they should also cater for the recipient to understand some basic concepts.

The development of technology, as a result of which various negative phenomena, such as 'social isolation', can be observed, seems to impose on media the duty to care for 'their interactive element' of communication. Interactive media can be understood as including the Internet[9] (and other media

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[6] C.J. Bertrand does not hide his sympathies for the Marxist ideas.

[7] According to the model of J. Galtung and M.H. Ruge, any information published in media must relate to short-term events which are: easily noticeable, clear, meaningful for the recipients, in line with the expectations, unexpected, repetitive, balancing (contrasting with other events), relating to the major political forces and social elites, personalised and negative. The more of these conditions any media message can target, the higher its place in the news [1, p. 154].

[8] When in 1995, in Poland, an opinion poll showed that 42% of consumers did not understand the content of television news, journalists from one of the editorial offices declared the society as illiterate [2, p. 134].

[9] But as noted by K. Jakubowicz, it is not quite obvious that the Internet is a place of authentic discourse. It does not provide for "deliberative interactions leading to an enlightened understanding of problems and transforming various individual attitudes into consensus and common approach" [18, p. 25].

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using it, e.g. web TV, internet portals of newspapers, etc.), however, one should not forget that traditional media can also give the possibility, albeit to a much lesser degree, for their consumers to participate in the communication process. One of the forms of such a participation could be letters to the editor (including electronic), which, as far as it is possible, should be replied to. But these could also be special programmes with the participation of audience, in which ordinary people can talk about their lives and their problems. Talk shows, which are sometimes regarded as being the symbol of evolution of the modern media[10], offer an example to this category of programmes. Another form of 'interactivity' can be also provided by the opportunity to choose programmes from a large number of TV channels on offer, so the recipient can actually create their own media content (make their own "media content assembly" [6, p. 205]). The scope of the recipient's contribution here is somehow limited, however, especially on account of the increasing standardisation of the programme offers in electronic media and, on the other hand, because of the recipient's general competencies, that is their general knowledge about the world as well as the extent of their interests or language proficiency, etc. This fact has an important implication for the understanding of media responsibility.

Our participation in the common media space leads many recipients to confuse reality with television fiction[11], while the lack of any such participation leads them to social isolation and breaking of the process of social communication. In view of this, are we in fact able to word ethical principles relating to media so that their use would not entail negative effects? Even if we assume that both phenomena are harmful, because they do not lead to the development of an individual, but have a degrading effect, what becomes necessary is the need to choose between the greater and lesser 'evil'. This would mean that media are inherently bad, and the society should find ways to counteract this evil. The most effective method to counter this would be to totally abandon media messages (perceived as bad messages, directly or indirectly), which in turn would mean an even more drastic rupture of social communication, and would therefore be a counterproductive endeavour.

Ideal media would therefore need to be materially different from the actual media, and the mere fact that such ideal media do not in fact exist makes us think over the conditions of the possibility of their existence. Such media would primarily need to present a coherent view of the world. As it is clear from the research, nowadays, such an image is more and more fragmented, volatile

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[10] Some authors even tend to speak of a 'talk-show democracy' [19, p. 57].

[11] This process seems to be favoured by the phenomenon of 'thinking laziness' related to the informational part of media. According to J. Rudniański, this concept is caused by a passive receiving of large amounts of information. Because of the sheer volume of information, its recipients become unresponsive and they do not attempt to critically evaluate any messages, transferring this passivity to their surrounding world [14, p. 89].

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and contradictory. Furthermore, this image of the world should not be too different from the image that the younger generations receive from their parents. Any excessive difference between these pictures would lead to the breach of tradition and a further impediment of any consensus between generations. Similarly, such a picture of the world should not be made from too many information elements, so that recipients do not develop harmful habits of passive perception of their surrounding reality. It would be also highly appropriate if any information relating to the image of the world, other than the one accepted in a given community, was accompanied by a suitable commentary. Some items and problems that should not be critically discussed could also be identified, since they would constitute for the basis of sustainability of the culture and the wider social structure. Any community wishing to keep their identity intact would need to have their own media, which should remain in a relative isolation from media belonging to other communities. The basis for the functioning of media should be the rule that any lack of information is better than virtually incorrect or incorrectly transmitted information, as it does not lead to the degradation of an individual.

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