

Media Ethics in the Guidelines of Western Media Organizations and Guidance Documents for Ethical Coverage

Mariam Adamashvili

Assistant Professor

Georgian National University SEU

Abstract

What does ethics mean? It is a philosophical science related to morality. Media ethics is a unity of rules and principles, which are formed based on professional values. The principles of media ethics determine what is permissible/acceptable and/or unacceptable in carrying out professional activities. Along with the rights and functions of journalists, the obligations of media representatives are gathered in ethics guidelines, thus creating guidelines for professional standards. The goal of ethical codes is to protect the public interest along with professional independence, therefore, in the civilized world, in all developed countries there are manuals of ethical norms, although the latter can be found under many names: code of ethics and/or charter, standards of conduct, etc. One of the functions of ethics codes is to protect the rights of the audience and improve the quality of public awareness about the rules of professional conduct, which in turn increases the credibility of the media organization.

The article presents the ethical codes of the Western media and journalistic associations, which refer to the coverage of religious issues, and discusses how important it is to use them in the implementation of journalistic activities.

Keywords: media ethics, ethical codes, ethical journalism.

Introduction

Relevance of the study: Discussions have long been open in terms of the spiritual and moral values of media activities. Adoption of ethical norms while carrying out professional activities has turned into an issue to be necessarily considered. In his essay – The Best Job in the World – Columbian writer Gabriel García Márquez notes that any kind of journalistic study must be based on three key principles. The first and the foremost necessary condition is – skills and talent; then the understanding that journalistic investigation is not an outstanding genre, as any type of journalistic work is based on investigation and it is a necessary precondition to know that ethics is not a mere prerequisite for mastering, but its inseparable part. Ethics is inseparable from the profession just like in the case of buzzing and a fly.

In the modern world, free mass media is utterly important, as its existence determines the quality of democracy of states, also, the degree of openness of societies. Along with the independence of mass media, the responsibility of a media organization before citizens is a very important task given to states, societies or individuals by civilized world. In most cases, the implementation of the mentioned task depends on the activities of mass media. Therefore, the present-day journalism has developed and turned into action, guidance rules professional standards and ethical norms, which have been included in internal regulations and codices. Most influential brand media organizations have developed their own codex of professional standards and ethical norms and all employees are obliged to adhere to them. Along with the necessity to observe the principles of impartiality, accuracy and fairness in the mentioned regulations, special attention is paid to regulations, which oblige journalists not to allow discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia and abuse on different grounds.

The editorial good faith of the media implies that media organizations shall have the freedom of carrying out journalistic activities without restrictions and without the fear of violent treatment from state authorities. In this regard, public servants should be well aware of the fact that the main task of the media is to inform the society and that the role of the media does not include approving any political forces. The existence of informative, independent and diverse media is essential for rational and

civilized social discourse. Without doubt, the media, just like all public sectors, has shortcomings and examples of unethical conduct. Recently, the ethics of journalists and media, as well as their professional standards have been questioned. Thus, at present, it is the interest of the reputation of media organizations and journalism to double efforts for regaining social trust. Herewith, it should not be believed that silencing media is the way of suppressing dissenting opinion. It means compromising the freedom of information and media. Journalists must take their professional responsibility and respect their codes of ethics. This article reviews codes of ethics of western media organizations observing the guidelines of certain organizations, observance of which is recommended in the process of covering religious events.

Novelty: how must media organizations cover events related to religion? In terms of covering religious issues, what kind of recommendations and media functions are included in the guidelines of western media organizations and the guiding documents of ethical coverage? In these terms, in-depth study has not been implemented yet. And the guidelines of ethical codes of the western brand media are less available in Georgian language, particularly, regarding the coverage of religious issues. This article is an endeavour of eradication of the mentioned problem, though, of course, like any first endeavours, it will not be perfect.

Research goal: the research goal is to make the recommendations and the media functions determined under the guidelines of western media organizations and guiding documents of ethical coverage more available in Georgian language. This will simplify the process of revealing and solving the problems existing in Georgian media sector in terms of covering religious issues.

Research methods: the study is based on the methods recognized and widely applied in social and political sciences. Qualitative data were collected and analysed during the research. The study is based on the documents on ethical codes of the following organizations:

- Editorial standards of BBC
- Editorial code and handbook of the Guardian's practice
- Ethical principles and values of broadcasting news by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
- Journalistic standards of National Public Radio
- Policy of journalistic ethics of the New York Times
- Policy of ethics of the Washington Post
- Editorial handbook of the values of the European Broadcasting Union

1. Editorial Standards of the BBC

The mission of the British public service broadcaster (BBC) is to act according to social interests, serve for all audiences by providing unbiased and outstanding, high quality product, which includes dissemination of information, education and entertainment. In the document providing the activities of the BBC it is noted¹ that as a public broadcaster, the BBC shall be exemplary and its activities shall correspond with highest standards. It is also noted that all personnel of the organization shall be responsible for providing the society with the maximum. The BBC personnel shall serve society and not themselves, therefore, they shall carry out their activities based on public interests and not with the purpose of gaining personal benefit. The BBC places the audience in the epicenter of its activities and it is maximally adapted for the satisfaction of their altering needs.

The editorial values of the BBC are based on the utterly important functions of the media, such as confidence, truth and accuracy. The major fundament of the activities of the British public broadcaster

¹ BBC, „Working at the BBC, OUR CODE OF CONDUCT AND HOW WE WORK TOGETHER“, https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/policiesandguidelines/pdf/bbc_code_of_conduct_feb01_2019.pdf [L.s. 2.11.2023].

is confidence, also, the BBC is devoted to the standards of accuracy and impartiality and it does its best to never mislead the audience on purpose. Impartiality has decisive importance for the personnel of the British public broadcaster. External or personal interests or political pressure do not have any influence on their decisions. The document on the activities of the BBC reads as follows:² “We want to present the world as it is in reality. This means that we show all its parts, human or natural. But we also balance the right of innovative and complex broadcasting to protect the persons lacking protection and avoid insulting someone. Therefore, we know the standards that are expected from us. The same applies to the expectations of the audience in terms of the content.

The operation of the BBC is based on fairness, openness, honesty and direct communication, it treats the authors and the audience with respect. Confidentiality is observed during the operation of the organization: “We do not place information, communication or conversation in public domain, unless there is public interest, which is more important than maintaining its confidentiality”.³ Diversity and inclusion is the major key for all goals of the British public broadcaster, starting from covering the whole United Kingdom and letting the new generation re-discover themselves, to the most creative organization in the world. The BBC respects all persons with their different opinions, thoughts and experiences. Irrespective of age, abilities, sex, diversity of opinions, physical capacity, religion, ethnic origin, race, sexual orientation and social origin.

Any content, which concerns religious issues and which might be insulting for those, who have religious views and beliefs, shall be editorially grounded, in accordance with the expectations of the audience and generally established standards.⁴ Religious belief has vital place in the lives of many people and it is an utterly emotional and sensitive issue. This is an issue, which might result in crime on emotional grounds. Therefore, the media is obliged to prevent unjustified crime. Blasphemy Laws might vary much across the world and the content creators might receive advice from the legal office of the program. The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006, which applies to England and Wales, prohibits the use of the words or behaviour containing threat against human or showing written materials containing threat “if he/she tries to incite religious hatred in this way.”

According to the editorial standards of the BBC,⁵ religious sensitivity has to be considered by all means in terms of celebration of holy days and the main holidays of big world religion, in order to avoid the spreading of excess insulting materials. Drama, comedy and other genres have the freedom to broadcast religion-related issues, but we should always know about the potential insult. Upon the media broadcasting, religious sensitivity towards names, image, gods, rituals, holy scriptures and language, or their application in different religions shall be well-perceived, and their mentioning, in any form, may this be verbal or visual note, shall be ensured within the limits of generally recognized and established standards. The rights to exercise the freedom of thought, conscience and religion is formulated in national and international acts and agreements, among them, in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act in 1998. This includes the freedom to worship, preach, practise and observe. As religion is an inseparable part of numerous people, the British Public Broadcaster demonstrates proper responsibility in terms of the contents of religious programs and the related results.

The producers of religious programs and related content enjoy editorial freedom to publish information regarding various religions and study the issues of belief; Nevertheless, they have to ensure that the religious views of those pursuing certain religion or religious confession and their belief are not subject to insulting treatment. When a religion or religious confession is an object of religious program or

² Ibid.

³ BBC, „Working at the BBC, Our Code of Conduct and How We Work Together“, https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/policiesandguidelines/pdf/bbc_code_of_conduct_feb01_2019.pdf [L.s. 2.11.2023].

⁴ The BBC’s Editorial Standards, p. 87 <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/bbc-editorial-guidelines-whole-document.pdf> [L.s. 2.11.2023].

⁵ Ibid, p. 88.

related content, the religious identity must be understandable for the audience. Unprotected audience must be protected from exploitation and religious programs must not covertly spread religious views or belief.⁶

The producers of the British Public Broadcaster have editorial freedom to reveal belief and study the issues of belief. According to the editorial standards of the BBC,⁷ despite the fact that a religion and religious views might be critical, there must exist a relevant context and critical views are open for challenge. We should not let the contributors to insult other people's belief. Religious results must not be used for recruiting, for example, by means of direct proposal made to the audience to join certain religion. Indications to the positive outcomes of being assigned to any particular religion, usually, will be acceptable. By interactivity related to religious programs, a proper standard of liability must be applied, to let the demonstration of belief and the studying of the issues related to belief. At the same time, religious views and belief must not be abused. According to the BBC editorial standards, a balance will be achieved in the case, if it actively broadcasts an issue and chooses an appropriate form of moderation upon the preparation of a media product.

2. Editorial Code and Handbook of the Guardian's Practice

In the editorial code of the Guardian's practice, it is written that any journalistic activity shall be proportionate to public interests and journalists shall be convinced that the product prepared by them serves public interests. Public interest is a strong basis for the activities of the Guardian, which includes the following:⁸

- Detecting a crime or a threat of committing a crime.
- Protecting public health and safety.
- Protecting from misleading society by an action and/or statements of an individual/organization.
- Disclosing non-performance or probable non-performance of any obligation by a person or organization, which falls under their obligations.
- Disclosing judicial shortcoming
- Rising the issue of public debates or contributing to it, among them, in terms of serious cases of inappropriate, unethical conduct or incompetence towards society.

Journalists must care for providing society with maximally ascertained information. The mistakes must be corrected within the shortest terms. If the audience has received information that has misled them, it is necessary to correct and ascertain such information.⁹ Journalists working in the field of news must always try to be fair and objective upon carrying out their activities and they must understand the impact this might have on their personal biases. Journalists must not publish unascertained or distorted information, which may mislead the audience. Significant inaccuracy, misleading statement must be immediately corrected and, upon necessity, an "apology text" must be published on the site, that will attract attention. Despite the fact that publication is free for editorial office and campaign, a comment, an assumption and a fact must be well distinguished.

Upon covering important events, objectivity and ascertaining information before its publication is particularly important. Avoiding speculations, stereotypes and sensational language are also utterly important.¹⁰ It is inadmissible to discriminate or incite hatred. The journalists must avoid the statements insulting and humiliating person's race, colour, nationality, religion, age and sex, gender identity, sexual

⁶ The BBC's Editorial Standards, p. 224 <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/bbc-editorial-guidelines-whole-document.pdf> [L.s. 2.11.2023].

⁷ Ibid, p. 225.

⁸ The Guardian, "Editorial code of practice and guidance, Guardian News & Media", p.8 https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2023/07/27/GNM_editorial_code_of_practice_and_guidance_2023.pdf

⁹ Ibid, p.9

¹⁰ Ibid, p.14

orientation, disabilities. It is important that the mentioned characteristics are not indicated, unless truly necessary for the story to be covered.¹¹ It is inadmissible to record individuals in public or private places without their consent. A journalist must not threaten, oppress and chase anyone. Journalists must not continue contacting or recording people, when they have already received a refusal. When they have once been asked to leave the place, they must not chase individuals. In the cases of personal grief and/or shock, the interrogations and attitudes must be carried out with compassion and the publication must be prepared with compassion, upon one's discretion.

Journalists must not obtain or publish the materials received through hidden cameras or hidden listening devices; or the materials obtained by interfering with personal or mobile phone calls, notifications or emails; or by unpermitted use of documents or photos; or unpermitted access to digital information. Participation in the misleading or suppression, including, through agents or intermediaries, may be justified only based on public interests and only in the case, when the materials cannot be obtained by other means. The relatives or friends of the persons convicted for or accused of committing a crime, as a rule, must not be identified without their consent, except for the case, when this is essential for the story to be broadcast. Special attention must be paid to naming the victims, insensitive or graphic details or using the photo, which may damage the dignity of the victim.¹²

3. Ethical Principles and Values of Covering News - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The audience of the Associated Press has been privileged to read the news and receive information on current events for more than 170 years. The Associated Press has overcome significant obstacles for disseminating ascertained, balanced and unbiased news among the audience in a sincere and operative way. This efforts of the organization were followed by the public confidence – on any given day, more than a half of the world population watches the contents of the AP news.¹³

In the XXI century, the news is broadcast online, on mobile, print and/or broadcasting media using words, photo and video materials, interactive, graphic or audio techniques more than ever. Irrespective of the dissemination platform, the main goal of the AP is to observe the highest standards of conduct and ethics while broadcasting news. The AP opposes any type of hatred propaganda and it does not use the content, which might be inappropriate, insulting, racist or which may include other kind of discrimination. The AP also observes the confidentiality of the victims and, as a rule, it does not identify them in the text and/or visual materials.¹⁴ The personnel of the editorial office must remember that their stated opinions might damage the reputation of the AP, as an unbiased source of news. They must refrain from stating their views regarding disputed public issues on any public forum, may this be via blogs or social networks.¹⁵

The AP respects copyrights and it does not apply plagiarism. It avoids such conduct and/or activities, which causes the conflict of interests and has negative impact on the principle of fair and accurate coverage of news. For the purpose of creating news, the AP does not use incorrect identification or misleading and it observes the principles of fairness, confidentiality and safety. Every time it presents someone negatively, it makes every effort to give the subject of criticism an opportunity to respond, and in the case of an error and/or inaccuracy, this is corrected immediately, exhaustively and transparently. Inaccuracies, negligence, biases or dissemination of distorted information is inadmissible for the mentioned organization.

¹¹ The Guardian, "Editorial code of practice and guidance, Guardian News & Media", p.7 https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2023/07/27/GNM_editorial_code_of_practice_and_guidance_2023.pdf

¹² Ibid, p.6

¹³ THE ASSOCIATED PRESS STATEMENT OF NEWS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES, <https://www.ap.org/about/news-values-and-principles/downloads/ap-news-values-and-principles.pdf> [L.s. 6.11.2023]

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

Dissemination of information, citations must be accurate and unbiased. The AP always tries to reveal all sources of information, also, protect them through anonymity only when they insist on that, upon spreading vital information and not in the case, when they provide the audience with an opinion or a speculation. Anonymity is observed in the case, when there is no other way for obtaining this information and when they are sure that the source is reliable.¹⁶ Observance of the mentioned principles is general and mandatory for the AP personnel. Their non-observance may lead to disciplinary liability, among them, dismissal, considering the severity of the violation.

Based on the AP rules,¹⁷ the anonymous sources of the material may be used only in the case, when the material is a fact and not an opinion, or a speculation, which is vitally important for the story to be broadcast. Also, the AP observes the anonymity of the source, when it's credibility is undoubted and the source has direct knowledge of the information. The reporters, who plan to use the materials from anonymous source, must inevitably receive approval from the news manager, who is responsible for checking the materials, to truly comply with the AP instructions. The manager must know the identity of the source and he/she is obliged to keep the confidentiality of the source as in the case of a reporter. Only after they make sure that the source materials are examined by the manager, the editors and the producers must allow its use. In the case of anonymity, the AP searches for an additional source for ascertaining the story. A single source will be sufficient only in rare cases – when the materials come from an authoritative figure, who provides the information in such details that its accuracy may not be doubted. The reportage must explain, why the source has asked for anonymity. If the story depends on documents, the author of the reportage must explain in the possible clear way, how he/she has obtained the information.¹⁸

The AP respects the rights of its personnel to actively participate in civil, charity, religious and/or social activities, though, they must avoid such activities, which may cause the conflict of interests or pose a threat to the ability of the AP to broadcast the news fairly and accurately, without being under the influence of a person or an action.¹⁹

4. Journalistic Standards of the National Public Radio

The mission of the NPR is to establish a more informed society in partnership with its member stations, which strengthens the whole world with a deep understanding and appreciation of events, ideas and culture. Therefore, the NPR produces and disseminates news, information and other type of content, which satisfy the highest standards of public service in journalism and cultural expression. The NPR is a news organization, which considers public service to be its primary value. The organization seriously considers the democratic role of its supervision to observe the fundamental principles of honesty, integrity, independence, accuracy, contextual truth, transparency, respect and fairness, this way, it serves its own audience. We know that truth is impossible without active search for diversity of opinions.

The goal of the NPR is to find the truth and to ensure the critical examination of facts. The organization pays attention to the circumstance of placing the facts in the context correctly and does everything to provide the audience with the notice reflecting ultimate reality – starting with the smallest details to the common context. Errors are unavoidable, but the best protection against them is permanent vigilance. For this reason, the NPR reviews the facts systematically and strictly before publications.²⁰ Upon the general assertion of the fact, a reporter and an editor must be able to immediately identify the source

¹⁶ THE ASSOCIATED PRESS STATEMENT OF NEWS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES, <https://www.ap.org/about/news-values-and-principles/downloads/ap-news-values-and-principles.pdf> [L.s. 6.11.2023]

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ National Public Radio - An American non-profit media organization, “NPR Ethics Handbook”, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/688139552/accuracy#accuracyinourreporting> [L. s. 6.11.2023].

and explain, why this person or organization is reliable and authoritative. This is essential for the process of editing and “it also enables us to be clear and persuasive in our opinion, if the story is questioned”. Upon broadcasting the news, a journalist protects himself/herself from subjective errors. Before publishing the materials, it is important to be sure that “we have interpreted the facts in our media product correctly and that the collected materials – voice, photos and words – correspond with the context. While rephrasing – this may be in a blog or on live broadcast, it should be considered, whether the source agrees with the interpretation. Big Journalism is partly a result of joint effort of researchers, reporters, editors and producers. Each of them plays an important role in the process of ensuring accuracy. In the NPR document it is written that they believe in the effectiveness of joint work, “but good editors are good prosecutors as well. They always check and study reporters, with the purpose to make the NPR news as good (and thus, accurate) as possible”.²¹

Special attention must be paid to the news, which might cause grief or damage reputation. Any lie might damage the audience, or certain individuals. The mistakes, which may damage reputation or cause grief are particularly dangerous and additional measures must be taken for their prevention. For example, the media must not spread information on the death of a person, unless it is convinced that the family has already been informed about that and unless it is confirmed by authoritative sources. In such cases, journalists need to be particularly cautious.²² Upon broadcasting the news a journalist must refrain from assumptions. Special caution must be applied while using the phrase – “I think”, which implies that a journalist brings more sense to the story, than a media product, and that reduces the clarity of the journalist’s words. “For the question “what might happen next?” act against speculations. Use your knowledge to offer an analysis and a view based on sound evidence”.²³

It is important to enable the persons subject to criticism, inconvenient accusations or other negative statements to respond in stories and media products. The main goal of the NPR is to find the truth. In every product, especially, if it is related to controversial issues, the NPR tries to discuss the strongest and diverse arguments, and it thereby gives more clarity to the reportage.²⁴

Each person, whom we mention must have the confidence that we will be fair not only in the way we demonstrate their opinions, but also in how we seek those opinions. This means that we enable them to respond to critical accusations in our reportages, or explain their position, when we are suspicious that they have provided inaccurate information. If we are considered as unfair, we not only lose the confidence of the audience, but we also place our general reputation at risk.²⁵

5. Journalistic Ethics Policy of the New York Times

The journalistic ethics policy of the New York Times pays special attention to the impartiality, accuracy and integrative character of journalists and journalism. The document states that “producing the supreme quality and the integrity of the content is the basis for our reputation and the means, through which we deserve public confidence and meet the expectations of our customers”.²⁶ The Times treats readers fairly and disseminates such information for its audience that is unvarnished impartial and exhaustive. The policy of The Times is to correct mistakes immediately. The Times collects information in favor of its readers. The personnel members cannot use their positions for other purposes. The personnel members, which commit a plagiarism, disseminate false information on purpose or without intention, betray the fundamental standards of The Times.

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ National Public Radio - An American non-profit media organization, “NPR Ethics Handbook”, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/688139552/accuracy#accuracyinourreporting>[L.s. 6.11.2023, 15:35]

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ The New York Times, “Ethical Journalism, A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Opinion Departments”, <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/ethical-journalism.html#investmentsAndFinancialTies>[L.s. 7.11.2023]

The Times personnel are responsible citizens, also journalists. The Times respects the education, freedom of religion and faith of their family members, their right to vote and their active participation in social affairs, but even in the case of the best reasons, the Times personnel have the obligation to avoid the conflict of interests. They must never use the name of the Times upon carrying out personal activities. The aim of the New York Times is to broadcast news as impartially and fairly, as possible. Its personnel share the necessity of avoiding a conflict of interests. The conflict of interests may arise in diverse fields. They may include the personnel relations with the readers, the news sources, the advertisers or the competitors; Civil and professional activities may cause conflicts or the appearance of conflicts. "The Times treats its readers as fairly as possible and our policy is to correct our mistakes, whether big or small, whenever we face them".²⁷

In the times of increasing social doubt towards the impartiality, accuracy and good faith of journalist, it is necessary that The Times and its personnel observe highest standards and not do anything that could shaken the confidence of the readers towards the new columns of The Times. This means that the personnel must be awake to avoid any activities, which may cause a real and apparent conflict of interests and thereby place the ethical condition of the newspaper under threat. This also means that the journalism that is performed by the editorial office on a daily basis, must not deserve a reprimand. Falsification of any part of news is inadmissible and it will automatically result in disciplinary liability.²⁸ Nobody may do such a thing that would damage the reputation of The Times in terms of a strict neutrality upon covering politics and the government. Real or apparent conflict of interests must be prevented. The fundamental goal of The Times is to observe impartiality and neutrality. Often, asking oneself a question, whether one's own action might damage the reputation of the publishing house, is sufficient to establish the appropriateness of the action.

The personnel of the editorial office may not serve governmental councils or commissions, in exchange for remuneration or without remuneration. They may not join boards of trustees, consultation committees or similar groups, except for the groups, which serve journalistic organizations or promote journalistic education. Usually, the restriction of joining boards of trustees or advisory committees does not apply to the organizations, which are less probable to generate the news interesting for The Times and which generally do not try to form public policy. As a rule, this includes religious service houses, community charity organizations, local libraries, fine arts groups, youth sports leagues, the clubs of the country and the alumni groups. Therefore, the personnel members can assist such groups in the attraction of comparably small funds.²⁹ Journalists do not have the right to require funds for socio-political, religious, educational, charity and other purposes. This may cause the expectation of becoming favorably disposed in return. The anonymous sources of a material are used only in the case, when the material is not an opinion and/or a speculation and it is utterly important for the story to be covered. The source that might be under the threat of revenge can be anonymous, or when he/she may become a victim of violence in the case of disclosure.³⁰ The editorial office respects and protects the copyrights and does not apply plagiarism. The citations must be accurate and unbiased. It refrains from the conduct and/or activities, which create a conflict of interests and/or has negative impact on the principle of fair and objective coverage of news.³¹

²⁷ The New York Times, "Ethical Journalism, A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Opinion Departments", <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/ethical-journalism.html#investmentsAndFinancialTies>[L.s. 7.11.2023]

²⁸ The New York Times, "Guidelines on Integrity", <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/guidelines-on-integrity.html> [L.s. 7.11.2023, 12:15]

²⁹ The New York Times, "Guidelines on Integrity", <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/guidelines-on-integrity.html> [L.s. 7.11.2023]

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

6. The ethics policy of the Washington Post

The Washington Post is obliged to avoid the conflict of interests. Therefore, it does not receive gifts and free travel offers from the news sources. The editorial office does not agree with concessionary treatment for its positions. Free attendance to any event is prohibited.³² The Washington Post reporters and editors are oriented to fairness. Despite the fact that the arguments on objectivity are never-ending, the concept of fairness is what editors and reporters must necessarily consider and observe. Fairness comes from several simple practices: neither of the stories is fair, if it loses its own primary sense.

Fairness includes wholeness, relevance, honesty and equality with reader. None of the stories is fair, if it contains substantially inappropriate information at the expense of important facts, or which purposely or unconsciously misleads or deceives the reader. Herewith, fairness includes a diligent search for a comment and a true consideration of that comment.

The Washington Post respects taste and diligence and it understands that social conceptions on taste and diligence are constantly changing. The word that is insulting for the previous generation might be a part of a common speech for the new generation. Indecency must be avoided unless its use is so essential for an important story that its meaning is lost. By no means may indecency be used without the consent of executive or managing editors. If the editors decide that a material with a potentially insulting content has legitimate informative value, the editors must use visual and/or textual warnings on such material. The news columns are clearly separated from editorial pages. This aims to serve the reader, who has the right to read facts in the news columns and opinions on the editorial pages. The labels are created in the following way:

- Analysis: interpretation of news based on the evidence, including, the data, where it is determined, how the events might develop based on the past events.
- Perspective: review of news topics, including, the narratives of individuals in terms of their experiences.
- Opinion: a column or a blog in the opinion section.
- Review: an evaluation of a professional critic on a service, product, play, fictional and literary works.

The reporters of Washington Post have the major responsibility to broadcast their stories, write them and check the facts. The stories are subject to reviewing by one or more editors. The post has a structure of reviewing stories for editing, which may include the checking of facts. The Washington Post tries to cover a story accurately and exhaustively. And upon publishing materials, it treats mistakes with particular responsibility and corrects them immediately. “When we perform the correction and/or precision, our aim is to tell the reader as clearly and quickly as possible, what was incorrect and what is correct. Anyone must be able to understand how and why the mistake was corrected”.³³ If the editorial office corrects an article, a photo inscription, headline, graphic, video or other material, it publishes a correction immediately, which explains the change.

The Washington Post is ready to maximally disclose the information sources for its readers in the stories and tries to make its media product maximally transparent for the readers, so that the audience knows how the information was found. Transparency is one of the main values of honest and fair journalism. When our journalism is factually correct, but the language, which we used for explaining those fact is not so clear or detailed as it takes, the language must be rewritten and an explanation must be added to the story. The explanation may also be used for noting that the comment or the answer could not be found initially and it was added to the story later, or that a new report on the event has changed the media product.

³² The Washington Post, „Ethics policy“, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/policies-and-standards/>, [L.s. 7.11.2023].

³³ The Washington Post, „Ethics policy“, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/policies-and-standards/>, [L.s. 7.11.2023, 12:52]

7. Editorial Handbook on the Values of the European Broadcasting Union

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which represents broadcasting organizations in 56 countries, carries out the totality of editorial principles, which require from social media broadcasters to be impartial, independent and fair. The members of the Union are devoted to the Declaration on the Core Values of the Media. The organization determines six main values shared by all means of media, which are members of the Union and the editorial principles are also inspired by these common values. These are:³⁴ universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability and innovation.

- The editorial choice of the European Broadcasting Union is based on professionalism and professional experience. The Union enjoys editorial freedom to cover any story/content, which it considers to be justified based on editorial reasoning. The activities of the Union do not cause doubt in terms of independence and impartiality.
- The media product prepared by the organization is balanced; their aim is not pleasing or displeasing anyone. The Union is ready to cover any story or event without political influence and commercial pressure.
- The organization tries to include exhaustive information in the media product and to share the full image, it offers a full context to the audience, which will enable the audience to sum up the events sincerely and exhaustively.
- The organization treats the victims of violence, crime, war, conflict, accident or catastrophe with the same special respect as their relatives. Showing individuals in the times of poverty or torment, especially in the moment of death, might be unacceptable and discriminatory. ‘‘We cannot avoid showing alarming materials in our information programs, on internet and during live broadcast, especially, when we have a case of war, conflict, disturbance or terrorist attacks, it warns the audience on unavoidable graphic image in advance.’’³⁵
- The organization understands well the strong impact that graphic materials (war, conflict, catastrophes, etc.) may have, though, the organization considers that it is liable for thorough editing of stories, nevertheless, images, for example, during war, must not be cleared for hiding bloody reality. The organization treats reality with responsibility and, when necessary, it warns the audience in advance. Using extreme images, for example, at the moment of human death or pain, is never acceptable for illustrating other stories and events.
- The organization respects the right of each individual to be an active and sincere member of the society, but a journalist, who represents the European Broadcasting Union, must not be involved in political and/or other type of activities, which may damage the organization.
- None of the activities carried out by certain persons at organizations shall cause doubt in terms of the editorial decision and his/her professionalism.
- The European Broadcasting Union covers its own sources and their anonymity, especially when in the case of disclosure of their identities, they may be in danger of violent action or other type of damage. If substantial editorial reasons exist for not disclosing the identity of the source, the organization shall inform the audience regarding that.
- The organization supports journalists, when they suffer prosecution and/or improper pressure for journalistic activities.
- The organization is open to prepare a media product based on the information obtained from any source, if they are convinced that the mentioned information is relevant for its audience.
- The European Broadcasting Union covers the events impartially and it offers a wide spectre of perspectives and opinions to its audience, and the personnel of the organization is sensible in terms of the threat of conflict of interests.

³⁴ European Broadcasting Union, „Editorial Principles, A Model for the Members of the European Broadcasting Union“, https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Editorial%20Principles_EN.pdf [L.s. 7.11.2023, 14:55]

³⁵ Ibid

- The use of hidden microphones or hidden cameras may be acceptable, if this is for the benefit of the audience, but this action is justified, when the information cannot be obtained through other means.
- Live broadcast of a story is accompanied by a huge responsibility, especially, when we are covering war, conflict, terrorist acts and catastrophes. A journalist must not show such visual material, which is inappropriate during live broadcasts (e.g. killed or seriously wounded persons, victim of violence or other discriminatory materials). Upon carrying out its activities, a journalist must not violate the dignity of another person.³⁶
- In the case of criticism towards certain person and/or groups, they must have the opportunity to respond.
- The information and opinions play decisive role in the process of development of citizens in every society. The European Broadcasting Union covers and disseminates accurate information based on various sources, and it immediately corrects mistakes/inaccuracies.
- A media product is examined several times before publishing to avoid inaccuracy and mistake and establish the correspondence.
- The European Broadcasting Union strictly observes copyrights.
- The organization is ready to explain its editorial choice and actively uses digital services to explain the choice, answer and respond to comments.³⁷
- The organization evaluates the comments and opinions of each member of the audience. The Union members understand that active participation in social networks and blogs means a dialogue, i.e. mutual communication, therefore, it enables its audience to write a comment and participate in debates.
- The organization appreciates the comments and opinions of each members of the audience. The members of the Union understand that active participation in social networks and blogs means a dialogue, that is, mutual communication, and, therefore, it gives the opportunity to its audience to write a comment and participate in debates.
- The organization reserves the right to impose censorship on a blog or other online post, which might bear a racist and/or other type of discriminatory character and irrelevance.
- The organization tries to protect children and youth from the influence of insulting and harmful materials. The material, which may seriously damage the physical, mental or moral development of children/youth must not be disseminated.³⁸

Conclusion

Journalistic and media ethics is articulated in many codes of conduct or practice, diversely approved and enforced in different countries. Among the publicly cited media codes and guidelines are: Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists of the International Federation of Journalists; the Principles of Ethical Journalism of the Ethical Journalism Network. The Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality, the BBC Editorial Guidelines; and Codes of Practice of well-known newspapers, such as: Le Monde and New York Times, also, international information agencies: Reuters, Associated Press and Agence France Press. All such editorial codes have common key elements. The Ethical Journalism Network, an independent body of media professionals determines five key elements: truth and accuracy, independence, fairness, impartiality and humanity.³⁹ In the mentioned codes a coherent accent is placed on the element of independence from all types of external influence,

³⁶ European Broadcasting Union, "The Values Translated: Editorial Guidelines", p. 5-6.

https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Editorial-Guidelines_EN.pdf [L.s. 7.11.2023]

³⁷ European Broadcasting Union, "The Values Translated: Editorial Guidelines", p. 7-8 https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Editorial-Guidelines_EN.pdf [L.s. 7.11.2023]

³⁸ Ibid., p. 5

³⁹ Ethical Journalism Network, „OUR FIVE CORE PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL JOURNALISM“, <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/who-we-are> [L.s. 7.11.2023, 15:19]

including, from governments. Such independence is considered to be a necessary condition for media freedom. Accountability, which is recognized by journalists, is in terms of professional journalistic ethics codes and society and not state authorities.

In one of its reports, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe notes⁴⁰ that the fundamental right of expression and freedom of information is accompanied by obligations and responsibilities. Media professionals are accountable to society. They must observe high editorial standards and adopt codes of conduct, which will promote ethical principles, such as truth, accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality. They must develop healthy self-regulation mechanisms and adopt more effective measures for the prevention of dissemination and propaganda of false news. In this context, the assembly supports the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists adopted by the International Federation of Journalists. The Assembly considers that in today's complex context, the necessity of observing editorial wholeness and high professional and ethical standards by journalists has become particularly actual. Editorial wholeness in the media requires not only accuracy, honesty and fairness, but also the right to a healthy and independent evaluation for journalists. Journalists and means of media must have the right of free investigation and publication of materials without excessive restrictions and the fear of violence or arbitrary treatment by state authorities.

In spite of the fact that all states have adopted different regulations in terms of ethical norms, common key issues still exist in all similar documents, such as: dissemination of accurate, fair and impartial information, when necessary, the right to reply to a comment, confidentiality of sources and inadmissibility of discrimination. A journalist must not provide the audience with such media product, which is insulting for different religious organizations and their confession, or which incites hatred towards them. The media must not publish information, which may cause conflict between religious groups and/or which is discriminatory in religious terms. The materials prepared on a religion must not be a means of playing with the senses of the audience and it must not include making fun of religious belief. Media organizations must not promote associating a problem with religious groups and, this way, they must not be the promoters of formation of stereotypes and/or formation/reinforcement of existing stereotypes. The committed crime and violent action must not be broadcast in such a way to promote the formation and reinforcement of negative views, stereotypes. The conduct of a single representative of any group must not be assigned to the whole organization. A media organization must not draw a parallel between the religious affiliation of persons and negative events, especially, without substantiation. Upon criticizing the faith of religious organizations, it is important to let the object of criticism voice his/her opinion and attitude.

Finally, the mass media enjoys significant influence on the process of formation of social opinion. A media organization is able to create an inadvertent view on various issues. It has the skill to provide the audience with disinformation in such a way that the most part of the society will not even guess it. The mass media also has the skill of developing and degrading the social worldview. Thus, journalists must not forget their responsibility before conscience, as their impact on society is enormous, especially, in such country as Georgia.

⁴⁰ "The protection of editorial integrity", Volodymyr ARIEV, Parliamentary Assembly, Report | Doc. 14526 | 0904.2018, Origin - Reference to committee: Doc. 13964, Reference 4187 of 4.03.2016. 2018 - 2nd part-session <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=24556&lang=en>[L.s. 7.11.2023, 15:19]

Bibliography

1. BBC, „Working at the BBC, OUR CODE OF CONDUCT AND HOW WE WORK TOGETHER“, <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/policiesandguidelines/pdf/code-of-conduct-2022.pdf> [Last seen 2.11.2023];
2. The BBC's Editorial Standards, <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/bbc-editorial-guidelines-whole-document.pdf> [Last seen 2.11.2023];
3. The Guardian, "Editorial code of practice and guidance, Guardian News & Media", https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2023/07/27/GNM_editorial_code_of_practice_and_guidance_2023.pdf [Last seen 2.11.2023];
4. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS STATEMENT OF NEWS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES, <https://www.ap.org/about/news-values-and-principles/downloads/ap-news-values-and-principles.pdf>
5. National Public Radio - An American non-profit media organization, "NPR Ethics Handbook", <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/688139552/accuracy#accuracyinourreporting> [Last seen 2.11.2023];
6. The New York Times, "Ethical Journalism, A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Opinion Departments", <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/ethical-journalism.html#investmentsAndFinancialTies> [Last seen 2.11.2023];
7. The New York Times, "Guidelines on Integrity", <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/guidelines-on-integrity.html> [Last seen 2.11.2023];
8. The Washington Post, „Ethics policy“, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/policies-and-standards/> [Last seen 2.11.2023];
9. European Broadcasting Union, „Editorial Principles, A Model for the Members of the European Broadcasting Union“, https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Editorial%20Principles_EN.pdf [Last seen 2.11.2023];
10. European Broadcasting Union, "The Values Translated: Editorial Guidelines", https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Editorial-Guidelines_EN.pdf [Last seen 2.11.2023];
11. Ethical Journalism Network, „OUR FIVE CORE PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL JOURNALISM“, <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/who-we-are> [Last seen 2.11.2023];
12. "The protection of editorial integrity", Volodymyr ARIEV, Parliamentary Assembly, Report | Doc. 14526 | 0904.2018, Origin - Reference to committee: Doc. 13964, Reference 4187 of 4.03.2016. 2018 - 2nd part-session <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=24556&lang=en> [Last seen 2.11.2023].

