

MEDIA, ETHICAL NORMS AND MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

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Abstract. *Media reporting requires ethical prudence. Journalistic ethics must set norms, guidelines, rules, and codes that will provide for truthfulness and accuracy; impartiality and honesty; respect for personality and privacy; independence from individual interests; accountability to society and social goods; respect for the law; moral, competence and good taste. New media offer quick contact, promotion, exchange of thought, and freedom of expression. New technologies, such as the Internet, do not change the necessity of posing basic ethical issues of privacy violations, intellectual property or identity theft, dissemination of fake information, but only give them a greater dimension. The current body of research provides ample evidence of the growing need for media literacy instruction in all schooling levels in order to educate and protect the young from unethical social media contents. Therefore, this paper will deal with the problem of media, ethical norms and media literacy education comprising teaching moral reasoning and critical thinking skills. Media literacy must be incorporated in all schooling levels, from the lowest and progressing towards the highest. Even the youngest ones nowadays know how to stream, how to twitch and use social media but they are not fully aware of possible negative effects. Media and the Internet especially should be seen as an instrument of change and progress but they can be manipulative as well. However, the role of the responsible society is to educate the young how to use media to their advantage and successfully differentiate ethical from the unethical in the media of the contemporary networking world.*

Key words: *media, ethical standards, Internet, media literacy, education*

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1. INTRODUCTION

A legal framework to protect personal data flow and the well-being of natural persons, the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹ uses the term “ethics” which in turn calls for a philosophical framework; it uses the term “data” to give an up-to-date angle of the vital role of information in a digitalized society. Fitted together, data ethics policy initiatives are highly pertinent but taken separately they enhance a glimpse into their particular significance. For example, a moral philosophical view concerning data ethics initiatives might not be aware of the hidden interests and power aspirations, thus any society must not neglect a possibility of these data policies function as enhancing negotiation and positioning; whereby considering data ethics as something novel in the age of big data general public can miss out on its place and relation to historical development of public sphere and governance, respectively.

To understand better a notion of public sphere, which is in itself connected with ethical norms, Fraser (1992) in her article *Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy* as already committed to developing a model for a post-bourgeois society identifies four issues central to Habermas' concept of the public sphere: social equality as a necessary condition for political democracy; the question of competing publics versus a single comprehensive public sphere; the role of private interests and private matters in the public sphere; and requirement of democratic public sphere to make a distinction between civil society and the state. Nowadays, when the public sphere has been radically transformed by new mass-media how can we apply the emphatic and normatively impregnated concept of a democratic “public sphere” to current circumstances? In an interview published in 2014, celebrating his eighty-fifth birthday Habermas (1996, pp. 22-23) already aware of the weak and strong public spheres, states that “public communication circuits should not be cut out of actual decision-making processes”, and simultaneously warns that “democratic procedures and institutions can reduce themselves to empty facades if they lose a functional public sphere”. Concentrating on the goal and function of the new mass media, the Internet, Habermas (1996) says that the classical public sphere stemmed from the fact that the attention of an anonymous public was “concentrated” on a few politically important questions that had to be regulated. However, he claims that the web “on the contrary distracts and dispels and amidst digital noises turns communicative communities into billions of dispersed archipelagos. In order to create concentration and not isolation, it is necessary to know how to choose relevant information and issues. “In short, even in the mare magnum of digital noise, the skills of good old journalism should not be lost”².

Fraser (1992) makes a distinction between “weak publics”, referring to deliberative practice consisting only in opinion formation and not decision making, and “strong publics”, that is parliaments whose discourse encompassed both opinion making and decision making. Civil society that is separated from the State is a weak public. Parliamentary sovereignty is a strong public because it occupies two functions (opinion and decision-making), which nullifies the separation between civil society and the State. Is then the Internet a public good, or does it represent weak or strong publics? The internet has become the modern public sphere, and social media and search engines have

¹ REGULATION (EU) 2016/679 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL (27 April 2016) on the protection of natural persons.

² Interview in the “Feuilleton” of the “Frankfurter Rundschau” of 14/15 July, 2014.

both tremendous power and a weighty responsibility to ensure that their platforms serve the public good. If antidemocratic entities effectively capture the internet, citizens will be denied a forum to articulate shared values, debate policy questions, and peacefully settle intrasocietal disputes.

Nowadays, disinformation, fake news and propaganda spread online have poisoned the public sphere. The uncontrolled collection of personal data has totally endangered traditional notions of privacy. This has resulted in the global internet freedom declining for the eighth consecutive year in 2018 with the highest decline rate in Egypt and Sri Lanka (Shahbaz, 2018). However, one innovative national model can be found in Estonia, a country that tied with Iceland for the best internet freedom score in this survey. Among other benefits, their citizens are notified when their data files are accessed by government agencies, except in cases of ongoing investigations. Multilateral and cross-sectoral coordination is required to promote digital literacy and identify malicious actors. Global internet freedom should be the antidote to digital authoritarianism. World's democracies and ethical norms abiding depend on it.

The global era of networked communication and computing shows positive side of the Internet as global media by introducing a new enthusiasm to serve the world's poor and vulnerable. For example, the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³ proclaims that a legal identity for all will only be possible through the power of digital technologies. Thus, governments can better protect citizens and their civil rights, equality of access to economic and social services, and enhance respect of ethical norms and standards.

2. MEDIA POWER AND JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Giles (2010) asserts that media psychology is at least trying to understand how the way we behave in 2010, or any year on, is a combination of the contemporary media age and deep-rooted, enduring human characteristics. He points to the theoretical models explaining effects of the media in the twentieth century, citing the theory of the hypodermic needle first. Media content automatically acts as a magic bullet or hypodermic needle to a passive and irrational audience that, by a mechanistic principle, responds to the content of the media message which is a stimulus that provokes the reaction of anyone who receives it. Gerbner (1998) in cultivation theory groups mainstreaming and resonance claiming that mass media primarily select events while creating a sort of list of selected topics and models a framework for their interpretation. At the end of the 20th century theories emerged that media also create a value matrix for interpreting processes in the real world. These theories, which start from the elements of social constructivism, are referred to as transactional approach theories.

Baudrillard (1994) believes that the media are involved in creating a simulacrum or a special world that becomes as real as reality itself and it is difficult to hold this simulacrum at bay. Thus, social life is dominated by signs, not real-world objects and beings. According to these claims, hyper-reality is an essential element of contemporary culture, in which media production has created an implosion, separating the world of reality from the world of performances. The traditional watchdog role of the media to control democratic processes,

³ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/71/313) and 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

to shape democratic thinking and maintain a healthy democratic climate in society, is drawn to the fore. As Habermas once noted, as a player, "media should play a central role here".

Klapper's study (1960) is considered the founding text of the "reinforcing doctrine" claiming that the most important media effect is "reinforcing the existing beliefs". Maximum Effect Theory is based on mass society theory, a linear model of communication in which media directly influence the behavior of individuals and the perception of the audience as a passive recipient of messages. Carey (1988) believes that the importance of changing the theoretical framework is far-reaching as it affirms the diverse intellectual heritage associated with research into the metaphors of communication. The preferred reading model postulates that readers are naturally engaged in a productive business of interpreting messages but under certain conditions.

The media audience no longer acts passively and at the request of the media content producers, but creatively and inherently deciphers what the media offers it. Media psychology calls for further exploration of new media formats, both interactive and digital, that have significant psychological consequences on the user being completely disoriented by the amount of information.

Journalism is increasingly a single stream of information disseminated simultaneously across different platforms of media, but its regulation remains dominated by old-fashioned notions of how media work. The report *The Trust Factor an EJN Review of Journalism and Self-regulation* edited by White (2016) insists on raising awareness among journalists, citizens and representatives of the judiciary about the importance of media self-regulation, especially in the Western Balkans. It illustrates "keeping journalism honest is money well spent for media and, for the public at large, it's a good investment in democracy" (2016). In some countries – Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium, for example – all published journalism on any platform comes under the jurisdiction of a single press or media council. In Denmark the press council is a statutory body with significant powers to impose its will if media step out of line. At the Level of the Individual (White, 2016, p. 4) journalists should abide to work governing codes as part of their employment contracts, they have to act according to their conscience, and finally, they need to have whistle-blowing systems to disclose acts of corruption or unethical behavior.

Journalistic ethics must set norms, guidelines, rules and codes and its determinants are: truthfulness and accuracy; impartiality and honesty; respect for personality and privacy; independence from individual interests; accountability to society and social goods; respect for the law; moral, competence and good taste (Malović, Ricchiardi, and Vilović, 1998). In the perspectives of media ethics, objectivity, or journalistic professionalism fairness usually means to consider the entire aspects of public communication.

It becomes very hard to maintain ethical professional standards when media become "the creators of public opinion through the role of gatekeepers, the process of representation and the discursive construction of reality, framing and priming topics" (Peruško, 2011, p. 31). A journalist has to be accountable and responsible to himself or herself, and at the same time to the society and social goods. It becomes even harder to maintain fairness and journalistic code of conduct when mass media are turning into the means of soft power. "The effectiveness of public diplomacy is measured by minds changed (as shown in interviews or polls), not dollars spent or slick production packages" (Nye, 2008, p. 102). This statement effectively explains effects of the media in contemporary society and the complexity of the journalism as a daunting profession.

Ethical norms comprise following elements: *dignity* (leaving the person whom we write about as much dignity as possible); *reciprocity* (dealing with others the way we would like others to treat us); *accuracy* (the data must be accurate, the right words must be used and placed in the context); *resistance* (when the topic is important, effort is made to reach all sources equally); *justice* (acting fairly and equally with all sources); *community* (evaluating collective achievements as well as individual ones); *diversity* (reporting on all segments of society fairly and appropriately).

These principles are congruent with the Five Core Principles of Journalism cited by the Accountable Journalism Project:

1. *Truth and Accuracy* – Journalists cannot always guarantee "truth", but getting the facts right is the cardinal principle of journalism,
2. *Independence* – Journalists must be independent voices; they should not act, formally or informally, on behalf of special interests whether political, corporate or cultural,
3. *Fairness and Impartiality* – Most stories have at least two sides. While there is no obligation to present every side in every piece, stories should be balanced and add context,
4. *Humanity* – Journalists should do no harm. What they publish or broadcast may be hurtful, but they should be aware of the impact of their words and images on the lives of others and finally,
5. *Accountability* – A sure sign of professionalism and responsible journalism is the ability to hold oneself accountable.

Serbia adopted professional norms in 2006; in 2009 the Press Council was founded only to start functioning in 2011. The council is increasingly accepted by the media community, 78 media outlets as members at the beginning of 2014, involving magazines, dailies, tabloids and press agencies. Since 2013, the council has introduced the approach already adopted in Bosnia to adjudicate upon ethical breaches by both member and non-member media. Both councils have also widened their remit to include online media (White, 2016, p. 4). Recommendations on how to improve the media and journalism in the South Eastern Europe were drawn up and agreed on as follows (UNESCO):

1. Pressure on the media and journalists can be decreased if interests and ownership (financial and political influence) are fully transparent.
2. Media activities in the free market must be a subject of a necessary self-control, the fundamental humanitarian principles and basic ethical rules have to be respected, and protection of general social and moral norms needs to be carried out by the media themselves. Free market must not become an alibi for abuse of journalistic principles. Sensationalism is not the public interest. Free press is obliged to handle information fairly and to refrain from turning it into a sensation.
3. Independent regulatory bodies should be created and the role of the existing strengthened within the profession. They should become a guarantee of adherence to journalistic standards.
4. Journalists should fight for institutional framework that will bind all participants in the media business – journalists, media owners and politicians – to respect professional standards and ethics. They need to invest their own energy to this cause and attain help from lawyers and responsible public persons.
5. Journalist codes of conduct should be improved and promoted. This issue should be constantly discussed in the media and journalistic organizations. Internal ethical codes

established within each newsroom can be useful tool for strengthening ethical standards.

6. Education of journalists should be improved: special courses and training are necessary – not in the form of short and sporadic attempts, both in form of permanent education in editorial offices and as specially designed courses and trainings. Similar code of rules "South East Europe Media Organization Declaration" was adopted on 11 May, 2002 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

3. EDUCATION ON MEDIA LITERACY

Modern society is marked by rapid and intensive development of new technologies that have become part of man's everyday life. In circumstances where media are increasingly present in all spheres of human life, it is undeniable that one can talk about the influence of media on the behavior of people, their attitudes and beliefs. Media influences are even more pronounced when it comes to young people, especially those who are still in the development phase and whose personality is just being formed. In that line, issues that deal with youth and media relations are increasingly raised, both in the part of the influence of media on the development and formation of the personality of young people, as well as in the part of preventive action in terms of protecting young people from the inconveniences of media content. All the more important is how media literacy is represented in education covering all levels of schooling. Previous experiences in this field show that censorship of media content did not give the expected effects, and that the warning to the audience media content is targeting, or prohibiting, is usually neglected by young people. In order to overcome the problem of negative action, young people who are still in the process of education are striving for different solutions, among which a significant place is taken by media literacy. The development of media literacy and media literacy of young people especially can be considered as the most adequate way of protecting young people from exposing to undesirable media content, but also through the formation and development of a critical attitude towards the rich offer of various types of contemporary media (Ljajić, 2018).

Media literacy is making a comeback since the students' access to unlimited information on the Internet poses a never-ending threat. The Internet has kindled a resurgence of interest in media literacy. With vast amounts of information at students' fingertips, educators and parents worry about students' ability to make sense and fully understand the contents of what they freely browse. How then can students learn to recognize bias, track down sources, and cross-check information? Media literacy in the past tended to focus on alerting students to stereotypes, advertising, and propaganda and on protecting them from undesirable influences. Today's digital media literacy encompasses many additional topics, from using search engines, to creating Web sites and online profiles, to participating in social networking. Therefore, the most basic strands of media literacy emphasize the skills and knowledge students need to locate and critically assess online content.

Hobbs (2010) in his book *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action* enumerates sets of Digital and Media Literacy skills and competences as follows:

Access: Keyboard and mouse skills, Be familiar with hardware, storage and file management practices, Understand hyper linking & digital space, Gain competence with software applications, Use social media, mobile, peripheral & cloud computing tools,

Identify information needs, Use effective search and find strategies, Troubleshoot and problem-solve, Learn how to learn, Listening and reading comprehension.

Analysis: Understand how symbols work: the concept of representation, Identify the author, genre, purpose and point of view of a message, Compare and contrast sources, Evaluate credibility and quality, Understand one's own biases and world view, Recognize power relationships that shape how information & ideas circulate in culture, Understand the economic context of information and entertainment production, Examine the political and social ramifications of inequalities in information flows.

Create: Recognize the need for communication and self-expression, Identify your own purpose, target audience, medium & genre, Brainstorm and generate ideas, Compose creatively using language, image, sound and multimedia, Writing & speaking skills, Editing & revising in response to feedback, Use appropriate distribution, promotion & marketing channels, Work collaboratively, Comment, curate and remix.

Reflect: Recognize how entertainment media communicate values & ideology, Understand how differences in values and life experience shape people's media use and message interpretation, Appreciate risks and potential harms of digital media, Apply ethical judgment and social responsibility to communication situations, Understand how concepts of 'private' and 'public' are reshaped by digital media, Appreciate & respect legal rights & responsibilities (copyright, intellectual freedom), Learn that communication can maintain the status quo or change the world.

Take action: Participate in communities of shared interest to advance an issue, be a change agent in the family & workplace, Participate in democratic self-governance, Speak up when you encounter injustice, Respect the law and work to change unjust laws, Use the power of communication and information to make a difference in the world (pp. 19).

Some countries have made progress in integrating media literacy into the school curriculum but schools in the United States generally have lagged behind (Hobbs and Frost, 2003). Even though students are spending more and more time on the Internet and teachers increasingly expect their students to do assignments online, digital media literacy skills are vastly underrepresented in the curriculum for all but the most advanced students. Advocates of digital media education agree that reading online demands different skills and they differ on the extent to which training in the new literacies should go beyond procedural learning – how to use search engines, read URLs, identify Web site publishers, etc., and they should include more cognitively demanding tasks that teach sound critical judgment and sense making. The current body of research provides ample evidence of the growing need for media literacy instruction that targets the added cognitive demands posed by the Internet. Some research results confirm that students are increasingly online both in school and at home. Four years ago, 87 percent of U.S. students ages 12 – 17 reported using the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2019) and almost half of students' ages 8 – 18 reported going online in a typical day. Moreover, social media users in the above mentioned study consider it easy for the Facebook and Instagram platforms to determine their race or ethnicity (84%), their hobbies and interests (79%), their political affiliation (71%) and even their religious beliefs (65%), (Hitlin & Rainie, 2019, p. 4).

Most striking findings point to a fact that (young) people are not fully aware of what happens when they use social media and how their choices and preferences are recorded and stored somewhere, and later on some products or internet contents are offered. This kind of social media "behavior" towards the young, but the other population as well, is dubious and non-ethical. Therefore, the young must be educated to what happens on their

next click, how much information they provide through the Internet, and how they can be protected. Some mobile phone manufacturers offer the internet content protection mode installed in their phones.

However, what is most needed is to develop children's' critical thinking abilities, for somewhat older, to teach them about possible frauds, theft of their personalities, malpractice, abuse of their contents already remembered and stored by the Internet. These are all examples of the unethical acts and violations of the users' rights. Since high percentage of the young is addicted to using various types of media, their media literacy should nurture a critical attitude also towards stereotypical representations offered by media, because in that way young people learn how to decipher and interpret media messages (Đerić & Studen, 2006). Researchers find that reading for understanding online requires the same skills as offline reading, including using prior knowledge and making predictions, *plus* a set of additional critical-thinking skills that reflect the open-ended, continually changing online context. For example, online readers play a more active role, selecting links rather than turning pages, and they often must interpret visual images to make sense of what they are reading (Coiro and Dobler, 2007).

Choosing appropriate search engines, following relevant links, and judging the validity of information are difficult challenges, not only for students of all ages, but also for most adults, including many teachers. More than half the adults surveyed in Great Britain were not able to use search engines or databases at a basic level (Buckingham, 2007). In the United States, almost two-thirds of a national sample of adults doing online searches were not aware of the difference between paid and unpaid search results and believed that search engines provide fair and unbiased results for any given search (Fallows, 2005). Such research clearly establishes the need for online media literacy, yet very few studies have addressed how to teach the topic most effectively. Educators face enormous challenges in preparing their students to be critical online readers. For the most part, the teaching of critical-thinking skills is not part of the regular curriculum, and printed text is still considered the mainstay of school reading. Moreover, many recent studies identify persistent barriers to integrating new technologies into instruction, including lack of training and help for teachers and insufficient access to functioning technology (Cuban, 2002). Yet, the increasing number of students spend more and more time online. Rather than ignoring this fact of life, educators and education policymakers should embrace it and by integrating elements of digital media literacy into their instruction, teachers can influence how well students critically assess content, both online and offline.

4. CONCLUSION

Media and the Internet especially, cannot be seen as an instrument of political power but also as a crucial factor of changes and progress. At the same time, citizens as individuals, or the public, are not an uncritical mass which can be easily manipulated. Each individual can differentiate between the meanings of the media message, depending on his/her background. Therefore, we are confronted with the possibility of "manipulating manipulators" by means of intercultural deconstruction of the media text by the users. Ethical standards and norm abiding will certainly play a vital role in the contemporary networking society but education or media literacy teaching at all levels of schooling is a key word.

A definition of the Internet Ethics may encompass everything from the role that social media play in the creation of human relationships, to privacy, net neutrality, the intriguing

question of the Internet accessibility, development of the big data ecosystem and data collection. Main ethical questions seem to be raised about data collectors, data processing, and the Net neutrality. As far as the Internet access is concerned the claim urged is that internet access should be seen as a human right. The fact that there are still vast numbers of people not only across the U.S. but worldwide as well, who have to struggle with this, is an ethical imperative for the government, corporations and other entities dealing with broad public to consider. Time and again the society is warned that the power of global order lies not in the economies of production and commerce, but in the economies of information and knowledge. The key to opening the gates of power lies in the media, that is, culture, public dialogue, tolerance, and mass, which counteract elitist despotism with an information network accessible to all members of the civil society. Time pervaded with digital technologies facilitates the development of other forms of socialization in cyberspace.

The digital era has brought along some new experiences and new skills such as assessment, analysis, involvement and creativity, all of which are important in resolving the issues that are of vital importance in everyone's daily life. There are always plus and minus sides, or two faces of the coin. Thus, using social media has its ups and downs, depending how much young population is educated or possesses media literacy sufficing level to bring the internet contents to their advantage. Media literacy must be incorporated in all schooling levels, starting from the lowest and progressing towards the highest. Even the youngest ones nowadays know how to stream, how to twitch, how to reveal their whole lives on the Facebook. However, they are not fully aware of the possible consequences of their being friendly with the Internet. The conditions are harsh and children's reactions can be cruel if their peers meddle with the Internet and find themselves abused in some web-based contents. Then the whole families might suffer because of the lack of media literacy. The advantages are also countable in these turbulent times when education contents are presented online and children can continue their education even when crisis related time forbids physical school attendance. Again, high caution must be exerted as to how media literate our young population is throughout all levels of their schooling.

The Internet brings about increasing superficiality and a lack of critical thinking, evaluation and interpretation. The Internet and digital literacy however, as public goods offer a lot, but at the same time warn the society that it is confronted with the possibility of intercultural deconstruction of the media text by the users. Therefore, all the more important are ethical standards, but most important is the education and media literacy instruction which will teach our young ones to differentiate ethical from non-ethical contents offered by the new media of the contemporary, networking society and highly globalized world.

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MEDIJI, ETIČKE NORME I EDUKACIJA MEDIJSKE PISMENOSTI

Medijsko izveštavanje zahteva etičku opreznost. Novinarska etika mora postaviti norme, smernice, pravila i kodekse koji će obezbediti istinitost i tačnost; nepristrasnost i iskrenost; poštovanje ličnosti i privatnosti; nezavisnost od pojedinačnih interesa; odgovornost prema društvu i društvenim dobrima; poštovanje zakona; moral, kompetentnost i dobar ukus. Novi mediji nude brzi kontakt, promociju, razmenu misli i slobodu izražavanja. Nove tehnologije, poput Interneta, ne menjaju neophodnost postavljanja osnovnih etičkih pitanja kršenja privatnosti, krađe intelektualnog vlasništva ili krađe identiteta, širenja lažnih informacija, već im samo pridaju veću važnost. Veliki broj studija pruža dovoljno dokaza o rastućoj potrebi za edukacijom u oblasti medijske pismenosti na svim nivoima školovanja kako bi se mladi zaštitili od etički nekorektnih sadržaja koji im se nude na društvenim mrežama. Stoga će se ovaj rad baviti problemom medija, etičkim normama kao i problemima obrazovanja u oblasti medijske pismenosti koje uključuje podučavanje o moralnom rasuđivanju i usvajanju veština kritičkog razmišljanja. Medijska pismenost mora biti predmet proučavanja počev od osnovnog pa sve do najvišeg stepena školovanja. Čak i najmlađi danas znaju da strimuju, tvičuju, i koriste društvene mreže, ali nisu potpuno svesni svih mogućih negativnih posledica. Mediji a Internet naročito, se moraju posmatrati kao presudni faktor promena i napretka ali mogu biti i maipulativni. Međutim, uloga svakog odgovornog društva je da obrazuje mlade kako da društvene mreže i nove medije koriste u svoju korist i kako da uspešno prepoznaju etično od neetičnog u medijima savremenog umreženog sveta.

Ključne reči: *mediji, etički standardi, Internet, medijska pismenost, obrazovanje*