SOME ASPECTS OF A JOURNALIST’S PROFESSIONAL ETHICS – FOREIGN EXPERIENCE AND GEORGIAN REALITY

Khatuna Kacharava, Associate Prof.
Grigol Robakidze University, Georgia

Abstract
Journalism is a synthetic profession. It comprises various functions and obligations. Meanwhile, it determines public opinion, intentions and desires. Journalism has the greatest levers for managing society. Consequently, journalists have special responsibility towards society. Namely this is the reason journalists should have thorough knowledge in the norms of professional ethics and have to follow them. Ethical norms make journalists’ activities rather transparent and ensure reliance on them. These issues cause interest in our country as Georgia has been facing a lot of ethical dilemmas for the last years, such as: interference in an individual’s personal life, candid camera, demonstrating violence, promoting drugs, alcohol, etc. The ethical problems existing in Georgian media are discussed on the example of BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) as BCC was established as the Public Broadcaster. It gradually improved its broadcasting strategy as well as its own ethical regulations. Ethical criteria of BBC have become a kind of measure and key point for many public broadcasters of the world, Georgia is among them. Ethical norms help journalists to determine the border between publicity and private life, what is more significant – sensation or a simple fact, how to follow the ethics in such delicate situations. In such cases the main thing is society’s interest. It does not imply hiding the truth or disguising it; just the contrary, only demonstrating the problem and following the ethical norms one can solve the existing problems and achieve progress.

Keywords: Ethics, Journalist, Broadcasting, Society, Media

“Two things amaze me: stars on the sky and the morality in me” – Immanuel Kant

Introduction:
Morality is the supporting point of an individual and cultural society. Society that does not follow moral principles cannot be cultural. That is why the maxima of the modern epoch is “If you want to be a person, you have to follow moral codes”.
Aristotle was the first who spoke about the significance of society’s moral relations. In ancient times, ethics was perceived as the inseparable part of philosophy, but modern scholars consider it together with psychology and sociology.
The word “ethics” can be defined as the norms of as a kind behaviour among different parts of society. It can be considered as one of the forms of social awareness that sets certain rules to a person’s consciousness; a person has to decide whether to fulfill or not these rules.
The moral field is so human that is comprises all directions of existence, action and activities. Ethical norms are urgent for journalists, politicians, teachers as well as for doctors. A person of any profession has to rely on ethical aspects. Professional ethics is a certain limit that should not be exceeded. The fundamentals of the rules of professional ethics are universal norms. Their aim is a person to defend human rights while performing his/her activities.
Taking into consideration these norms contributes to developing professions as well as society.

Nowadays, when media has a great impact on society, journalism cannot be considered without professional ethics. As it has already been stated, professional-ethical norms should be followed in any kind of activity, but they are of vital importance in journalism. If a journalist, a media organization or generally media do not comply with moral norms, it will definitely have impact on society and its development.

Journalist’s professional ethics is based on certain rules of behavioural and prohibitions. It is noteworthy that it is an unwritten law and a professional him/herself has to decide whether to fulfill it. Consequently, an unethical act is not punished by justice; there is not juridical form of ethical norms that will regulate the mentioned problem. It is interesting what will happen if a journalist violated the unwritten law of ethics. The answer is simple – he/she will lose the trust of society and his/her colleagues.

It is not easy for a journalist and media to gain society’s trust. World known media brands are proud that people trust them. For instance, CNN slogan sounds like this: “CNN International – We Are Trusted”; BBC priorities are as follows: “Our goal is to be the most creative and reliable broadcaster and programme producer organization in the world. We also aim at seeking for the ways to provide society with information, educational and entertainment programmes and satisfy their interest; encourage British talented and progressive people. We strive to be independent from establishments, defend justice and follow ethical standards”. [2, 23].

The major ethical values of BBC are: impartiality, exactness, establishing relations between people and cultures, editorial independence, keeping secret, considering taste and moral standards as well as the diversity of audience, caring for children, fair attitude towards respondents, excluding commercial bargain and developing society’s culture.

BCC was established as the Public Broadcaster. It gradually improved its broadcasting strategy as well as its own ethical regulations. Ethical criteria of BBC have become a kind of measure and key point for many public broadcasters of the world, Georgia is among them. Though, Georgian Public Broadcaster was and is being formed in different historical and political conditions. It is noteworthy that it was not easy to move from one platform what was called state television to another – Public Broadcaster. State television named I channel had bad reputation; people did not trust them anymore. Besides, other competitive channels appeared in the 90s of XX century. Majority of broadcasters recognize the rightness of the ethical regulations of BBC. Due to this fact, we can consider the ethical aspect of modern Georgian media on the example of BBC ethical regulations.

I would like to focus on several significant aspects: interference in an individual’s personal life, candid camera, demonstrating violence, promoting drugs, alcohol, etc. Nowadays, many hidden camera records appear in Georgian media. These materials mainly concern people’s private life. There legality is dubious. Destruction of these materials is a permanent subject of discussion. According to BBC ethical legislation, the Public Broadcaster has to respect the confidentiality right of each person. Interference in a person’s life is justified if its aim serves humanism. A person’s behavior, private correspondence and conversations should not be discussed publicly if it is not an extraordinary case. A journalist should not cross those borders that condition protecting an individual’s confidentiality rights and his/her fair treatment. Confidentiality right is more protected in one’s private dwelling place than in public places as, besides exceptional cases, use of a candid camera is forbidden on one’s own territory (home, hotel room, etc). The Broadcaster CBS follows the same regulations.

Candid camera should not be used for political and other purposes. It is allowed only in the following cases: to ascertain serious antisocial and criminal cases; to obtain those materials that are not available for everybody in such countries where the local law does not
follow the principles of democracy and freedom or cause serious obstacles to authors of programmes; to conduct social survey if this latter cannot be legally carried out (in such cases works the practice of hiding a person’s identity); for entertainment purposes. When candid camera is a main part of entertainment, it is necessary an individual to give her/his consent.

When the author of BBC programme uses candid camera, it should preliminarily be allowed by the administration. In such a case, the corresponding department should monitor the process: how the existing norms were followed, who gave the permission about using candid camera, etc. Such monitoring process should take place in any case, notwithstanding the programme is broadcasted or not. The administration of the channel is responsible for monitoring what enables the company to watch and study the whole process of using this method.

BBC never makes record of telephone conversations for broadcast purposes if the company does not have the consent of at least one participant of the conversation.

Almost majority of Georgian television broadcasted illegally obtained materials that described people’s private life; in most cases they were shot on private territories. No television considered the ethical norms and journalists did not follow their moral responsibilities. When BBC is offered candid camera materials, BBC administration finds out how expedient the material is and decided whether to broadcast it or not.

Broadcasting of programmes demonstrating mournful and stressed people requires special attention (e.g. hospitals, funerals, etc). This can be done only in case of consent of these people. Broadcasting of the material concerning the small child’s secret murder is noteworthy. The journalists were asking stressed people to estimate the hardest situation. It is obvious that broadcasting of comments of such mournful witnesses was not ethical.

Today, the ethical side of the well-known material depicting the prison violence broadcasted by almost every channel arouses a lot of questions. While demonstrating such material the following should be considered: whether the fact of violence corresponds to the content of the programme; how the violence episodes will influence audience watching them for the first time; what effect such programme will have if it is broadcasted several times. Material should be balanced; audience should have a desire to see and find out the truth. It is considered that the more horrified material is and the more shocked the audience is the more credible is the fact. A certain part of such material can comprise not only violence acts, but also materials depicting their results.

While broadcasting the prison materials, the ethical norms were violated; violators’ faces were shown; they were identified; airtime was not kept; the material was broadcasted several times a day.

When using archive materials, authors of programmes should not often use stereotypes. Scenes demonstrating the acts of the hardest violation can provoke disgust of the audience and have bad influence on teenagers.

Unfortunately, there are some cases in society that should necessarily be publicized, that require society’s reaction, that should be revealed. It is obvious that public should be aware of such cases but media should try its best to follow the main postulate of professional ethics – “do not make harm”. Every person has the right to know the truth notwithstanding its content. It is evident that negative information has negative impact on each individual or the whole society. Stream of negative news can cause even mass depression. In order to avoid society’s negative emotions media can preliminarily warn public about the expected results and thus get rid of unexpectedness effect. Society has to know the real exiting situation; otherwise the problem can become more acute and have sorrowful results. The airtime of the material is very important for society. Broadcasting of the scenes depicting violence, sex and misfortune as well as of indecent words and phrases depends not only on editing and content factors, but also on the airtime. Special attention should be paid to broadcasting the material demonstrating violence until 9 p.m. Though it should not be forgotten that today everybody
can reverse any TV programme and watch it any time. Thus, each programme becomes available for teenagers and even for children.

**Conclusion:**

In developed countries, media, society and establishment agree that compliance with the ethical norms serves to their development and promotion. In Georgia, certain steps are made in this direction. Compliance with the ethical norms does not imply restricting media activities. Namely deficiency of certain norms deprives media of free will and this latter often becomes a simple tool.

More freedom always implies more responsibility. A journalist’s profession is contradictory itself. On the one hand it is oriented to special news, in exceptional case – to sensation; on the other hand it is based on trust as without trust of society and establishment a journalist’s activity becomes unimportant.

**References:**