

THE ETHICAL VALUES OF MASS MEDIA AND THE SIDE-SLIPS OF THE ROMANIAN JOURNALISM SCENERY

Margareta ANDREESCU¹

¹Lecturer, PhD, „Apollonia” University of Iași, Romania
Corresponding author: Margareta Andreescu; e-mail: marga.andreescu@tvr.ro

Abstract

The basic principle of BBC is trust. Journalists are impartial, independent and honest. Everything that a journalist does takes into account the public and the audience. The most important principles within the organization are creativity and quality promotion. BBC offers the highest editorial and ethical standards in broadcasting its shows and services. Not all the televisions have a very high capital in order to develop more elaborated and profound news programmes and that is why they prefer to achieve entertainment shows that are less expensive and attract large audiences. The lack of financial resources severely decreases the independence of TV channels. The lack of financial capital makes the audio-visual mediums to become more easily manipulated by particular interest groups. Some TV channels received state financing through advertising contracts offered by institutions subordinated to the government

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BBC emphasizes the right to free speech or to information with responsibilities, the right to respect private life and to protect children. The fundamental principles which must always be respected are accuracy and the presentation of the truth, impartiality and opinion diversity, editorial integrity and independence, serving the public interest, fairness, respect for privacy, respect for the public, independence from any commercial interest, fairness towards those interviewed.

A piece of information is always presented with accuracy, it establishes the truth in regard to what happened. Information comes directly from the source, by being present at the scene, and if this is not possible, by talking directly to the ones present. Accuracy does not only refer to gathering the correct facts. Information has to be carefully measured so that the presentation or the description becomes true, honesty has to be present in the information that we do not hold, avoiding speculations.

Impartiality and diversity reflect all opinion standards, analysing all the opinions of those involved in the conflict. Objectivity has to be present in the approach, professional judgement has to be presented where necessary, yet one should never present only one vision when it comes to controversial matters, such as public policies.

Interviews have to present the manners and the politeness of reporters. They will be based on fairness, openness and straightforward approach. A quality production respects the individuals' private life, this principle being violated only in exceptional situations, when there is solid reason. A person's behaviour, mail and conversation from the private life will not be exposed unless there is public interest. The prospect of offense is to present the world as it is, including all the aspects of human experience and reality of the natural world, it values the right to broadcast innovative and provocative productions with the responsibility of protecting the vulnerability. Programmes should not offer the impression that they support or promote a particular product, service or company. The reference to any service or product has to be justified from an editorial point of view (COMAN, 2003).

A more detailed research on the Romanian audio-visual as a whole demonstrates the poor independence and the lack of credibility. Editors benefit from sufficient independence as long as they support the interests of their owners and their partners. Another characteristic of television in Romania is the tabloidizing and trivializing of news programmes, which lately have become more and more interested in political news. This direction was aggravated by the new electoral legislation prior to the 2004 elections, which forbid

all TV channels to broadcast news about the candidates for Parliament and the Presidency, outside the electoral programmes. TV channels are allowed to present the news about the elections only during news bulletins. Political analysis can only be broadcasted if they respect the complicated placement calculation between the political parties. Prime time generalist programmes, especially the news, reflect something that television calls "non-events," meaning events that do not present any importance for the entire public, such as accidents or cases of domestic violence. The purpose of television is to educate and inform and this principle cannot be differentiated from the rest of the media environment.

A few years ago TVR 1 was the only TV channel to possess a network which presented the technical possibility of covering the entire national territory. TV channels multiplied in recent years. The majority focus on news, some have a generalist format, while others are specialised in sport, music, films, documentaries or religious programmes. In recent years television has gained a highly significant role in building a career and this is why many politicians have become television owners. The media in Romania presents a higher rate of foreign investors than any other field. In reality no organization is able to decide who is behind the capital. Therefore, property concentration reached a peak and the audiovisual environment is being dominated.

During the communist time, television represented just a propaganda broadcasted on the only TV channel available, TVR. Nowadays, the Romanian media environment does not come up with a generous offer. In fact, it comes down to three major players: TVR1, Pro Tv, Antena 1. Lately, TV news bulletins turned into tabloids, mainly focusing on the sensational, such as crimes, rapes or accidents. Although editors claim that this approach facilitates higher rating, news is becoming less and less interesting, losing a major part of their audiences.

The post-communist television had a major impact on the public. The live broadcasting of the December 1989 revolution offered the television incredible power. After the revolution television took a new magnitude,

a new era appeared - that of soap operas and of shows. Television represents the main source of information for more than a half of the population, while the written press presents a lower percentage. In the beginning, television channels used the analog transmission and after some time they used the satellite digital transmission, which was retransmitted via cable.

The National Audiovisual Council of Romania (CNA) represents the only authority in the field of audiovisual programmes. Established in 1992, CNA tracks both the private and the public broadcasters and its aim is to protect public interest in the audiovisual field. Its interventions are regulated by the Audiovisual Law. CAN's obligations are to uphold the expressing of ideas in the structuring of the content of the broadcasting programmes, to protect the Romanian language and culture, to protect human dignity and that of minors, to ensure transparency for the means of mass communication in the audiovisual sector. One of the most important duties of CAN is to track the message of the broadcasted materials using a detailed monitoring of the programmes. CAN is comprised of eleven members; the President of the state names two of them, whereas the Government, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate each propose a number of three. The members are appointed for a six year term. The council is comprised of either civil servants or of people with an individual employment contract. Employees cannot be members in the Board of Directors of the public or private broadcasters. CAN's activity is carefully supervised by the Parliament, the council being obliged to publish reports of its activity on a regular basis (ȘOITU, 1993).

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology was for a period the authority which controlled the broadcasting spectrum by means of the department which was subordinated to the General Inspectorate for Communication and Information Technology. The management of the organization is comprised of a president and a vice-president, both appointed by the prime minister. The aim of this organization is to manage the spectrum by

planning and attributing the frequencies, to establish the norms and technical procedures used in the specific surveillance and control activities.

The procedures to obtain a license were frequently changed. The audiovisual law clearly states that CNA is the only institution who has the right to issue licenses. According to the same law, a broadcasted needs two licenses in order to launch a TV station, an audiovisual license issued by CNA and a technical license, called broadcasting license, issued by IGCTI. The process of obtaining an audiovisual and frequency license involves several stages: CNA announces the public auction for an audiovisual licence, the people who take part in the auction need to obtain confirmation from IGCTI in order to verify the basic information about the company that requires the license, the applicant takes part in the public auction for the license, CNA grants the audiovisual license, the one who wins the license addresses IGCTI, demanding the license to use the frequency, which establishes the basic technical broadcasting conditions, and the applicant returns with the frequency license to CNA which grants the final authorization that allows the station to broadcast. IGCTI may reject the frequency request if this was not complete or if the applicant did not attach a copy of the audiovisual license (STAVRE, 2004).

Not all televisions have a very large capital in order to produce more complex news programmes and this is why they prefer to produce entertainment shows, which are less expensive and attract large audiences. The lack of financial resources for productions clearly diminishes the independence of TV channels. The lack of financial capital determines audiovisual environments to be easily manipulated by certain groups of interest. Some TV channels received state financing with the help of advertising contracts, which came from institutions and companies subordinated to the government. The distribution of state advertising was not based on the ratings of TV channels. The public television uses two sources of financing, state subventions and advertising revenues. The government can make changes in the financing

of the public television services by means of emergency ordinances, which are then subject to the Parliament's approval. Public television services consist of the Romanian Television Society, which operates under the control and surveillance of the Parliament. Public media have to uphold the freedom to information, the freedom of ideas and to directly inform the public. The principles of the public media are: information, education and entertainment (ȘOITU, 1996).

The right to information and the freedom of speech are guaranteed by the Constitution and are applied using specific laws. Lately, the Internet has gained more and more significance. The whole potential impact of the Internet cannot be estimated yet, but there is clearly a strategic potential for its use as an information and transaction channel, in order to spread the news and to develop some communication channels. Social networks have to be updated constantly, a fact which requires investment in multimedia specialists. The aspects related to the development, management and research of an organization's website offer development potential to many consulting firms from the field of public relations, although contracting them gains a more and more complex character from the perspective of corporate communication planning. The new research techniques, such as webpage analysis which make use of tools such as those that monitor eye movement, in order to collect objective information, change the aspect of promotional planning by means of time economy, talent associated with information technology and of the new challenges from the creative field. However, in managing the deadlines imposed by the press and other public relations activities one should never underestimate the continually changing requirements of the mass-media legislation. Nowadays in Romania there is no law regulating the rules of mass-media. Politicians refuse to develop such a legislative act because they are afraid that they might lose the sympathy of some journalists they need in election campaigns. This is why the editorial staff is comprised of employees lacking elementary knowledge about what journalism really means.

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