Research Article

Ethical Principles of Journalism Communication: Media Convergence as a Transforming Factor

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The advent and development of new types and forms of media led to the development of ethical principles of journalism in the second half of the 20th century. However, the process of media convergence, which began at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, has led to global changes taking place at all stages from the creation to the distribution of content. These changes are associated with a serious transformation of the ethical principles of journalism. The authors of this article conclude that further degradation of the ethical values of the media is inevitable, and directly related to certain trends that are inextricably linked with the process of media convergence. These trends are an increase in the share of user-generated content in the media; an overabundance of content that has influenced the media business, giving priority to the speed of content delivery and its clickbait potential; an increase in branded content; and the development of data journalism, which itself raises new ethical issues. **Keywords:** media convergence, ethical standards of journalism, digital media ethics

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries in the same period with the development of the process of digitalization, Internet and mobile technologies, a new stage has begun in the development of the media and media content. It led to the merging of previously various forms and types of media, blurring the boundaries between them, the interpenetration of genres and the emergence of new forms of content provision. This new stage of media development has long been called the process of media convergence, or media convergence (Baranova, 2017). The process of media convergence is well-studied by various authors. Their studies are devoted to various aspects of media convergence: the problems of access of the media to

the Internet; the development of newspaper editions in a convergent environment; the advent of mobile media applications; the transformation of journalism education in a converged environment, new monetization models of the media business, etc. However, experts have not paid much attention to how the process of media convergence may affect the ethical principles of journalism.

Most ethical principles of journalism have been developed over the last century. The international principles of journalistic ethics were formalized in 1983 after a series of consultative meetings held under the auspices of UNESCO. Despite the existing differences in the formation of norms and rules of the media in different countries, in the 21st century, with the development of the Internet and other new information technologies, the world's governments faced a common problem related to freedom of expression, free flow of information and media pluralism on the Internet (Akdeniz, 2011, p. 35). The media faced the global problem of developing new standards and rules of conduct for journalists on the Web, as well as the problem of revising many ethical principles. Indeed, "content control measures designed for traditional media cannot and should not be applied to the Internet" (Akdeniz, 2011, p. 20).

The purpose of this article is to comprehensively examine the problem of changing the ethical standards of journalism in the context of media convergence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ethical and legal foundations of regulating the activities of online media can be traced to 1980–1995. The rise of so-called "netiquette", a portmanteau of the English "network" and "etiquette" referring to a code of behavior for communication on the Web was formulated, and the Request for Comment (RFC) code, which considered several situations arising between users of the Web, postulated the fight against insults, and included provisions on spam and copyright, occurred in this period (Kucher, 2011, p. 26-27).

In February 1997, an event occurred that, according to several experts (Seib, 2001, p. 2), made the world public think more seriously about the problems of the ethics of journalism online at that time, foreign newspapers published their news on the web with might and main. On February 28, during the trial of Timothy McVeigh, the Dallas Morning News posted an article on the Oklahoma City attack that included McVeigh's confession that he had killed 168 people. The public was not surprised by the attack itself, but by the fact that the material about it was published on the site seven hours before the publication of the print edition. The newspaper was accused of violating ethical principles by publishing information that could affect the jury's decision and deprive the accused of a chance for an unbiased trial. This was the first time a major newspaper used its website to publish such "explosive" material (Seib, 2001, p. 2).

Today, no one questions that the media should use its online version to publish breaking news to attract users to the site. At first glance, this merely speeds the delivery of the material. But important ethical issues may arise here; "Along with the speed and completeness of the presentation of facts, high-tech converged media are becoming a source of danger: traumatic situations, addictions, the dissemination of unverified and knowingly false information" (Baranova et al., 2020; Karpovskaya et al., 2019; Miloslavskaya, 2017, p. 159; Tametyan et al., 2020; Zheltukhina et al., 2020a, 2020b).

The emphasis on speed has always been an integral part of the news business, but in the past, the process of content production for print media lasted all day, and all information was carefully checked. Experts say that today, journalists are "forced to work in the mode of news agencies, and when submitting material, speed dominates depth and reliability. To attract readers, it is more expedient to quickly publish short news with errors than to spend time checking and, thus, lag competitors" (Kolisnichenko, 2018, p. 40).

Ted Koppel, a well-known television journalist, noted in 1997 that "if we are entering an era in which journalists are forced to publish news as quickly as possible on the Internet, neglecting the verification of information and its editing, in an era in which content delivery speed becomes the main criterion, then I think that it is dangerous" (as quoted in Lasica, 1997, p. 64). Such a scenario is, indeed, dangerous, because if a journalist has published false or distorted material, it may not be possible to correct the error. Of course, they will make corrections on the site of his media, but what about the text that is replicated across a network? Inaccurate information is likely to remain on the Internet.

It is no coincidence that worldwide experts use such concepts as "digital media ethics" or "online journalism ethics" (Seib, 2001, p. 6). These concepts focus on issues of plagiarism and copyright infringement; problems arising from the publication of unverified information; ethical standards of behavior for journalists on blogs and social networks; issues that arise when working with User-generated content (UGC), as well as the global problem associated with the increasing conversion of journalistic content into a product that must be sold, often to the detriment of ethics; and new considerations faced by journalists in the selection and development of topics. The modern journalist must first think not about whether the material meets basic legal and ethical standards, but about how many comments and likes it will collect.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct the study and achieve the aim, methodological considerations were to be applied. New media also so-called journalism on the Internet is subject to rapid and content changes, that is why we applied the method for sorting and describing these changes. The methods used in the study are descriptive, comparative historical, and typological methods.

The results that we received regarding the conducted analysis of the topic also went from two directions: the one and the biggest one in the part dedicated to the interviews, by Baranova. The auditory of the interviews were experts on the topic of the transformation of the ethical principles of Journalism in a converged environment.

It was taken the large period from 2013 till 2018 years. This period is significant to convergent journalism and journalism in general due to high level of development of online media and online content. During these years participants were interviewed several times, to see how the ethics principles are changing, how the companies are reacting to the new environment. Respondents were asked questions related to the impact of the convergence process on the transformation of the ethical principles of media. It was stated that the positions have rapidly changed. The participants of the interviews included twenty employees of seventeen media companies. It included the online versions of print media, convergent media, new media, and traditional media. People who were asked the same question included the top position of the companies, like editors, employees od PR and Advertising Departments, top managers, and Board Members of the Russian media companies.

To perform a critical analysis of online news texts and by that attempt to grasp the changeable dimension of online media content, some methodological considerations are necessary.

As journalism on the Internet is subject to rapid and content changes, we first need a method for sorting and describing these changes. For this, we use systematic content analysis. In this study, we consider content analysis as a quantitative and systematic analysis of mass media content, from which one can draw general and representative conclusions that summarise the content rather than focusing on every single unit (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 15).

In order to further expand the analysis, we employ method triangulation by combining quantitative content analysis meant to give and overview of the changes that occur on the studied webpages, with qualitative discourse analysis enabling us to study the texts in greater detail but also in the light of its processual development seen through the quantitative analysis. Regular-Interval Content Capturing (RICC), which is our proposed technique for gathering the empirical material, and from which we will develop our analysis, will be explained in detail later.

The second direction of the methodology was taken from the Shnaider's thesis that was dedicated to "Development of traditional and new media of Latvia" (Shnaider, 2018). The thesis contributes and explores the stages of the development of traditional mass media and new media. The significant part was dedicated to the analysis of affection od Convergent journalism and corporate journalism on mass media and its' ethical principles. The author thoroughly analyzed the formation and process of development of online mass media in the country.

The authors used descriptive, comparative historical, and typological methods in this study. The empirical basis was online publications, reviews of the media markets of Russia and the world, as well as the results of interviews conducted by Baranova with experts on the transformation of the ethical principles of journalism

in a converged environment, and results from Shnaider's thesis research on convergent media in Latvia. Twenty employees of 17 media companies in the period 2013–2018 participated in interviews for this project. The participants included editors of online versions of print media, employees of advertising departments, and top managers of the Russian media companies. Respondents were asked questions related to the impact of the convergence process on the transformation of the ethical principles of media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the conducted interviews and scientific literature on the experience of the world media, we concluded that the process of convergence of the media leads to serious changes in the applications of ethical principles in the media. Further degradation of the ethical values of the media (Zheltukhina et al., 2016a, 2016b) is inevitable and directly related to the following trends that go together with the process of media convergence:

An Increase in the Share of User-Generated Content in the Media

In the late 1990s, Western experts raised the issue of a lack of edited information, saying that we were entering an era in which everyone can become a reporter (Drudge, 1998, p. 4). Numerous bloggers, though without professional journalism education and unfamiliar with the conventions of the genre, reached a mass audience. In 2014, a law was passed in Russia to address the problem in that country. It would the responsibility of bloggers whose sites had more than three thousand users per day, causing them to be considered media and subject to media-related regulations. But in 2017, Roskomnadzor ceased to maintain a register of bloggers after Federal Law of July 29, 2017 (Federal Law No. 276, 2017) declared the provisions in the article 10.2. "Features of distribution a blogger of publicly available information" governing the activities of a blogger invalid (Federal Law No. 97-FZ, 2014). Today, non-professional journalists have more rights than professional journalists, because the latter have editors, managers, and technical workers over them. Thus, the question of a journalist's responsibility to the reader, viewer, and listener is very acute.

Many ethical issues are raised by comments on blogs and content in the media. Such comments often include insults directed at other users, major figures within the material, and even at journalists. One of the authors, Baranova as a correspondent for Komsomolskaya Pravda, has repeatedly come across various insults directed at herself. However, many media outlets have found ways to avoid violating ethical principles when working with comments.

For example, on the site of the Ekho Moskvy radio station in Russia 1990-2022 (once closed, the site no longer exists), where there was a lot of socio-political material, often quite controversial, only a registered user could leave a comment (Baranova, 2017; Ponomarenko et al., 2017; Tameryan et al., 2018). The site had several stages of registration, each of which opened increased opportunities for users. At the first stage, there were restrictions on how many comments you could leave per day; in the final stage, which required a user provided substantial personal information, allowed users to write an unlimited number of comments without pre-moderation. Regarding this policy, Ruvinsky, chief editor of the site, noted, that "it is not always save for the radio station. Sometimes it happens that a person leaves all the information about himself and behaves inappropriately. But we believe that when a person leaves complete information about himself, this disciplines him [...] Nevertheless, we were forced to close the commentary on some materials. As an example, when a 'controversial' person, such as Valeria Novodvorskaya, dies, moderators fail: they must delete 90% of comments. Therefore, at the end of 2014, we concluded that commenting should be closed on such materials. This is a matter of ethics" (as quoted in Baranova, 2017, p. 57).

The same policies are followed by the "Moskovsky Komsomolets" (2017) newspaper. Its editor-in-chief and owner noted that, "for certain materials, for example, on the Karabakh conflict, commenting is closed. Indeed, comments in such cases can lead to serious problems, up to protests from the Azerbaijani or Armenian embassy" (as quoted in Baranova, 2017, p. 39).

There are other models employed by the media to address ethical problems associated with the publication of user comments. One solution is simple – site viewers are separated by their views, and then provided with access to commenting. For example, during the Pope's election in 2013, the "New York Times" (2013) offered readers a mini-poll under the material requiring they indicate their religious preference:

"Catholic" or "Protestant" and a few other parameters. Depending on the choice, the reader will fall into a comment thread with people with the same religious profile. This was done to avoid abuse in the comments. A similar filtering idea has been implemented by Sports.ru (2014). Users must press a button confirming that they are a fan of "CSKA" or "Spartak"; depending on the choice, the user will be sent to a different commentary tape (Miroshnichenko, 2014, p. 73).

Poleskov, editor of the site "Novaya Ggazeta" (2014), opined that a site must have written rules for commenting on materials that the moderator may refer to (as quoted in Baranova, 2017). In 2015, some technical solutions appeared on the website of this publication to prevent users from violating ethical standards. To combat trolling, a moderator can "silence" the user, that is, put him in a mode where his comments are visible only to him and the moderator. This method works well. In addition, moderators can infiltrate inside a comment to not only hide or delete it, but also to inform the user that within two minutes there is a possibility to change his comment.

In Russia since 2016, notaries began to officially certify trolling on the Internet, which allows victims of Internet aggression to file a claim for compensation for non-pecuniary damage. There has been created a law, an article 130 Criminal Code of Russian Federation (1996), but since December 2001 it is not relevant anymore, now all the cases of using of offensive language are considered under the article number 5.61 Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation (2001).

Another big question that arises when working with user-generated content is the responsibility for plagiarism. In Russia, there are serious fines for copyright infringement, but they are primarily aimed at solving the problem of unauthorized use of clips and films, rather than news content and video materials.

Not the last problem associated with the use of UGC is the problem of responsibility for mobile reporters. "This raises such ethical questions: as which tasks can be observed with the help of mobile reporter, which not; what are the actions when the author is arrested by the police, who is responsible in this case?" (Baranova, 2017, p. 99).

An Overabundance of Content has Influenced the Media Business, Shifting its Focus to the Speed of Content Delivery and its Potential as Clickbait

Even if users can somehow be controlled, what about the journalists? The consensus of online media appears to be that the more news on the site, the better – and, as noted above, the speed of content delivery is very important: there is often no time to fact-check or deliberate about whether to publish material.

Thus, at the end of 2014, an article entitled "Potato took root in the vagina of a Colombian woman" (No author, 2014; Baranova, 2017, p. 159), reprinted from the "Daily Mail" tabloid (Daily Mail, 2014), was published on the website of "Komsomolskaya Pravda" (2014). The question arises: "Was there really no other news on this day?" The chief editor of the site "Komsomolskaya Pravda" (2014), O. V. Nosova, answers, "the fact is that we have many correspondents, and they themselves can post news on the site. It's difficult to control everyone. But today there is a tendency to the need to protect the reader and, possibly, not to give such kind of materials" (Baranova, 2017, p. 95).

Whether or not there is such a trend is a moot point. On the same site of "Komsomolskaya Pravda" (2013) there are many articles that were explicitly written based on numerous comments and reposts (after all, the employee's salary often depends on their quantity), but often, journalists chasing likes achieve the opposite effect. For example, to celebrate the 195th anniversary of the birth of I. S. Turgenev at the end of 2013, an article entitled "How Turgenev miraculously escaped from the Bigfoot" (Chernykh, 2013) appeared on the website (and in the print edition) (Baranova, 2017, p. 160). The material talks about the meeting of Turgenev with humanoid, after what Turgenev tried to ran away. The author wrote, "history often appears in articles and television programs about the unknown. Convincingly confirming that the Bigfoot is a real creature. Which, of course, did not just happen to the hunter. Ufologists believe he liked this "female". And what? Turgenev was a healthy man. A good sexual object for the yeti, the offspring will be strong, strong" (Baranova, 2017, p. 160). The article received only seven comments (with five users indicating they did not like it).

Here we agree with columnist Michael Marinaccio, who notes that modern media organizations are locked in steel shackles, since they are simultaneously expected to be arbiters of truth and jesters. If it is possible to

remove the role of comedian from them, most likely it will be possible to keep the news as a public good and leave the media as the guardians of information and knowledge (Marinaccio, 2016).

Such a change is possible. Here is a hopeful example: By the same memorable date on the site kp.ru, it published another article, "You are the only support and support for me, Oh, great, powerful, truthful and free Russian language" (Baranova, 2017, p. 160). The article contains interesting facts from Turgenev's life: it is said that he was a pioneer of civil liberties in Russia, and was known in the West as a chess player. The author also talks about his difficult relationship with Turgenev's mother. This article received 64 comments, to the questionable article's seven.

Note that the professional crisis associated with the fact that journalists often act as "jesters" is also experienced by the media of other countries. For example, 48.3% of the members of the Madrid Press Association surveyed believe that the sensationalism and "yellowness" of journalism has turned it into a spectacle (Paisova, 2018, p. 69).

Many ethical issues are raised by online blogs (diaries) of journalists on media sites. The blog genre implies complete freedom of expression for the author, both in terms of content and stylistic expression (Karpovskaya et al., 2019). This statement conflicts with the legal and ethical standards of a journalist. Does a journalist remain a journalist when keeping a blog on a publication's website; does he assume responsibility for its content? Fake journalists, without a professional education, come from the blogosphere, where various illegal actions, up to the hidden propaganda of Nazism, are welcomed. A blogger does everything for likes and reposts; the era of new media is coming, the era of Twitter and Facebook. We can say, that Twitter & Facebook appear to have substantially cut down the number of personal blogs.

Often, journalists allow themselves to make offensive statements on blogs and social networks, which contradicts the principles of ethics and the norms of media law (Black & Roberts, 2011; Brown, 2011; Couldry, 2013; Ward, 2010, etc.). According to the authors of the present work, the most striking example of such an ethical breach was the article by the *New York Times'* Stephen Levitt (2007) on his "Freakonomics" blog, published on the newspaper's website, about how easy it would be to carry out a terrorist attack on board an airplane under the restrictions that airlines and the TSA impose on passengers. He described in detail scenarios for possible terrorist attacks. He also proposed the topic of organizing such crimes to readers, and they offered their options. These reflections of the journalist make it possible to better plan real terrorist acts, even if they do not generally provoke them.

The editors of the world's leading media, of course, are trying to find solutions to emerging problems. Many global media outlets have already incorporated requirements for employees' social media behavior into their corporate standards (Tameryan et al., 2019, Zheltukhina et al., 2018; Zheltukhina & Zyubina, 2018; Zyubina et al., 2017; etc.). For example, the "New York Times" Company's journalistic ethics strategy in the Websites and Blogs section says: "Nothing can be published under the brand of our company or any of our divisions, without going through editing or moderation …" (New York Times, 2022).

There is also an important note in this section that "even a private blog of an employee is most likely associated in the minds of the audience with the reputation of the company. Therefore, even on blogs that were not created on the publication's website, newspaper employees should think about respect for the dignity and privacy of other people […] employees can chronicle their daily lives, but should not defame or humiliate others. […] Texts may include photos and videos, but without offensive images. Journalists must not disclose personal or confidential information obtained through the editors…" (The New York Times, 2022). Members of the New York Times' editorial staff are also prohibited from speaking on social media on issues that may cause public conflict and accept sponsorship from individuals or commercial entities.

Increase of Branded Media Content

Another ethical issue associated with the development of online versions is online advertising (Seib, 2001, p. 10). The share of entertainment, advertising and PR content is growing, crowding out a journalistic product, and traditional journalism is being transformed into a medium that expands its functions – one that "incorporates the characteristics of journalistic, advertising and PR text: about 80% of media content is in some way connected with the execution of the customer's order (with 'customers' in this case meaning advertising services and PR structures)" (Miloslavskaya, 2016, p. 580). News stories often include a link to a

relevant sponsor; for example, the travel section may contain a link to a travel agency. The advantage for the advertiser is the prospect of an immediate response.

In the late 1990s, the "New York Times" was criticized for carrying advertising by Barnes & Noble, a chain of booksellers. If a visitor to the newspaper's website bought a book using the link from the website, then the website received commissions. Such a mechanism may create the temptation, for commercial reasons, to review books that are most likely to be bought. It is very difficult to maintain the line between editorial and advertising content, combining the interests of both journalism and the media business (Seib, 2001, p. 11).

In other words, journalism as a business has failed in the task of providing news in the form of a public good. Popular media are forced to serve two incompatible masters: justice and profit. Journalism across the world is more dissolved by advertising. When analyzing features of the development of modern Latvian journalism, Shnaider (2018) concluded that, "due to economic difficulties, advertisers began to influence the country's media market: large companies, private banks. They began to use media channels to disseminate their information and promote their ideas. Now they began to admit to the editorial issue, up to changing the language and style of journalistic material" (Shnaider, 2018, p. 174). She concludes: "The growth of brand journalism and corporate communications is the next step in the process of transforming traditional media in the Latvian media space" (Shnaider, 2018, p. 174). Thus, an increase in the share of advertising and PR content leads to a decrease in the share of journalistic product.

The development of technology today continually poses new ethical issues that require reflection. For example, the development of data journalism entails a problem associated with the processing of data by machine methods. Journalists often collect data on social networks; the problem is that robots that extract information do not distinguish whether between closed and open profiles, and whether information is presented to friends or to everyone; finally, they do not receive consent from people to process their information. However, as noted by the famous Soviet and Russian scientist N. N. Moiseev in "The Fate of Civilization. The Way of Reason" (Moiseev, 2000), technological progress has always been ahead of the moral and spiritual development of man.

Worldwide researchers in data journalism are also considering ethical issues that may arise in the automated creation of content. For example, they note that it is published without editorial oversight, which means that it may contain various kinds of errors. Reg Chua, innovation manager at Reuters, notes that the agency generates 950 media alerts and 400 daily materials that are published without human input (as quoted in Fanta, 2017). This is quite enough to make a conclusion, that the introduction of systems that allows automated content creation will be financially impractical if there will be human editors. Further, Lin Weeks, in an article entitled "Media Law and the Copyright of Automated Journalism," notes that machine-generated content raises complex copyright issues. Weeks suggests that rights can even be transferred to the computer program itself (Weeks, 2014).

Worldwide researchers considering data journalism also raise other ethical questions: when creating texts, should programs consider the parameters of objectivity, responsibility, and accuracy? Questions also arise about data integrity, because missing elements can lead to bias in the creation of content (Fanta, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the results of the study, obtained because of interviewing 20 employees of 17 media companies in the period 2013–2018 and after the literature analysis devoted to this subject and regarding the real work experience in the online media, the authors concluded that today it is necessary to create a global standard for ethical and legal norms of a journalist, who are working with new media. This set of rules will help to avoid multimillion-dollar courts directed against the media, help to make the audience to begin to trust to online resources, and journalists to be calm, avoiding the audience attacks on the Internet.

The technical progress, and in particular, the production and dissemination of information using technology, has always contributed to social progress, increased the human ability to process and preserve knowledge, and helped the development of the media industry. Today, when technology is developing especially rapidly, and the process of media convergence is directly related to the digital revolution, there is a sharp decrease in the moral character of an average person in which the media plays an important role.

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