

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

*PERSPECTIVES ON THE MORAL
DEVELOPMENT OF JOURNALISTS*

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Key concepts:

Moral development, journalists, defining issues test, self-regulation process, legal perspectives

Overview of the main chapters

Freedom of expression represents one of the fundamental values for the existence of a democratic society as well as for the harmonious existence of any society/ in Romania, freedom of expression constitutes one of the fundamental liberties gained after the 1989 revolution. Exercising this freedom has proven to be difficult, as it is characterized by a continuous process involving the discovery of the content and exploring its limits. Journalists, in their stand as mediators of the informational flux and opinion makers were and still are one of those most exposed category of citizens and professionals to this process of exploring the content and especially finding the limits of this freedom. While legal provisions established during the communist period (an example being the Press Law of 1974) fell into disuse, new provisions in line with newly adopted Constitution, started to enter into force. As the regulatory process continues, freedom of expression gained from this process meanings and new content, but also new limits.

The purpose of this current research is to identify the moral development stage of journalists by assessing how they relate to the professional ethical dilemmas they have faced in the last five years and the recent legal developments that took place. As it is presented in the first chapter of the thesis, the moral development stage determines how the individual relates to a particular moral or legal problem, which is a valid indicator of future behavior. This information should be the essential starting point in supporting any attempts or self-regulatory profession and any attempt to formulate a public policy in this field.

The introductory chapter includes some preliminary observations with a section defining the concepts used in the paper. A literature review of main contributors in the study of moral development stages and moral thinking is followed by a critical overview of the research tools used over the years by researchers. At the end of the

chapter test that intends to investigate the development of moral judgment of journalists adapted to the specific profession, which takes into account the important ethical dilemmas that Romanian journalists faced last years is being introduced.

The second chapter provides with an overview of the international and domestic regulatory framework that are directly related to the cases included in the designed test. The right to freedom of expression in the view of the European Convention of Human Rights and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights indicating its interpretation of the right to privacy and family life are being introduced. From a national perspective some of the most influential laws of Romanian media law, an example being the now repealed crimes of insult and libel are being introduced next to an overview of the new provisions of the Civil Code that regulate the right to privacy and human dignity and the specific regulations for the audiovisual sector the most recent statutory proposal for a law regulating journalism. The purpose of presenting the regulatory proposal is to identify the attitudes of the potential "legislator" in relation to the actual exercise of the profession of journalist, identifying issues whose resolution is required by law and the methods that are suggested in this regard.

The third chapter aims to outline the ethical framework governing the media. The first part of the main European regulations in the media, the main lines of argument for media self-regulation attempts and two of the oldest of these forms of self - Swedish Press Council (the oldest in the world, which was used cited as a model for almost all subsequent press councils) and the Danish Press Council, significantly more recent date, a model that blends successfully the court regulatory framework and the individual characteristics of a self-regulatory body as a viable compromise, which would could lead to a reconciliation of the press and regulatory efforts to maintain independence and its freedom of expression.

The second part of the third chapter includes national ethical regulations in force taking a special interest in the relevant articles of the Unique Code of Ethics adopted by the Media organizations Convention. The national self-regulatory proposals,

respectively Journalism Best Practices Group and the current form of self regulatory body, although less widely known, that the Council of Honor of the Romanian Press Club are being presented.

The following chapter is dedicated to the study of the moral development of Romanian journalists conducted using a test similar to the Defining Issues Test for three dilemmas relating to the right to private life, rights of the family of the deceased, right to reputation and public interest. The three dilemmas were built based on recent cases that have been discussed both from the legal standpoint and from the deontology standpoint. The analysis of the answers provided by the journalists on a Likert scale, combined with the analysis of their open essays and with their top-three ranking motivations enabled us to issue statements relating to their moral development stage correlated with the type of media they are working for, their status in the organization, their gender and age and their geographical location.

The conclusions of the research indicate the moral development stage of the journalists and their main development tendency.