NEW SKILLS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF JOURNALISTS

TEACHING GUIDE

ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF THE DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

Erasmus+

About the Newsreel Project

Journalists have an essential role in the new media landscape as a pillar of credible and contextualized information. Being in competition with several alternative forms of news, non-professional or even deliberately manipulated news, professional journalism should be empowered by new competencies and skills.

Opportunities enabled by digital technologies, such as processing, analyzing and visualizing large amounts of data, as well as multi-sectoral and digital cross-border co-operations, open new fields of journalistic activities, and new ways to speak about public issues. However, this environment also entails technical and economic risks, and demands expertise in IT security, as well as the development of business models and strategies from journalists and media companies.

Journalists face several ethical challenges that should be handled to meet their social responsibilities. Fake news and hate speech have become major issues in the public sphere, as have whistleblowing and activism.

By improving skills of a new generation of European journalists, NEWSREEL will contribute to the strengthening of the common European democratic public sphere. It will do so by improving collaborative and cross-border journalism that is able to elaborate and make tangible the huge amount of available data, and which is based on a predictable business strategy and a firm ethical foundation.

The main goal of the project is to develop e-learning materials connected to four fields: data journalism, new business models, collaborative journalism and ethical challenges. All educational materials produced by the project are openly and freely accessible through open licenses via the project's website (https://newsreel.pte.hu/).

The project partners are the University of Pécs, in Hungary; the Erich Brost Institute, from the Dortmund Technical University, in Germany; the University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL), in Portugal; and the University of Bucharest, in Romania.

Teaching Guide

The main goal of the teaching guides, there is one for each one of the four fields, is to give some hints and help teachers to implement the courses. Here they can see in a glimpse what contents will be found at the eLearning, the main goals of the course, for whom it was thought, bibliographical references, and other contents.

Ethical challenges of the digital public sphere

Target audience

As a course for the journalism and the media studies, the main audience are the students of masters, as well of bachelor programs. The completing of the course presupposes the basic knowledge on journalism and media ethics. It is not an introductory course; it is rather based on the knowledge gained from other ethics courses. However, the teaching materials are also useful for professionals on the field of journalism, media research and media law, and for interested persons who look for information about the ethical challenges of the digital media environment.

General objective of the course

The overall objective of the course is that students and other interested persons gain knowledge about the new ethical problems linked with the digital media and journalism, as well as increasing sensibility of the journalism students and professionals regarding the digital ethical challenges. The teaching materials deal with the special ethical issues of the digital media, and they give examples on handling these challenges. As a result, the learners will become more aware of how digital technology and increased two-way engagement with audiences are changing the nature of journalistic ethical decision-making and challenging it in new ways. The significance of the ethical problems is enlightened by their technical and social background.

Specific objectives of the course

Learners in this course will:

-       learn the difference among legacy journalism, citizen journalism and activist journalism;

-       learn how to reach and use anonymous sources (including whistleblowers);

-       understand the importance of privacy in the digital media;

-       learn fact checking technics;

-       learn the importance of the transparency of the journalistic work;

-       learn how to refer articles published in other media outlets;

-       identify online tools to solve ethical challenges (source verification, comment moderation, accountability measurements and the like).

Professional competences to be enhanced (500 characters)

Learners will gain:

-       knowledge about the opportunities and risks of digital technologies from the point of view of the journalism;

-       experience in using tools for fact-checking and checking the source credibility;

- ability to make ethically founded decisions in the digital environment;

- ability to communicate more effectively with the audience;

- experience in using data in a fair way.

Course

Contents

1. *What is journalism, who is a journalist*: In the 21st century, journalism and news consumption underwent a radical transformation that have fundamentally changed the world of press and media. Some speak of a crisis in journalism, pointing to the content and linguistic degradation of texts, the supremacy of sensation, or even the decreasing prestige of the profession of journalism. Others, however, talk about the revolution in journalism, referring to the unprecedented opportunities for access to information and knowledge, the unrestricted freedom of expression and opinion and the new spaces for public dialogue. This teaching material explores what journalism means today, how old and new expectations influence the work and role of the journalists are in journalism work and role, and how the relationship between (editorial) / journalists and the public has changed.

2. *Ethical editing in digital journalism*: One of the greatest responsibilities of the journalistic profession lies in the editing. The selection of raw materials and their finalization into text, the cutting of images and videos raise the possibility of undue subjectivity, distortion of information or even manipulation. As technology has advanced, the topic of ethical editing has become an increasingly important issue. This curriculum explores the ethical issues of text, image, and video editing in the era of digital journalism.

3. *Anonymity, whistleblowing*: What is the value of anonym sources? How to check the credibility of anonym sources? How can the safety of whistleblowers be guaranteed? What are the legal guarantees of the protection of information sources?

4. *Cooperation between disclosure sites and journalists*: What are the disclosure sites? What is the role of the leaking portals in the public sphere? What can we learn from the WikiLeaks story? Ethical aspects of well-known cross-border investigations.

5. *Fake news, disinformation – new problems?* Truth, accuracy, fact checking have been the fundamentals of journalism, because they are the preconditions for the media to fulfil the role it plays in democracy. However, disinformation has become one of the most significant challenges of contemporary and likely future public discourse. In this material you will learn about disinformation and fake news, about those who are responsible for spreading them and the fight against this phenomenon, and you will also see some concrete steps that you as a journalist can take against disinformation.

6. *Fact checking in the digital media environment*: Checking, double-checking the facts published in journalistic products had been a core expectation for journalists even before the post-truth age began. Fact-checking is the tool of ensuring accuracy and truth in reporting. Digital information sources, however, need new methods and tools for debunking the false and inaccurate information. This course will provide you the fundamental knowledge about these methods and tools.

7. *Transparency of journalistic work*: Newsrooms can be transparent in two different ways: in their operation and their work. Transparency can build trust, and if the readers

trust in a media outlet. The notion and importance of transparency. Role of the journalists in the improving of media literacy.

8. *The ethics of data*: Data journalism and data visualization has now become a natural tool and companion for journalists who work with complex data stories when writing their articles. In fact, data journalism is all about combining traditional journalism sensitivity and storytelling with the vast amount of information the digital world offers. This curriculum addresses the ethical challenges of collecting, organizing, and visualizing data in journalism.

9. *Increasing of incomes and journalism ethics*: Technical innovations (like smart phones etc.) changed the media market, publishers and broadcasters have moved online. The advertising models also changed in the new area, and it has raised new ethical issues. How do we know we are reading an ad or an article? Is it right to use adblocking apps? Why do websites use misleading clickbait titles? Is it fair or a big mistake? Do newspapers steal other's article? How can it be ethical?

Teaching methods

The teaching materials provide all relevant information for individual learning. In this case, the learner will elaborate the teaching materials alone, not only by reading the texts but also by using the embedded external sources and fulfilling the interactive tests.

However, the most effective use of the e-learnings is use as a basis for a blended learning course. In this case, the teaching materials provide general knowledge about the digital ethical issues. To the personal elaboration on the course, it is suggested that:

- questions and problems marked as to 'think it over" should be discussed within the group;

- national ethical codices and relevant laws (eg. about public data) can be elaborated;

- real ethical cases collected and published online (e.g. at Media Ethics Initiative; Case Consortium @ Columbia) and from the cases of national ethical bodies should be discussed;

- ethical cases can be solved also as a role-play, where some of the students represent the newsroom, some others the claimant, and a third group will be the ethical committee;

- original sources referred in the e-learnings should be discussed;

- films like Citizenfour (Laura Poitras, 2014), Snowden (Oliver Stone, 2016), The Fifth Estate (Bill Condon, 2013), The Great Hack (Jehane Noujaim, Karim Amer, 2019) etc. can be watched and discussed together.

Evaluation

To the evaluation, more activities can be considered. The e-learning and the compulsory readings serve as a basis for a test or other kind of exam. The tasks from the e-learnings can also be used as test items. Students can also submit one or more elaborated ethical cases, alone or as a teamwork. Further, the active participation in the discussions and role-plays can also be evaluated. The students can also write essays based on the films or some complex ethical issues mentioned on the e-learnings.

Short bibliography

Ireton, Cherilyn & Posetti, Julie. 2018. Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training. UNESCO https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265552

Fengler, Susanne. 2012. "From Media Self-Regulation to 'Crowd-Criticism': Media Accountability in the Digital Age." Central European Journal of Communication 5, no. 2: 175-89.

Foreman, Gene. 2016. The Ethical Journalist: Making Responsible Decisions in the Digital Age. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell

Graves, Lucas & Cherubini Federica. 2016. The rise of fact-checking sites in Europe. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/The%2520Rise%2520of%2520Fact-Checking%2520Sites%2520in%2520Europe.pdf

Kavanagh, Jennifer & Rich, Michael D. 2018. Truth Decay. An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2314.html

McBride, Kelly B., Rosenstiel, Thomas B. 2013. The New Ethics of Journalism: Principles for the 21st Century. London, New Delhi, Singapor: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Muller, Denis. 2014. Journalism Ethics for the Digital Age. Brunswick, London: Scribe Publications.

Silverman, Craig, ed. 2014. Verification Handbook. A definitive guide to verifying digital content for emergency coverage. http://verificationhandbook.com/book/

Simon, Joel. 2015. The new censorship. Inside the global battle for media freedom. New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

Zion, Lawrie, Craig, David. 2016. Ethics for Digital Journalists: Emerging Best Practices. New York, Oxon: Routledge

Observations

The topics covered by the course are familiar to the students and trending in the popular culture. Therefore, the students can be involved easily in the discussions. It is a rapidly changing topic, that means the examples and the sources should be adapted to the current situation. Ethical issues are partly different in the different countries, it is important to consider the real national context.

The team

Gábor Polyák

Dr Gábor Polyák works for University of Pécs, Institute for Communication and Media Studies as associate professor and for Mertek Media Monitor, a Hungarian NGO dealing with media policy issues as research leader. Before, he was research fellow at the University of Münster, Institute for Information, Telecommunication and Media Law from 2014 to 2016, and associate professor at the University of Pécs, Institute for Information and Communication Law from 2001 to 2014. His educational background includes law and media studies at the University of Pécs, Master of Laws degree in ICT law at the University of Vienna, PhD degree and habilitation at the University of Pécs. He teaches and does research in the fields of media regulation, IT law, media policy, and he also teaches media literacy for media teachers.

Annamária Torbó

Annamária Torbó is a PhD student at the Department of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Pécs. Her main fields of research are the products of popular culture (particularly movies and TV series), and the connection of media texts and fan communities. In her PhD thesis she is dealing with a contemporary pop-cultural phenomenon, the young adult fiction. She is also interested in journalism related to communication and media research and developing the skills of media literacy. She is the editor of the Hungarian European Journalism Observatory. Besides being a researcher, she is also the project assistant of NEWSREEL.

Eszter Katus

Eszter Katus is a journalist working for Átlátszó, a watchdog NGO and the first non-profit centre for Investigative journalism in Hungary. She received her degree in Hungarian Literature and Language and Communication Studies in 2008 at the University of Pécs. She has been a reporter for a decade at a county daily paper, and she has worked as a teacher for two years. She writes investigative reports and she is also a permanent expert of Mertek Media Monitor.

Éva Varga

Éva Varga is an expert of journalism and communication. She works as a lecturer at the Department of Communication and Media Studies of the University of Pécs. She is also a communication trainer and coach and worked as a journalist for several years.