Ivana Stojanović Prelević[1]
University of Niš, Serbia,
Faculty of Philosophy

BLOG ETHICS - ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND CODES[2]

Abstract. *Technology development facilitates numerous changes in different areas - social, economic, scientific, etc. New kinds of journalism have appeared, along with numerous questions and ethical problems. Citizens become prosumers, and the need for media literacy is growing. The author explores ethical aspects of media literacy. This research primarily focuses on the ethical regulation of blogs as one of the most widespread forms of expressing opinions among people. Blogging is a tool of citizen journalism which impacts the public sphere; it requires a critical reflection and ethical regulation. The pioneer of blogging, Tim Dunlop (2003), points out that blogs revive the art of argumentation and the idea of public debates. By using descriptive methods, the author analyzes ethical values - credibility, authenticity, justice and objectivity. At the end of the paper, the author compares the ethical Codes for Bloggers with the ethical Codes for Journalism in Norway with the aim of finding commonalities and differences among principles. The conclusion is that it is useful to the welfare of societies to ethically regulate blogs, which has already been done in certain countries. It is important to disseminate knowledge about the importance of ethics for bloggers to young people and journalists because they belong to public spheres. The Blogging Codes are akin to Codes for Journalists, since in both Codes basic ethical values prevail.*

Keywords: *media literacy, weblog, citizen journalism, ethical values, ethical codes*

1. Introduction

Digitalization has made many changes in different spheres: media, journalism, education, art, etc. The model of communication in the media has been changed. The audience becomes to a greater extent involved in the communication process, and it has a now role – producing media contents. This gives rise, according to the American writer Alvin Toffler (1980), to call contemporary audience "prosumers" [3]. Prosumers

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[3] *Prosumer* is a word derived from the words: *producer* and *consumer*. It refers to an individual who is both a producer and a consumer.

have become new journalists. However, there are certain differences between professional journalists and prosumers. Unlike prosumers, professionals typically possess the knowledge of media ethics and writing news. Although prosumers are important in the public domain, especially in citizen activism, they are important for society and could serve as sources for serious media. For that reason, it is important to educate them. Media education is undoubtedly a need of contemporary society. Learning ethics is just a part of media education, yet very important.

Blogs present a tool for expressing attitudes and opinions through the Internet. For democratic societies, the possibility of criticizing, asking questions and commenting on opinions are essential. The Internet makes those activities easier to perform. Blogs could help the democratization of communications, but they need to be true and respect other ethical values such as human dignity, privacy, etc. This is recognized by many ethicists who create ethical codes which propound some ethical values and behavior as desirable: authenticity, credibility, justice, truth. Those values exist in journalistic codes, too. By analyzing codes for bloggers and codes for journalists by means of content analysis and comparative analysis, I sketch similarities and differences between ethics of journalists and ethics of bloggers.

2. Ethics for bloggers

Referring to the Hutchins Commission of the Freedom of the Press, Bivins (Tom Bivins) concludes: "In other words, not only should media do their job and attend to the ramifications of carrying out that job, but they should also involve themselves in the well-being of society as a whole" (Bivins, 2017: 1). Another theorist, Steven Ward, thinks that in a global world we need global media ethics if we want to live in a better world: "The greatest task of moral theory today is to transform itself into a global ethics that challenges dominant forms of parochial ethics, from ethnocentricity to nationalism and political realism. We should be radical in the ways of moral invention, envisaging a global ethics and a global media ethics for our interconnected world" (Ward, 2015: 23). Free media and professional journalism are basic elements of a healthy society, that is, a just society.

The appearance of citizen journalism is the most important change instigated by the Internet. Citizens become much more active in producing and distributing news. "Citizens not otherwise employed as journalists find themselves with access to tools for recording and sharing text, photos, video, audio, and other content more quickly and easily than ever before" (Roberts, Steiner, 2012: 1). Roberts and Steiner annotated ethical problems in new technologies, that is, a new cell phone software which enables users to locate people and to know their private information. New ethical issues emerged, while many issues are part of traditional ethics which have developed over the past 100 years. Relating to this Bivins suggests: "...what has been considered unethical in the past will probably still be unethical today and tomorrow. Media practitioners must use the lessons of the past to inform their actions now and in the future, especially if they want to avoid the mistakes of the past" (Bivins, 2017:

2). The State of the News Media 2008 Report suggested that "citizen media" had become a "true competitor to traditional media" (Bivins, 2017: 120). The main reason could be: "the advent of online media that operates as a partnership, or interactively, with the consumer—now part producer" (Bivins, 2017:30).

As it is well known, weblogs appeared in 1998. As Rebecca Blood writes in her paper "Weblogs: A History and Perspective", Jesse James Garret started making a list of weblogs and sent that list to Cameron Barret who published it on Camworld. Garret made a list of 23 weblogs at the beginning of 1999. "Suddenly a community sprang up. It was easy to read all of the weblogs on Cameron's list, and most interested people did. Peter Merholz announced in early 1999 that he was going to pronounce it 'weeblog' and inevitably this was shortened to 'blog' with the weblog editor referred to as a 'blogger.'" (Blood, 2000: 28). Garret then continued to make his own list – Rebecca did it too. "The original weblogs were link-driven sites. Each was a mixture in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays. Weblogs could only be created by people who already knew how to make a website. A weblog editor had either taught herself to code HTML for fun, or, after working all day creating commercial websites, spent several off-work hours every day surfing the web and posting to her site. These were web enthusiasts" (Blood, 2000: 28). In a sense, that was good for readers because the editor guaranteed accuracy. Yet, Rebecca asked about weblog independence.

Weblogs changed with time. It was a false promise of the web that everyone could make a blog properly. The truth was that this could be done by the people who knew how to code a webpage. "Blogger, Pitas, and all the rest have given people with little or no knowledge of HTML the ability to publish on the web: to pontificate, remember, dream, and argue in public, as easily as they send an instant message", as it was explained by Blood (2000:32).

She states: "Let me propose a radical notion: The weblog's greatest strength — its uncensored, unmediated, uncontrolled voice — is also its greatest weakness".[4] When blogs appeared, discussions about the ethics of blogs practically did not exist. The situation is not much better today. Rebecca Blood proposes a set of six rules aimed at forming a basis of ethical behavior for online publishers of all kinds: Publish as facts only that which you believe to be true; If material exists online, link to it when you reference it; Publicly correct any misinformation; Write each entry as if it could not be changed; add to, but do not rewrite or delete any entry; Disclose any conflict of interest; Note questionable and biased sources[5].

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[4] See: http://www.rebeccablood.net/handbook/excerpts/weblog_ethics.html (Accessed on October 1, 2021).

[5] Ibid.

3. Some ethical problems in traditional and new media – authenticity, objectivity and responsibility

With the development of online media and digitalization, people today are using different criteria when they choose who to trust. People looking for online news gravitate to "aggregators" such as Google. According to Bivins, one of the problems with aggregators is that they lack personalization and credibility of news sources (2017:33). With regard to blogs, he said: "Increasingly, however, blog sites are offering a mix of commentary, passed-along or repackaged news stories (often citizen-contributed), and links to other news sites — what might be called "news and opinion as social dialogue" (Bivins, 2017: 2017).

If bloggers want to be a part of journalistic practice, they need to respect ethics. The principles they need to respect have to be tied with their respect toward society as a whole and to the consumers of their product specifically.

One way to look at how the new media can develop credibility and trust is by imagining a typical visitor and his wishes and expectations when he/she visited a website and looked for a credible news source (Bivins, 2017: 33).

Authenticity in traditional media was guaranteed by mainstream media. What about objectivity? Being unbiased is one of the main conditions for objective media – unbiased thinking, writing, reporting and acting. However, it is hard to be unbiased because our opinions are influenced by the social environment, traditions and culture. Also, the definition of media objectivity changes. As Bivins shows, subjective claims are based on individual feelings, personal opinions and taste (Bivins, 2017: 2). Journalistic objectivity refers to being without prejudice or bias, fully presenting information in context, but also being fair and in balance. Being unbiased does not exclude subjectivity. Walter Lippmann (1919) believed that the crisis in journalism arises when we are faced with the crisis in democracy. He found that journalism is like a science and it needs to use scientific methods – a consistent method of testing information. He emphasized that the method is objective, not journalists (Schudson, 2007). Meyer (1995) thinks it is important to include community and its opinion in searching for the truth. Subjectivity presents a view that could be new and original. Interpretative journalism is an example of such subjectivity. We can count it as new objectivity. Or what if we are wrong? Perloff (2015) suggests that traditional media bias was understood as a function of someone's ideology and levels of trust in media, rather than as an objective assessment of media content (Perloff, 2015). Contemporary journalism is different from the traditional one. Today we are faced with different kinds of journalism – brand, citizen, data journalism, etc. In the Internet and social media era the audience has become journalists and the audience is in the center in the sense in which information is directed to the public. Journalists work for the public; marketing is directed toward the public and the public is directed to the public. Intentions are different, some journalists do this for ethical reasons, some of them, like marketing professionals, are driven by profit, etc. All of them, journalists, marketers and the public, have responsibility.

The responsibility of journalists is very complex. Journalists are responsible to the editor, to the public, to advertisers, to the people they report on, to victims, and so on. Responsibility to editors means that they need to be professional – to be accurate and behave ethically. One very important aspect of responsibility is self-responsibility. Every journalist enters journalism with his personal ethics which could help him to behave ethically. On the other hand, there is professional ethics which could help in ethical communications in organizations. Knowing ethics as a philosophical discipline could help journalists to recognize ethical problems. Media ethics could help journalists and other media employees to solve that problem by using arguments. In the digital era responsibility has expanded. The reasons for this include the appearance of new kinds of journalism, and people who are not journalists in the process of creating news.

Journalists should check the information with at least three sources. There are ethical codes which serve as a guideline. New creators of news could also use codes to make sure that they do their work ethically. For example, there is the Association of Bloggers which makes codes for influencers and bloggers with brands[6]. It should not be forgotten that the biggest internet controllers are states and among them the USA, then private companies, civil society, intergovernmental organizations, Internet and academic organizations. When we are talking about roles of reporting contents, we need to take three views into consideration: human rights related to the expression of opinion, the right of the state to regulate illegal content, and technology as a means of content control[7]. These roles could help ethics, but they also open new questions, such as the problem of privacy in the Internet domain and democratization.

4. Ethical Codes for Bloggers – content analysis

Here I will present the Codes of Ethics for Bloggers, Social Media and Content Creators[8] based on the Code of Ethics for the Norwegian Press published by the Norwegian Press Association. [9] These Codes consist of the preamble, a short version of Codes and a long version of Codes. At the beginning of the preamble, it is written that "As an Online Content Creator – whether it be as a blogger, a video blogger, a podcaster, a microblogger or a general social media participant – you are an important part of the wider public knowledge creation and discussion."[10] This introduction

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[6] Available on: https://associationofbloggers.com/code-of-ethics/ (Accessed on November 1, 2021).

[7] See: https://agitprop.rs/etika-na-internetu-u-svetu-i-srbiji/ (Accessed: October 1, 2021).

[8] Available on: https://mor10.com/code-of-ethics-for-bloggers-social-media-and-content-creators/ (Accessed on November 1, 2021).

[9] Available on: https://accountablejournalism.org/ethics-codes/norway-norwegian-press-code-of-ethics (Accessed on November 1, 2021).

[10] Available on: https://mor10.com/code-of-ethics-for-bloggers-social-media-and-content-creators/ (Accessed on November 1, 2021).

gives an important role to online community bloggers and other participants. The other sentence refers to responsibility: "This role carries with it a responsibility to be fair, honest and respectful not only toward your fellow members of society but also toward fact".[11]

The short version of Codes consists of twelve principles and their short explanations. These include: It is your right to voice your opinion; Be critical of everything, even yourself; Use your power to protect; Tell the truth at all times; Present your opinion as your opinion; State your allegiances to stay independent; Reveal your sources unless doing so can harm your sources; Be critical of your sources and seek independent verification; Always give credit where credit is due; Always preserve the intended meaning of a given statement; Give your opponent a chance to respond; Admit and correct your mistakes immediately[12]. These principles talk about the freedom of speech and the bloggers' right to use this freedom to express their opinions, to shine a light on injustices and neglect perpetrated on individuals and groups, and they also talk about responsibility related to truth, correctness, and authenticity. Special attention is paid to independence and to plagiarism, which is the correct quotation of other quotations and opinions: "6. State your allegiances to stay independent. To preserve your own trustworthiness and integrity as a Content Creator, always state any relation, financial, personal, political or otherwise, to the subject or topic you are presenting. Bias, even if it is only perceived as such, immediately discredits your account unless you warn of it first. In simple terms; if you have a political affiliation that colors your judgment, say so; if you are employed by or received money from the subject you are covering, say so; if you were given gifts or preferential treatment in return for a positive review or commentary, say so. By stating these facts of allegiance your opinions gain informational value that would otherwise be lost in suspicion of bias".[13]

The longer version consists of four principles, which are explained by subprinciples. These are: 1. The Role of the Bloggers and Online Content Creators in Society, 2. Integrity and Responsibility, 3. Content Creator Conduct and Relations with the Sources, 4. Publication Rules.[14] The first principle is about the freedom of speech (1.1; 1.3), then it is about content creators' responsibility to allow different and independent views to be expressed (1.2.), it is about the right of any content creator to be critical (1.4) and about Content Creators who have an obligation to protect individuals and groups against injustices (1.5). The second principle is about a content creator who carries personal and full responsibility for the material presented to the public (2.1.), then it states that Content Creators must guard their own integrity and credibility (2.2), they need to avoid conflicts and biases (2.3), and to be independent from advertisements (2.4; 2.5; 2,6). The third principle is about relations with the

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

sources, it is about plagiarism, too. "3.1. The source of information must, as a rule, be identified, unless this conflicts with source protection or consideration for a third party".[15] The principle suggests that bloggers should be critical in choosing sources (3.2), "The Content Creator should always clarify the terms on which an interview is being carried out." (3.3). Subprinciples 3.4 and 3.5 are about the need to protect the sources. Principle 3.6 reads: "In consideration of the sources and the independence of Content Creators, unpublished material as a main rule should not be divulged to third parties".[16] Any changes in interviews, or given statements need to be quoted (3.7 and 3.8). The last subprinciple 3.9 reads: "Proceed tactfully in journalistic research. In particular show consideration for people who cannot be expected to be aware of the effect that their statements may have. Never abuse the emotions or feelings of other people, their ignorance or their lack of judgment. Remember that people in shock or grief are more vulnerable than others".[17]

In the end, the fourth principle is about publication rules. It consists of sixteen subprinciples. These are principles about making distinction between facts and comments (4.1), respecting a person's identity and privacy (4.2), writing appropriate headlines (4.3), always quoting sources that are used in your research (4.4), avoiding the presumption of guilt in crime and court reporting (4.5) and thinking about victims and how contents about crime could affect them (4.6). 4.7 is about being cautious with names and photographs and other clear identifiers of persons referring to contentious or punishable matters. 4.8 speaks about taking care of children's privacy, then 4.9, 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12 are about the need to credit the author of the video, graphics, and photographs of others, 4.13 is about the right and duty to correct incorrect information, 4.14 says that "Those who have been subjected to strong accusations shall, if possible, have the opportunity to simultaneous reply as regards factual information".[18]4.15 is about the chance to reply to an attack, and in the end, 4.16 says that it is good for users to know how the publication is registered and used by services.

5. Codes for Journalists in relation to Codes
for Bloggers – comparative analysis

The Code of Ethics for the Norwegian Press[19] (published by the Norwegian Press Association), on which Codes of Ethics for Bloggers, Social Media and Content Creators are based, consists of four principles. These are: The Role of the Press

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Available on: https://accountablejournalism.org/ethics-codes/norway-norwegian-press-code-of-ethics (Accessed on November 1, 2021).

in Society, Integrity and Responsibility, Journalistic Conduct and Relations with the Sources, Publication Rules[20]. Basic principles from this Code are the same as principles in the Codes of Ethics for Bloggers, Social Media and Content Creators. The first principle has five subprinciples like the Codes of Ethics for Bloggers, Social Media and Content Creators, which are the same. The second principle has nine subprinciples, while the Codes of Ethics for Bloggers, Social Media and Content Creators Codes have six subprinciples. Subprinciple 2.5: "A member of the editorial staff cannot be ordered to write or do anything, which is contrary to his or her convictions" is part of the Codes for Journalists.[21] It is specific for journalists. Subprinciple 2.6 from the Codes for Journalists and 2.5 from the Codes for Bloggers are the same. Additionally, subprinciples 2.6 from the Codes of Bloggers present the articulation of 2.8 and 2.9 subprinciples from the Codes for Journalists. The third principle has ten subprinciples, while the Codes of Ethics for Bloggers have nine subprinciples. Nine subprinciples are the same in both codes and subprinciple 3.10 is specific for journalism: "Hidden cameras/microphones or false identity may only be used under special circumstances. The condition must be that such a method is the only possible way to uncover cases of essential importance to society".[22] The fourth principle uses 17 subprinciples to explain Publication Rules. In the Codes of Ethics for Bloggers, Social Media and Content Creators, publication rules have 16 subprinciples. The differences are as follows: subprinciple 4.1 is just in Codes for Journalists (Make a point of fairness and thoughtfulness in contents and presentation). Principle 4.9 from the Codes for Bloggers is similar to 4.10, but subprinciple 4.9 that reads: "Suicide and attempted suicide should in general never be reported"[23] from the Codes for Journalists is not part of the Codes for Bloggers. Instead of it, there is: "3.9 When using photos, graphics, illustrations, video, audio or any other type of content always credit the original creator".[24] Subprinciple 4.17 is reserved just for Ethics for Journalists: "4.17 Should the editorial staff choose not to pre-edit digital chatting, this has to be announced in a clear manner for those accessing the pages. The editorial staff has a particular responsibility, instantly to remove inserts that are not in compliance with the Ethical Code".[25]

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Available on: https://mor10.com/code-of-ethics-for-bloggers-social-media-and-content-creators/ (Accessed: November 1, 2021).

[25] Available on: https://accountablejournalism.org/ethics-codes/norway-norwegian-press-code-of-ethics (Accessed: November 1, 2021).

6. Conclusion

Blogs are typically used by young people, people who want to share some news or to indicate certain problems, journalists, public persons, etc.

As a matter of fact, journalism is ethically regulated. Yet, we are faced with non-professional journalism in many countries. This is no reason to give up ethics. On the contrary, whether journalists behave ethically depends on many factors, and one of them is respecting freedom in their states. It seems that Walter Lippmann (1919) was right when he said that the crisis of democracy reflected the crisis of journalism. If society respected human rights and truth, then journalists could respect ethical values and behave ethically. In this paper, the following values have been examined: credibility, authenticity, responsibility, objectivity. New kinds of journalism are faced with new ethical problems and for that reason we need new ethics – global ethics, as suggested by Ward (2014). Nevertheless, old ethical problems remain, too. Bivins (2017) thinks that journalists could learn from mistakes from the past. In the digital era, new problems arise and there are some differences between values connected with traditional media and those that are connected with new media.

Codes could help journalists to choose the right way. Bloggers have their own Codes, too. They can be formal and informal. Some countries have them, or some associations, organizations, etc. Ethics of blogs is developing. It is based on traditional and applied ethics. Codes for bloggers are based on codes for journalists, which is shown earlier in this paper. Ethics for Bloggers, Social Media and Content Creators based on the Code of Ethics for the Norwegian Press is analyzed. The comparative analysis indicates that there are many common principles. If certain principles are found in the Codes for Journalists and not in the Codes for Bloggers, that is due to the nature of the profession. The main characteristic of the Codes for Bloggers is that they promote truth, independence and fair play (respect of sources, victims, suspects, children, etc.). Blogs could help the democratization of communication. This is the main reason why it is desirable for every society to have ethically regulated blogs. Respecting ethical principles will help content writers to behave responsibly and become responsible content writers, and, among other things, responsible bloggers.

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BLOGERSKA ETIKA - ETIČKI PRINCIPI I KODEKSI

Apstrakt. *Razvoj tehnologije je omogućio brojne promene u različitim sferama-društvenim, ekonomskim, naučnim itd. U oblasti novinarstva dolazi do pojave novih oblika novinarstva, te se javljaju brojna nova pitanja i etički problemi. Građani postaju prozumeri, te potreba za medijskom pismenošću postaje još veća. Autor istražuje etičke aspekte medijske pismenosti. Težište ispitivanja je pre svega etička regulacija bloga kao jednog od digitanih formi izražavanja naročito zastupljenog među mladima ali i šire. Blog je i alat građanskog novinarstva i kao deo javne sfere zavređuje kritički*

pristup i etičku regulaciju. Pionir bloga Tim Danlop (TIM Dunlop) ističe da blog oživljava umetnost argumentovanja i ideju javne debate (2003). U radu se analiziraju, pomoću deskriptivne metode, etičke vrednosti značajne za blogere- autentičnost, kredibilnost, pravednost, objektivnost. Na samom kraju, poredi se etički kodeks za blogere sa novinarskim kodeksom (primer Norveškog kodeksa) sa ciljem da se utvrde sličnosti i razlike među principima iz kojih su kodeksi sastavljeni. Zaključak je da je za dobrobit društva korisno etički regulisati pisanje blogova, što je već učinjeno u pojedinim zemljama. Znanje o značaju etičnosti blogova potrebno je preneti mladim ljudima i budućim novinarima jer oni su deo javne sfere. Blogerski kodeksi su nalik novinarskim kodeksima i u njima preovladavaju osnovne etičke vrednosti.

Ključne reči: *medijska pismenost, blog, građansko novinarstvo, etičke vrednosti, etički kodeksi*