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ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF KAZAKHSTANI JOURNALISTS

A journalist is supposed to provide society with true, objective, balanced, up-to-date information and act fairly and impartially, be truthful and transparent. Otherwise, journalists may cause harm by failing to act ethically. The purpose of this research is to examine journalism ethics in Kazakhstan, explain probable reasons for ethical misbehavior and suggest possible solutions to the existing problems in journalistic ethics. It is an important study because journalism misbehavior affects everyone and little attention is given in research about journalism ethics in Kazakhstan. To address research inquiry, this research study uses qualitative structured interviews with 11 working journalists and editors in the country. The interviews were conducted in Russian language during the fall 2021. Convenience and snowball sampling were used in the study. Specifically, seven journalists working in independent media outlets, three journalists from state-owned media outlets and one journalist working in international media outlet, participated in the study. The sample consisted of five women and six men, ranging in age from 29 to 49 years old and having experience in journalism from seven to 25 years. The interviewees did not receive a monetary compensation for participation. The findings suggest that socio-economic, political and personal factors explain ethical misbehavior in journalism. As for probable solutions to the current problems in journalistic ethics, the majority of the respondents believe that the situation may be improved through teaching ethics in universities, holding training and professional workshops for everyone involved in journalism. Some journalists suggest that nothing needs to be done with ethics and instead it is necessary to solve some complex issues in society. The value of the conducted research lies in the study of the reasons for ethical misbehavior.

Key words: journalistic ethics, Kazakhstan, journalism, ethical principles, deontology.

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Қазақстандық журналистердің этикалық дилеммалары

Журналист қоғамға шынайы, объективті, теңдестірілген, өзекті ақпарат беріп, адал және бейтарап әрекет етуі, шыншыл және ашық болуы керек. Әйтпесе, журналистер этикалық нормаларды сақтамай зиян келтіруі мүмкін. Аталған зерттеудің мақсаты – Қазақстандағы журналистік этиканы зерттеу, этикалық дұрыс емес мінез-құлықтың ықтимал себептерін түсіндіру, сондай-ақ журналистік этикадағы бар проблемалардың ықтимал шешімдерін ұсыну. Бұл маңызды зерттеу, өйткені журналистикадағы әдепке жат мінез-құлық барлығына әсер етеді және Қазақстанда журналистік этиканы зерттеуге аз көңіл бөлінеді. Бұл мәселені зерттеу үшін 11 қазақстандық журналистер мен редакторлармен құрылымдалған сұхбат жүргізілді. Сұхбат 2021 жылдың күзінде орыс тілінде өткізілді. Зерттеуде «жайлылық» үлгісі және «қарлы кесек» үлгісі қолданылды. Атап айтқанда, тәуелсіз БАҚ-та жұмыс істейтін жеті журналист, мемлекеттік БАҚ-тан үш журналист және халықаралық БАҚ-та жұмыс істейтін бір журналист зерттеуге қатысты. Іріктемеге 29 бен 49 жас аралығындағы және журналистика саласында 7-25 жас аралығындағы тәжірибесі бар 5 әйел мен 6 ер адам қатысты. Сұхбаттасушылар зерттеуге қатысқаны үшін ақшалай сыйақы алған жоқ. Алынған нәтижелер әлеуметтік-экономикалық, саяси және жеке факторлар журналистикадағы этикалық емес тәжірибені түсіндіретінін көрсетеді. Журналистік этика саласындағы ағымдағы мәселелерді шешуге қатысты респонденттердің көпшілігі жағдайды университеттерде этика оқыту, журналистикамен айналысатындардың барлығына тренингтер мен кәсіби семинарлар өткізу арқылы жақсартуға болады деп санайды. Кейбір журналистер этикаға қатысты ештеңе жасаудың қажеті жоқ және оның орнына қоғамдағы кейбір күрделі мәселелерді шешу керек деп санайды. Зерттеудің құндылығы журналистік этиканы сақтамау себептерін зерттеу болып табылады.

Түйін сөздер: журналистік этика, Қазақстан, журналистика, этикалық принциптер, деонтология.

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Этические дилеммы казахстанских журналистов

Журналист должен предоставлять обществу объективную, сбалансированную, актуальную информацию и действовать честно и беспристрастно, быть правдивым и открытым, соблюдать этические нормы. **Цель данного исследования** – изучить журналистскую этику в Казахстане, объяснить вероятные причины неэтических практик, а также предложить возможные решения существующих проблем, связанных с журналистской этикой. Это важное исследование, потому что неэтичное поведение в журналистике затрагивает всех, а исследованиям журналистской этики в Казахстане уделяется мало внимания.

Для изучения этого вопроса было проведено качественное исследование: структурированные интервью с 11 казахстанскими журналистами и редакторами. Интервью были проведены на русском языке осенью 2021 года. В исследовании использовались «удобная» выборка и выборка «снежного кома». В частности, в исследовании приняли участие семь журналистов, работающих в независимых СМИ, три журналиста государственных СМИ и один журналист, работающий в международных СМИ. В выборке участвовали 5 женщин и 6 мужчин в возрасте от 29 до 49 лет и со стажем в журналистике от 7 до 25 лет. Интервьюируемые не получили денежного вознаграждения за участие в исследовании.

Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что социально-экономические, политические и личные факторы объясняют неэтичную практику в журналистике. Что касается возможных решений текущих проблем в области журналистской этики, большинство респондентов считают, что ситуацию можно улучшить с помощью преподавания этики в университетах, проведения тренингов и профессиональных семинаров для всех, кто занимается журналистикой. Некоторые журналисты предполагают, что с этикой ничего не нужно делать, а вместо этого необходимо решить некоторые сложные проблемы в обществе. **Ценность** проведенного исследования заключается в изучении причин несоблюдения этических норм.

Ключевые слова: журналистская этика, Казахстан, журналистика, этические принципы, деонтология.

Introduction

“The media does play a vital role in our democracy, and if we cannot depend on journalistic ethics, the nation’s in trouble” – Dave Brat, the dean of the Liberty University School of Business.

The research focuses on Kazakhstan and provides insight into journalists’ ethical practices, possible reasons for ethical misbehavior in this country and probable solutions to the ethical problems in journalism.

The quotation above states that journalistic ethics is very important aspect of any democratic state as a journalist is supposed to act fairly and impartially, be truthful and transparent, according to the Kazakhstanian journalistic ethical Code adopted on October 30, 2012. Journalism ethics implies providing true, objective, balanced, up-to-date information that does not infringe on anyone’s rights.

A global perspective on the ethical issues

Generally, there is huge amount of codes, charters and statements about journalistic principles, obligations and values all over the world. However, while various codes may have some differences, most comprise common elements including the principles

of truthfulness and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, transparency and objectivity, humanity and public accountability. Ramaprasad, Hanitzsch, Lauk, Harro-Loit, Hovden, Väliverronen and Craft (2019) suggest that journalists from different parts of the world have to make decisions on a daily basis of an ethical nature whether to engage in news for which journalists are paid or reporting on incompletely verified information. In the article by Lo, Man Chan and Pan (2005) journalists from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong turn out to be susceptible to such freebies as trips, small gifts and meals. Kuwaiti journalists also receive gratification in their job according to the article by Onyebadi and Alajmi (2016). The interviews conducted by Rao (2018) with Indian and Chinese journalists disclose that falling trust in media and such corrupt practices in media sphere as paid news (India) and “red envelope journalism” (China) are the two most significant problems of ethics for these countries’ journalists.

A regional perspective on the ethical issues

Overall, journalistic ethical misconduct is observed in Central Asian countries (Kurambayev and Freedman, 2019). According to this research,

societies in this region are full of deception (journalists and governments lie to the public, potential advertisers are deceived by journalists which are also lain by the governments), journalists extort bribes to write or not to write about specific topics or particular individuals and information is restricted by officials and governments that leads to violation of ethical principles to get access to it. According to Mould and Schuster (1999), journalists in the Central Asia do not consider taking bribes to be unethical because they need to survive – ethics was called a “Western luxury” for local journalists. Thus, since journalists in Kyrgyzstan get “starvation wages”, they openly take bribes for writing ‘news’ articles about anything and about anyone.

Gift-giving and bribery in journalistic work are common in many countries. For instance, Klyueva and Tsetsura (2015) argue that individual’s economic conditions may influence morality and if they are poor, those conditions tend to decrease human advantage which in its turn brings to non-transparency in media practices. The authors argue that under severe economic conditions, transparency of media is one of the first principles of ethics that Russian journalists would undermine. Gratification is also a problem in Kuwaiti journalism (Onyebadi and Alajmi, 2016) as well as in journalism of Taiwan, China and Hong Kong (Lo, Man Chan and Pan, 2005). Accepting bribes and gifts lessens objectivity and transparency in journalistic work, such that journalists are unable to serve public interests, which is the violation of international ethical standards.

Journalists should be capable of developing their own norms regarding social responsibility rather than merely follow the rules of media outlets in which they work (Demers, 1989). Thus, this dependency is regarded as a threat for professionalism, considering the trend of increasing concentration of possession at the multinational level. Kurambayev and Freedman (2019) also focus in their study on social responsibility of the journalists in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Lack of education and professional training for journalists in the field of media ethic is an obstacle mainly common for developing countries. For example, Kurambayev (2017) concludes in his article that drawbacks regarding ethics in Kyrgyzstan might be overcome by incorporating more ethics into the syllabus of journalism faculties by universities in the country. Kyrgyzstani journalists also have the chance to enhance their skills by visiting professional trainings conducted by such organizations as Kloop Media Foundation, IWPR or Internews Network. One of the factors of gifts acceptance by journalists

in Kuwait is inadequacy of professional training for journalists in the media ethics area (Onyebadi and Alajmi, 2016).

Purpose of the study

To put it in a nutshell, there are many complications of journalistic ethics implementation around the globe, many of which have not been examined yet in the Central Asian region. The purpose of this study is to examine how ethical principles are perceived by Kazakhstani journalists, what are probable reasons for ethical misbehavior and possible solutions to the existing problems in journalistic ethics in Kazakhstan.

To explore journalistic ethics in the country qualitative semi-structured interviews with 11 Kazakhstani journalists were conducted in Russian language during the fall 2021 in Almaty. Convenience and snowball sampling were used in the study. Specifically, two correspondents, five journalists and four editors, working in independent and state-owned online media outlets and on TV, participated in the research.

Research questions

The research examines the following research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent do Kazakhstani journalists follow ethical principles?
- RQ2: What are possible reasons for ethical misbehavior in journalism?
- RQ3: What do Kazakhstani journalists suggest to overcome ethical misbehavior in journalism?

Literature review

There are many reasons why journalistic ethics is violated in different parts of the world. The following factors may explain ethical misbehavior in journalism: socio-economic, political, cultural, geographical, organizational, personal.

As for socio-economic factors, one of the most common explanations of the phenomenon of paid news in Tsetsura’s research (2015) about China is financial difficulties that journalists face. The same is true for Russian journalists according to the research by Klyueva and Tsetsura (2015). Economic hardships of the journalists contribute to non-transparency in Russian journalism. Low wages are also called as one of the hindrances to best ethical practices in Cambodian journalism, according to Quinn (2018), as well as in Ukraine (Grynko, 2012).

Regarding political factors, according to Kurambayev and Freedman (2019) the authorities of Central Asian countries restrict access to information that forces journalists in the region to violate ethics in order to get access to necessary information. In addition, governments of Central

Asian countries lie to journalists, which in turn lie to audiences and advertisers. In the article by Rao (2018) the respondents in China indicated ineffective legislation and decentralization of economy as some of the explanations of “red envelope journalism”. As a result, profit maximizing approach with state censorship have led to huge media corruption. As far as India is concerned, corruption in its media in the form of paid news has also appeared due to privatization and commercialization of media, according to Rao (2018). According to Quinn (2018) absence of freedom of expression, legal framework, weak cooperation by government (limited access to information) are mentioned as obstacles to effective practice in Cambodian journalism. Lauk (2008) believes that insufficiently developed political culture and poor civic society in Estonia contribute to bad journalistic practice and ineffective self-regulation. According to Wu and Lambert (2016), journalists in Taiwan face interference from government into press coverage that limits their freedom in collecting information and publication of news honestly.

As for cultural factors, respondents from research of Kurambayev and Freedman (2019) associate gift acceptance in the Central Asian journalism with its culture, i.e. if someone give a journalist something, he/she cannot refuse to take it because of the inability to refuse. Cultural incongruity is stated as one of barriers to sufficient ethical practice for Cambodian journalists, according to Quinn (2018). Al-Najjar (2011) concludes that Arab journalists do not adopt entirely principles of objectivity and impartiality when it comes to patriotism, for example in the case of reporting war between Palestine and Israel. Arab journalists consider patriotism to be “public good”, even though they understand that sightless patriotism may lead to absence of criticism of authoritarian regimes. Steele (2013) conclude that journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia have higher standards as a Muslim journalist must always act for the good and benefit of society. However, as defamation is prohibited according to Islamic religion, politicians may use an idea that media should not report anything until it is proven in court in their own interests, according to the author.

As far as geographical factors are concerned, ethics was called a “Western luxury” for Central Asian journalists (Mould and Schuster, 1999). This is consistent with the findings by Quinn (2018) where ethics is also considered to be a mainly West-oriented principle in the sense of practices and skills that does not function efficiently in the environment of Cambodia.

As for organizational factors, according to Onyebadi and Alajmi (2016), one of the reasons for gifts acceptance in Kuwait is lack of ethical instructions by owners of media. On top of that, Kuwaiti media outlets also hire untrained journalists to report and write stories. Low quality of staff, weak management and inefficient journalistic associations are some of reasons that prevent Cambodian journalists from suitable journalistic practice (Quinn, 2018). Latvian editors in the research by Bucholtz (2020) consider themselves as key to providing collective understanding of ethics in editorial offices. Ukrainian journalists claim that dependency on owners of media and advertisers lead to non-compliance with journalistic ethical principles (Grynko, 2012). The owner’s goal is profit maximization so they put pressure on journalists regarding media coverage in order to maintain good relationship with advertisers. Moreover, sponsors influence media through their owners who avoid negative media coverage of their advertisers because of potential profit loss. Taiwan journalists’ impartiality and balanced coverage are challenged by management’s intervention in news production (Wu and Lambert, 2016). According to Xu (2016), corruption in Chinese media takes place due to institutional system of its media. As Chinese media is monopolized by government, which means that state propaganda holds a huge part of airtime, non-state companies can get access to this limited media space by paying money.

Education and training, conscience and honesty refer to personal factors of ethics compliance. Kuwaiti journalists receive gratification due to insufficiency of training and education among them in the area of media ethics, according to Onyebadi and Alajmi (2016). The same reason is assumed in the article by Rao (2018) regarding the practices of “red envelope journalism” (China) and paid news (India). According to Quinn (2018), absence of training is also one of the impediments to successful practice in Cambodian journalism. Lo, Man Chan and Pan (2005) conclude that ethics courses should be proposed at faculties of journalism in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong in order to improve journalistic standards in the region. They also point out that such personal factors as honesty and consciousness always ensure adherence to standards. As for Cambodia, fright and self-censorship are described as one of the difficulties to efficient journalistic practice (Quinn, 2018). Ukrainian journalists consider cash acceptance for coverage as own choice and refer it to conscience of a journalist (Grynko, 2012).

Methodology

To answer the research questions, qualitative structured interviews with 11 working journalists in Kazakhstan were conducted. The study was undertaken in Almaty from September 10, 2021 until November 23, 2021. All the interviews were face-to-face and took place at various coffee houses of the city.

Convenience and snowball sampling were used in the study. To find initial participants the author contacted several friends who had been familiar to some journalists. Then, after interviewing the initial participants, the author snowballed the rest of the interviewees outward from there. Specifically, two correspondents, five journalists and four editors, working in independent and state-owned online media outlets and on TV, participated in the study. The sample consisted of 5 women and 6 men, ranging in age from 29 to 49 years old. All the journalists worked in Almaty at the time of interviews.

The interviews were conducted in Russian language, which is one of the two official languages of Kazakhstan. The length of the interviews ranged from 51 to 143 minutes. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards. The interviewees did not receive a monetary compensation for participation.

Results

Kazakhstani journalists depict situations of unethical practices in journalism, explain probable reasons for such misbehavior and also suggest possible solutions to the existing problems in journalistic ethics.

Ethical misbehavior in journalism

One of the most important problem related to journalistic ethics in Kazakhstan is that journalists often write ordered articles, while not revealing in any way that this is an order, i.e. that they were paid for it. One of the respondents also reports that journalists are being bribed: they make a lot of materials that look as if they are objective, but the advantage goes one way. It happens because of commercial bribery or since officials bribe such journalists or someone just come and say: "Do not write bad about me, I'll pay you", according to this interviewee. He adds: "Well, some journalists take money, for themselves, for the promotion of topics that are asked to be published by outside PR people. The editorial office does not know anything at all. A journalist just comes and submits it to an editor as a regular topic. It is more favorable for PR people to give money directly to a journalist so that he skips it like an ordinary article, because, firstly, there is

no mark, and secondly, it is cheaper. Thirdly, you get the loyalty of a journalist." The journalist also concludes: "Well, let's say we have one major advertiser in the country. Whatever happens to this advertiser, you will not be able to write about him, because when he comes with money to your editorial office, placing advertising, he buys your loyalty. From the same series, this is money and these are ratings that affect ethics." Another journalist observes that some media do not write that it is advertising: they accept money for articles and they broadcast it as news, thus deceiving a reader and this already violates the ethical principle of honesty and impartiality. A journalist from television says: "The main source of payback on television is advertising. Well, a lot of media live off state information order. Roughly speaking, this is the same story, the same advertising, only from the state. I tend to believe that there are no independent media, and they are always dependent on someone. You depend on who pays you money. Either you depend on the state or on the advertiser." Another journalist from a business media notes: "You know, as a rule, the situation in Kazakhstan is different: you don't have to look at what the media write, you have to look at what they don't write about, that's all. It says more about editorial policy. And as a rule, money is brought to the founders so that they do not cover some topics." Two journalists from television also note that there is no advertising mark on TV.

It is also mentioned that some media and journalists engage in extortion of advertising contracts by presenting these companies in a negative way or just extort bribes for non-publication of materials. One journalist reports: "I remember there was a case, colleagues told me, in 2014 or 2015, a major advertiser refused to advertise on some TV channel, well, they did not agree on the amounts, as a result, they received a task to dig for this company. Just at that moment, this company was talking about, there was a lot of negativity about this company, and they started pumping this topic every day. Well, there was a topic there, in principle, even if there was no advertising budget and there were no conflicts, an ordinary journalist would have written about it anyway. But there was a task here, so that they would release three or four stories there, then this "company" came and said: "That's it, we're leaving on your terms, just shut up." Well, these are again internal cases that do not come out."

Many respondents note that there are often such problems as absence of one side of a conflict and presence of biased materials that violate the principles of impartiality and objectivity. One journalist from

television says: “Impartiality is especially important because, as a rule, journalists still suffer a lot when they take sides. This, you know, is how it happens: you start protecting the one who appealed to you. But in fact it shouldn’t be. They turned to you – they just gave you a topic, material. And to figure out who is right, who is to blame, and to give the viewer, the reader an opportunity to figure it out is already your task – to study all aspects.”

Another problem in journalistic ethics in Kazakhstan is absence of fact-checking that leads to unreliable and false information, according to some journalists. One journalist from television claims: “It seems to me that the main and big problem that we have is reliability. The reliability of information, the truthfulness of information, because, unfortunately, many colleagues do not know how to do fact-checking. This is a big problem in Kazakhstan; the information that comes to you always needs to be rechecked. Many people neglect this rule, and a lot of fakes and unreliable and unverified information appear from here, and then a lot of refutations arise from official bodies or directly participants of the events after some time. Reliability, they don’t know how.”

The journalists also indicate violation of private life and slander as problems in journalistic ethics. One respondent says that some journalists can break into houses. Another journalist claims that there were such cases when journalists took picture of artists changing clothes in the dressing room or came to one’s home, photographed him/her in home clothes and posted it. The same journalist states the following: “Incorrect, biased presentation of information, slander can lead to the fact that a person is subjected to bullying, cyberbullying – a person can be driven to suicide.”

Theft of materials is also a trouble in Kazakhstani journalism, according to some journalists. They claim that some journalists just copy-pasted their materials without any references.

Some respondents indicate that it is common practice for journalists in Kazakhstan to work at the same time in PR. One journalist from television believes that it is ethical to work simultaneously as a journalist and a PR specialist and he also admits that he does so.

As for the coverage of crimes, some journalists noted that presumption of innocence is often violated. One journalist from television states: “Even if we see a video: a man or a woman kills someone, we can’t call him/her a criminal, only the court makes someone a criminal. Until he/she is acquitted or convicted, we can call him/her a “suspect”. When there is a trial, he has already moved from the status

of “suspect” to “defendant”, “accused” and so on, but in no case he/she is a “criminal”, not a “murderer”, not a “rapist”, we do not give him/her any definition. I read the materials of colleagues, and often I see that this moment is violated.” As for information about a convicted criminal, some journalists believe that his/her face or last name should be hidden because a criminal’s family may suffer, but the family has nothing to do with it.

Among other problems indicated are unethical headlines (vulgar, hype, clickbait), distortion of facts, gifts acceptance (expensive gifts, such as smartphones, bicycles, electric scooters and cheaper ones, such as note pads, cakes, vine), paid trips and press-tours, subjective opinion in the materials, double standards of those people who are responsible for ethics (journalistic ethics coaches, trainers, instructors), publication of rape victims’ names or photos, corpses, naked bodies, grief, tears and screams. One journalist notes the following: “There are journalists who, unfortunately, take advantage of their position and start calling press secretaries of hospitals in case of illness. Journalists also often write in the chat of the akimat of Almaty that they do not have light at their homes, when it appears and so on. It’s disgusting”. The same journalist also states: “There are journalists who... it is considered that they are not corrupt, but as a person working inside the system, I see who brings them what kind of money, what their incorruptibility looks like. There are journalists who go to briefings, they are very active, bright, they fight for the people, and it seems that these people follow journalistic ethics, and then suddenly this person writes an article, there are all the sins of some minister there, and we frankly see that all his/her material is collected on informational leak. A leak is when some, let’s say, relatively speaking, an employee of the akimat, knows some sin of akim, and takes this document, hides it and carries it to the journalist. This is illegally obtained information. That is, it is true, so the official cannot refute it. But this information was not obtained legally. Or, for example, a person seems to observe ethics, while teaching civil servants for money, telling how beautifully not to give information to journalists”. A journalist from a business media says that dishonest media outlets are screwing up their views in pursuit of ratings, and these ratings are needed for advertisers. A journalist from another business media concludes: “I don’t know, I think dead journalists fully comply with ethics”.

Reasons for ethical misbehavior in journalism

According to half of the respondents, one of the possible reasons for ethical misbehavior in

journalism is a socio-economic factor: because of low salaries Kazakhstani journalists engage in bribe extortion or take gifts. As for writing an ordered article without identifying that a journalist is paid for it, one journalist explains that an advertiser requires that there be no mark. Regarding free trips, the same journalist explains: "As for trips, we have always had a very soft attitude to this historically. This attitude is determined by the fact that the editorial offices are poor, almost all." Some journalists also point out that ethics mainly depends on an editorial office. One journalist claims: "Well, a journalist will do what the management tells him. They will say there go shoot how there, I don't know, a woman is being raped and post this video – a journalist will do, basically. Well, there are a lot of things that we don't cover, a lot of events that we don't cover." He also adds: "Well, accordingly, the pursuit of ratings and views is the main problem that leads to unfair competition between the media, and they begin to publish naked bodies, corpses, these tears, screams etc. So because of the pursuit of ratings and money everything will be violated". Another journalist from television notes: "Well, that's the main problem, I think, when there is a conflict between the editorial staff and the journalist. That is, we have such a direct vertical power. If an editor is above you, then he/she does not take into account your ethical standards. He says to go and do it."

The journalists also marked a strong censorship in the country and self-censorship among Kazakhstani journalists, editors-in-chief, commissioning editors, which are political factors. The journalist also adds: "The government understands journalism as journalists should write a patriotic opinion." Some journalists also claim that state media will not criticize the government at all that undermines the principles of honesty, impartiality and objectivity.

Another crucial problem regarding the journalistic ethics in Kazakhstan, according to the journalists, is presence of abovementioned state order. One of the respondents states: "Everyone takes it, you can count them on your fingers who does not take. Because there are no other earnings on the market." Another journalist claims: "Yes, that's exactly that... this is normal in our country to write paid articles, and, moreover, the state encourages it, allocates huge sums, multibillion spending annually on state order, and the state order kills, firstly, the objectivity of the media, and secondly, it kills competition: neither journalists, nor media develop in market conditions. They just know they're going to get paid. When there is competition, there is development. Let's say one article saying that akim

opened some kind of playground in the Medeu district – they pay 400 thousand tenge for it. That's how they can post one article in 10 different media outlets and spend 3-4 million tenge on it. And there are a lot of such articles. State order is also harmful to society. Because it happens that it is better for the same akimat – while forming the budget, they say that, for instance, this 50 million tenge for the media, they will give this money to the media so that they write well about the akimat. They could really use this 50 million to build a school there, repair, asphalt the road and thus win the respect of the people – this is better than any PR." Another journalist from television says: "If there was no state order, 95% of our media outlets would have closed in six months."

Another obstacle mentioned by the journalists which is also referred to political factors of ethical misbehavior in journalism is the closeness of the state, i.e. access to information. One journalist from television states: "It is very difficult sometimes to get comments, and you already think, "I spit on all these ethics norms, on all this ethics", because your material is burning, and the other side does not give comments – you can't give out material without the other side, and by hook or by crook, yes, we really knock out these comments because they are needed." Another journalist from television notes: "When an event occurs, we have very complex communication between government agencies and the media. Because they don't provide information, it only gets worse: people don't know, people start looking for information in other sources, other sources don't check it, don't worry about it at all, and hence these gossips, rumors, fakes and everything else appear again. There is a rule of the golden hour, even half an hour, you have to go out and say, "it happened", and then tell who, what, why and share this information. As a rule, state bodies do not know how to do this, unfortunately."

There are also some personal factors that may cause ethical misbehavior. Some journalists consider poor education, lack of critical thinking and incompetence to be reasons for violation of the ethical principles. One journalist claims: "Journalists lack critical thinking. They just, relatively speaking, come to a press conference and, without criticizing, simply write what speakers say there, "I write what I see". That's all. Without thinking that the official could lie or something else." Some journalists believe that many journalists have not read, do not even know that they have such responsibilities (stated in the Code). Another journalist considers Kazakhstani journalistic education to be generally academic. In addition, some journalists suppose that society

itself pushes journalists to behave unethically. One journalist from a business media claims: “And it is, I think, society that pushes journalists to commit some unethical acts, including seeking out details about victims, publishing something about a victim. Because, what is called, people chow. There is the fault of journalists, but the guilt of society is exactly the same.” There are also personal factors such as conscience, internal beliefs, personal feelings, a human factor that influence compliance with ethics, according to the respondents.

Solutions for improvement of the current situation

Every journalist was asked about possible solutions to the abovementioned problems in journalistic ethics. The majority of the respondents believe that the situation may be improved through teaching ethics in universities, trainings and workshops at work. Some journalists suggest that nothing needs to be done with ethics and instead it is necessary to solve some complex issues in society. One journalist states: “But if the political system changes in the country, then, I think, there will already be some movement, and then, I think, the standards will be applicable.” Another journalist suggests: “First, it is at the level of understanding. It is necessary to change the understanding of ethics. That is, to introduce an understanding of practical journalistic ethics, market ethics. Then, perhaps, some kind of shift will only begin. And I assure you that most of the journalists don’t even understand this, they don’t even know.”

One journalist claims: “The only thing that can directly force everyone to comply is only if it is introduced at the legislative level. Then only there will be compliance. Ethics is of a recommendatory nature, so journalists violate it.” Some journalists suppose that self-education and self-development may resolve these problems. One journalist from a business media says: “From the side of journalists – to be a professional, to develop constantly. It depends only on the person. That is, you will not order anyone, you can drive journalists into some legal framework, but it still depends on the individual. Well, on the part of state agencies – to be more transparent, to make contact. There are very complex communications.” Another journalist suggests the following: “I believe that ethics should be regulated within the journalistic community. Since there is a kind of solidarity in it now, that is, I really hope that, perhaps, they will be able to consolidate this ethics in this solidarity. In my opinion, there should be self-regulation, that is, we can regulate only within the community.”

Conclusion

The first finding is that there are such problems in Kazakhstan related to journalistic ethics as bribery: writing ordered articles, while not revealing in any way that this is an order, i.e. that they were paid for it; extortion of advertising contracts by presenting these companies in a negative way or just extortion of bribes for non-publication of materials; absence of one side of a conflict and presence of biased materials that violate the principles of impartiality and objectivity; absence of fact-checking that leads to unreliable and false information; violation of private life (some journalists can break into houses), common practice for journalists in Kazakhstan to work at the same time in PR; regarding the coverage of crimes presumption of innocence is often violated; unethical headlines, distortion of facts and gifts acceptance.

The second finding refers to possible reasons for ethical misbehavior in journalism. One of the probable explanation is a socio-economic factor: because of low salaries Kazakhstani journalists engage in bribe extortion or take gifts. There also political factors: a strong censorship in the country and self-censorship among Kazakhstani journalists, editors-in-chief, commissioning editors, presence of the state order and the closeness of the state, i.e. access to information. As for personal factors, some journalists consider poor education, lack of critical thinking and incompetence to be reasons for violation of the ethical principles. Conscience, internal beliefs, personal feelings, a human factor also refer to personal factors that influence compliance with ethics.

Solutions to the existing problems in journalistic ethics refer to the third finding of this research. The majority of the respondents believe that the situation may be improved through teaching ethics in universities, trainings and workshops at work. Some journalists suggest that nothing needs to be done with ethics and instead it is necessary to solve some complex issues in the society.

The theoretical value of the conducted research lies in the study of the reasons for ethical misbehavior. The search for possible solutions to this problem is of practical importance.

Limitations and recommendations

There are some limitations of this research study. First, in-depth interview, which is a qualitative research method, involves subjective interpretation. Secondly, the study is based on the words of these 11 journalists. It is probable that they could exaggerate or conceal some aspects of their job. Thirdly, the study employed convenience and snowball

sampling. It is possible that all the interviewees share similar opinions as they are acquainted to each other. The fourth limitation is that the interviews were conducted in Russian language. Kazakh speaking journalists may have different viewpoints, judgements and conclusions regarding journalistic ethics in Kazakhstan.

Future studies should conduct a quantitative survey, experiment or content analysis to more completely examine situations of ethical misbehavior in Kazakhstan, possible reasons for it and probable solutions to overcome it. In addition, Kazakh speaking journalists should be also included in future studies, as well as radio employees.

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