

## The Accuracy, Balance and Verification of News, in Independent Press, During the Electoral Campaign 2009 in Albania

Isida Hoxha

University of Shkodra, Journalism Branch, Albania

isidahaxhi@hotmail.com

### Abstract

The narrative of news should relay in some important elements such as accuracy, the right attribution, equilibration and verification. All of these elements are main components of Ethical Media Code of Albania. This code is at the same time the professional guide of journalists. Hence, the research question of this paper is; does the printed press reflect the electoral campaign based on the responsibilities it has in order to inform the audience? Does the printed press transmit accurate, balanced and verifiable news? Today with the development of technology, the number of people who can release news has increased. Everybody without the urgent need of being journalist has the opportunity to public information that generally is considerate as news. Therefore, such a development as far as having positive influence can have its negative effect. The open internet space for everyone increases the number of events that become news without any verification standard that is required in the Ethical Code. During these circumstances, to analyze the role of professional journalist becomes more important. A professional journalist should always be well informed and aware that his job is totally related with ethical components of writing news such as: verification, accuracy and balance. This paper is based on Ethical Code and on the theory of Social Responsibility of Media. This theory explains that people has the right to do their own choices, therefore media has the obligation to present them all the needed information so they can select what they want and what they need. Thanks to this selection, electorate can make rational choices and become more knowledgeable. These two theories show the proper way the news should be released in the press and should reflect the electoral campaign events. The hypotheses of this study which will be verified after analyze is; the content of news of the independent print media during the coverage of electoral campaign produce and reproduce inaccurate, unbalanced news which are difficult to verify. The methodology used is content analyses, which serves as a proper methodology in social sciences to understand the content of communication.

**Keywords:** accuracy, balance, verification, media ethic, electoral campaign

### Introduction

The market is not an element that can operate alone to ensure the social communication. According to historical context, the second half of XX century is the best evidence in support of the argument because in absence of government regulation, the bussines world did not worry about public service. That the media fulfills its functions to ensure the correct services for the public, the laws are necessary, but there are not enough. This comes as a result of consequences that can come from the misrealisation of the functions in the proper way from media which are not punished from the law. Printed media does not depend on a law that strongly defines the norms, differently from other institutions that operate in a democratic society. In this frame is important that the medias to fulfill their functions, should be aware for their responsibilities in relation to the services they offer. For this serves the self-regulation, the base for which are the ethics code. Ethics code rely on principle instruction with the purpose to guarantee the independence of the profession and service toward the public interest through public way of functions, rights, and obligations of journalist during the jornalistic coverage of the electoral campaign.

## Data and Method

In this paper is used the qualitative analyses of content which compared to quantitative analyses of data, permits more interpretation of the text. Kohlbacher(2007) to emphasize some main points of the qualitative analyses relies on Mayring by explaining that the analyze must based on systematic rules, which means that the material must be studied step by step and this analyzes should led towards categories which can be interpreted. To complete the study are used as primarily source the independent newspapers such as "Panorama", "Koha Jonë", "Tema" and "Gazeta Shqiptare", from which are taken datas, facts during the period of study. By emphasizing that these newspapers create diversity because they depend to different structures and not similiar mediatic groups.

The selected theories are the Ethics Code and the Theory of Social Responsibility which is a modification of Liberal theory taken in the context and condition of the twentieth century with the impact of communication revolution that it had in the society. It can be summed up as below:

*"...the position of power and monopoly of media enforces the media to be socially responsible, to look all the sides and to make a correct presentation and the public should have sufficient information in order to decide;and if the media does not take such responsibility, can be necessary for some public agencies to force it to do."*(Siebert et al. 1956; 3). The theory of Social Responsibility relies on the principle that by the time it is impossible for all to own a medium property to express the thoughts, opinions, their points of view. It remains the duty of existing mediums to create opportunities that all possible point of views to be presented and discussed.

## The importance of ethics in media

Media ethic has raised a lot of attention. For some journalists it is considered very important because it contains necessary principles codes and exactly for this reason they must be respected. Another part of journalists think that ethic is a good subject to be studied from academics and professors, but in the conditions they work, it remains an element that is not taken into consideration. The time they have in disposal, the impossibility to find information continually, the obstacles from the owners, the newspaper's culture where they work, the market, the salary etc are elements that make it harder. Randall says that:

*"The power of those who control the newspapers undoubtedly comes from their economic power and in some countries, from the influence they have on rare sources of press and publishings. But very often they do not need to use their power on particular journalists, it is sufficient that their values are totally absorbed from the dominated culture of jornalism in one or some kind of newspapers"* (Randall, 2003:20).

Randall's argument opens a new perspective which attracts the attention in the study of ethic. He speaks about a culture of ethics which comes from considering the media as a cooperation. He thinks that the journalist often has an approach which is developed inside the cooperation and in the advantage of the cooperation itself by avoiding that what is left out. In the case of journalism and in other professions outside the cooperation is everyone who is not inside her, the audience. But in this case the worst thing is that the audience remains out not with the wish of the jornalist but with its uncounsciousness.

Other elements of such importance are the values that the journalist has. The Illuminist philosophic approach used the objectivity of the journalist to find the truth, by considering as a mechanism that makes possible the division of the fact from the opinion, as a process to collect the information and as a way that does not accept an intervention from no other person for that is reported. Wilkins and Patterson say that "Culture, an individual of mission and a feeling of individual and organisative point of views is not taken into consideration if we want to have objective news" (2009:29). This means that the objectivity must come from that what we are accustomed to see as good and right, the fact must be read beyond our best subjectivity that is born as a product of culture, which we are part of.

Meanwhile the iluminist point of view over the truth consider the objectivity as a thing that can be reached, the pragmatist challenged this point of view. They chose the theory that: "the truth depend on the way of investigation and from the person that searches it" (Wilkins, Patterson, 2009:30). Further more they did not accept that there is only one way of truth investigation-the scientific research of her discovery. Taking from Ajnshtain the relative theory, prgmatists argued that the truth like the material is relative.

By not considering the truth like something universal, was created the possibility to conquer the objectivity because it is difficult to tell a truth that is relative, from an objective and impartial reporter. The pragmatist critique focuses on the role of the journalist in the preparation of the news and on his social-economical status. Even though many professionals do not give the proper importance to ethics, most of them are interested because of some factors. The rising level of that what the public demands comes as result of the intensity of taking the information from different sources all the time. Consequently, a kind of pressure exists not directly but it is manifested through giving up from that media that does not complete the quality standards demanded from the public toward media. Media increasing level of commercialization can often be a reason for not to show the information correctly, but also can make the media more sensitive toward the public opinion. The technology is an important factor that can be studied in both sides positive and negative. The positive aspect is related to the democratization of media, but this method has also the negative aspect which eliminates the filter process because the journalist directly refers to the audience or leaves space for the manipulation of the information through the usage of incorrect images. Because of the technologic development, the internet is playing an important role but the risk is still present in its positive characteristics, particularly in the possibility that everyone has for access. This is concretely reflected in democratic access that everyone has to upload information that cannot be correct, verified and can make different other features that are not included in journalism rules and principles. When Bertrand explains the radical democracy of Habermas he says that it "*seeks honest filters, journalist that can be trusted, that are competent and reasonable.*" (2007:8). Before this situation of these factors, the legal sides can treat only a part of the problems, the government intervention to solve them is not the correct one, the best possible strategy is the ethic code usage as a base of self-regulation. An interesting approach of ethic is that of David Randall. According to him, we should not see ethic as a behavior codation. According to him, we should see ethic as a codification of behavior or request to behave in a way that is not possible to be real but "...as a definition not only of principle but of good practices of journalists" (2003:120). Ethic is a protective mechanism, because it is the best way a journalist to complete his job because of being the safest way and permits to have a positive reputation. When Randall speaks about ethic, he considers the relation between the reader and the press who should contain this way where "*All events or articles that the newspaper contains come as a result of decisions free of every political, commercial and not commercial influence*" (2003:120). Randall does further with the argument on ethic in the journalist field by emphasizing not the philosophic aspect of thinking on ethic, but the ethic in the journalist report and owner, by seeing necessary the regulation of the connection between ownership and doing journalism.

### **Ethic in relation to journalist elements**

A good reporter should have some main qualities, the first one is "... the sincere obedience for the obligation that has toward population to approach as much as possible to the truth" (Raportimi dhe Shkrimi I Lajmeve, 1991:34). Other qualities are related to the respect for the management of difficulties that appear during the process of their work and the knowledge in relation to the news by involving information for those who cause this news and its consequences. The news must be an unheard fact and to have interest for all in the sense to influence or play an important role in the public life. The news does not exist alone but in relation to other factors that serve to orientate about what we want to know and orientate us to know the value of the news. Despite the subject, development, rareness, source, number of people that have knowledge on the news, we have other elements that don't have a direct relation to the event but which influence the value of the news such as the collection of information in relation to the reader and context which is seen as "*the whole circumstances in a particular area where the newspaper circulates, which are related with the subject and development and helps us to define the level of rareness*" (Randall, 2003:35). The news reporting should rely on some elements that are the accuracy, the exact attribute, balance, verification etc which we can add some other ethic values such as the preparation of writings that are capable of responding to the critiques, insistence that serves as an orientation for journalists to take the necessary data, application of moral norms in relation to people. In this case, the impartiality is not directed only to tell two side of history but the inclusion of all other sides for a better formation. The preoccupations of public opinion should not be in the second case, to be substituted from "the battle" for power. Wilkins and Patterson quote the critic of media who says that:

*"The concentrated journalism on the political conflicts is responsible in relation to removal of people from politics, a thing that is reflected on the decreasing number of voters and the tension which is created among the political actors" (2009:207)*

By staying on the same line Jamieson suggested that: *"instead of emphasizing the event, conflict, the race between political actors it is necessary the focus over the issue and political perspective"* (just there). The community feeling relies on the thesis that journalists should see themselves as citizens and not only as employees of profitable organizations in which they work, by asking themselves all the time about the social goods that are profited from their writings.

### **3.2 The historical perspective in Albania**

After the explanation of the history of ethic in the world and the development of studies in this field, I will give a presentation of ethic in the Albanian journalist field. Political changes in Albania were reflected in the field of media where the press during the first post-communist period was the most important media to process and transmit ideas. The born of this new press, despite other innovation that it brought, emerged the treatment of new problems such as the issues related to ethics and professionalism in journalism. The concepts of ethic or the ethic code were not part of media's field in the fifty years period of communism because according to Bertrand (2007) the deontology can exist only in democracy. The change of political system reflected a period of transition that would be reflected in printed press because the period of democracy was characterized from clash between those who represented the past of communism and other who represented the new system, but without relying on a system of values. The political antagonism between the old force of politics and the new ones, the distant relation with the past publicist in early XX century will make impossible the respecting of ethic and professional principles in printed press. To create the right frame of this sub-issue should be mentioned the difficult period of 1997-1998. The years 1997-1998 are the most difficult years in the historical perspective of Albania after the change of the political system, which would influence logically in the professionalism of the Albanian media where the system of information was deformed. This period is characterized by total avoidance of ethic usage and from the other side the professionalism is difficult to be reached because of the installation of Official Committee of Censure.

The law of 1997 is the legal arena in which is supported the printed press, which is supported in the notion of freedom by relying in two sentences: The press is free. The freedom of press is protected by law. The professionals of the field, journalists, parliamentary commission of media, different actors found necessary approval of a more detailed law and not so general, but despite this there are not any changes. In this context that the media to complete its functions should be oriented toward self-regulation, concretely toward Ethic Code, which was created for the first time in 1996. Ten years after the approval, The Albanian Institute of Albania decided to make a review of code by creating also a self-regulation mechanism that will control the execution of code. The Ethic Code (2006) had the support of four journalist organizations that operate in Albania. With all improvements during these years, ethical offences are still present in printed press. The ethic is not the main priority of actors that operate in this field.

### **The titles of writings in relation to content**

Titles are important because they serve as helpers for reader to be oriented. Russ explains that: *"All kinds of titles are absorbed more than the texts. Who unfolds the newspapers, in the end has read twice more titles that article"* (2010: 168). Through analyze can distinguish these approaches in the usage of title. Often they use sensational titles, which we identify like that in relation to the content of the writing. The writing with the title *"Kadare: "I expect elections with European standards"* (Panorama 8.06.2009, pg.6) accompanied with a title where is evident the comment that Kadare does for the electoral situation, in content of the writing is the interview of Kadare taken from media "Koha Vision" which focuses on the problems of Kosovo. Only two questions are related with the electoral campaign in Albania and the interview is in both pages 6 and 7 of the newspaper. Present are also some incorrect titles that reflect the partiality of the newspaper for example: *"The incident in Durres, PS electoral office is burned"* (Gazeta Shqiptare, 03.06.2009, pg.2) meanwhile the article says that some unidentified people tried to burn the electoral office of Socialist Party. The usage of similar titles by referring to the speech of political actors dominates in this period like *"Rama: Enveristi Berisha is ransoming Albania"* (Tema, 11.06.2009, p.3), *"Berisha: Edi Rama, a second Enver"* (Gazeta Shqiptare, 05.06.2009, p. 6)

#### 4.1 Accuracy, balance and verification

The Etic Code provides that: *"The journalists have the right to take informations, to publish it and criticize it. The information must be upaccurate, balanced up and verified"* (2006:4). So the accuracy is one of the most important elements which serves as a base to build the writings in the field of journalism, but that cannot operate alone. Often to reach the accuracy we should use the verification which is the esence and the difference of journalism from other disciplines. The usage of these elements from the journalist is done in function of the search of the truth which can be defined as:

*"The journalistic truth is something more than accuracy. It is a process of selection that is developed with the time from the interaction between the public, the person who does the news and the journalist. This primary principle of journalism –the search of the the truth without any interest-is what differs from every part of communication."* (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2009:55)

If we refer to the search of the truth we can say that it is a research very difficult, as a result of involved factors in this process where the truth can be deleted from the politician, cannot be supported by the owner, publisher etc but also from the factor time which influences on them continuously in relation to the organizational necessity for news. By taking into consideration there factor (that cannot be the only one) we see that a role more dominant are playing the sources as much as the journalists by referring the wide usage of citations, which are often based on accuses, against accuses, debates that pass the boundaries of ethic and obviously dominate the pages of newspaper.

It is not enough only the usage of citations, attributes even if they are done in the correct way. In writings from the electoral tour that the politicians organize, which take a huge space (and here we mainly refer to Rama, Berisha and Meta) it is not possible to include the interventions of journalists with questions, but the writing include what the politicians want to say. In most cases, the politicians have other interests from the interests that have journalist for their work so it is necessary that to do journalism, it mustn't returned into a journalism of statements.

To attribute the writing to a source does not mean that the journalist is telling the truth to the public. This form of doing journalism can be seen mostly as an elimination of responsibility from the journalist who uses a certain politician that has said something but is insufficient to understand if this is true or not. The taken information by having as a source the main leaders is balanced by using the political counterparts. Very often before such situations, take part other writings (rarely answers inside the same writing) from them who are accused for the event, different issues or personal accuses that have no relation with their duty as politicians. It must be emphasized that more that the problems that have interest on public opinion are included problems that are not important in public life such as the Serbian motives of the song "Stand up" chosen from the Socialist Party during the campaign and the answer that Rama gives to Berisha: *"Stand up not for Saliun. Our song is not for Saliun that stands still because the "horse" of the power is attached in the family's branch"* ( Salliu.F , Koha Jone, 06.06.2009, pg.4)

The used method in relation to balance does not substitute the verification and investigative journalism. The duty of the journalist is not simply to add to the information some interpretations or analyzes, but mostly to verify the credibility of the news and in a second step to list it in a way that people to understand how it is. By referring to the analyze of content of selected newspapers, it is noticeable that the saving of balance between two main political actors Berisha and Rama (but also Meta is a figure that is important) is present. In this case we do not refer the balance in its maximal percentage because there are cases when a large number can contain more or less information depending on main developments so we cannot speak about a strict measure of lines. Differently from other newspaper, at "Tema" newspaper obviously dominates Berisha. All the events, phenomena, problems of the elective process, identity card, the international evaluation in relation to corruption's scale, the case of two murders that happened during the electoral campaign etc are related with the figure of Berisha who turns into the main protagonist meanwhile Rama is mentioned only in a few cases. By referring to these writings the more is written and is criticized Berisha, the more this influences for Rama who turns into the protagonist even though not directly by being the other main option in this electoral campaign. So Rama even though does not have the same lines as Berisha, he positively dominates through a not direct strategy.

A large amount of the writings from the electoral campaign which are presented in selected newspapers, contain accuses, comparisons of the political counterpart with the figures of the past, who do not have a positive image. These characteristics turn in something impossible the process of verification –which contains the essence of journalism. According to the rules

of writing and reporting of news the verification rule is that what distinguishes the journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fictional or art.

The problem pre-scales because such writings are present in each number, their verification is impossible and not logic and if we refer to values they have as news we should consider that the news despite being an unheard news and not ordinary it should have interest, to influence, to be important for the public. The factors of the value of the news are influenced from some elements such as: event, its characteristics, rareness, development, source, how has happened before, how many people know about it. Are the news that complete the criteria that we explained, the writings where the leaders refer to each other as *shoeshine of bllok*, *mammoth of corruption*, *the yesterday Enverist*, *Enveristi who is taking Albania?*. I believe that the answer is rhetorical in this case. Referring to Randall (2003) over the criteria of evaluation of the influencing power, the events that he classifies in the end of the pyramid are supported by events-chatty when in reality has not happened anything by continuing with events that are said to happen. Such events are present in the writings of type Berisha asks Rama or Rama warns that no one will touch the votes.

#### 4.2 The lack of accuracy in function of political partiality.

Through the developed analyze during this chapter the used language in printed press reflects the political partiality of newspapers. The accuses that the leaders direct to each other, are interpreted on the basis of political support for example: "*Elections, Berisha offends Ram: you have collected the dirtiness*" (Bushati. G. *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 10.06. 2009, p. 2). In the case when the left leader uses a language that is not ethical by referring to the majority with the naming that there is no troit in power that can abuse with the vote, this is broadcasted in this way:

*"A strong declaration of the leader of PS, Edi Rama, yesterday in Mallakaster demonstrates that the opposite is determined to not permit the misunderstanding of only one vote with 28<sup>th</sup> of June"* (Tema, 18.06.2009, pg. 7)

Such language will influence not only in the information taken but also at the media consummator because:

*"The language of mediums is consumed a lot and influences a lot on the used language from those who consume the mediums... The negative supposed effects of mediums for the language of a nation take part on the debates for the conservation of the norms of Albanian language, but nearly in other languages too"*(Rugova, 2009:6).

The used language shows partiality of newspapers. For the same event, for the murder of Zeka (the activist of Democratic Party) during the electoral campaign, are given different versions. "Tema" newspaper says that the murder had criminal precedents, and a day later publishes the writing that "the fighting" was not for political motives and a group of people with Artan Zeka (his age is 25) had rrah the author of the event together with his wife who had the violence marks on her face. In "Gazeta Shqiptare" the age of the victim was 32, the group who violated the author was made from 7-8 people and the saying of the woman of the author does not include the version that she was violated. The newspaper "Koha Jone" presents the event through the function that Zeka had as an activist of Democratic Party, was shot while having a coffee as a consequence of the fighting which started a day before, through insulting, violation according to the author. It is not difficult to see the diversity of the information for the same event.

#### Conclusions

Media broadcasts, produces information in relation to the informing functions. The evident problems during this paper is that often the articles are written by relying on unbalanced news. The newspaper "Koha Jone" is in favor of right forces, "Gazeta Shqiptare" is in favor of left forces, "Tema" against Berisha and "Panorama" is more balanced.

A large numbers of writings from the electoral campaign which are presented in selected newspaper contain accuses, comparisons of the political counterpart with figures of the past who do not have a positive image. These characteristics turn it in something impossible the process of verification which is the sense of journalism. The problems pre-scale because such writings are present in every number and their verification is impossible and not logic.

The focus in a dominant way on leaders of main political forces and the type of discourse they use, produces ethical violations because the printed media does not fulfill the functions that it should do. The content of news of the independent print media during the coverage of electoral campaign produce and reproduce inaccurate, unbalanced news which are difficult to verify.

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