

Ethical Violations in the Media in the Context of Press Council Decisions

Mehmet Sena Köseadağ

Conceptual Framework

Concepts such as journalistic ethics and morals have become more significant in the new media order, where information is delivered simultaneously to a larger number of people. In contrast with this progress is an increase in the number of ethical violations due to the diversification of media and the failure of self-control mechanisms to operate properly. In addition to traditional media, ethical violations caused by digital media tools have emerged as an important problem needing to be settled in the era of communication.

Issues such as forming mechanisms to have control over media while not interfering with freedom of information, how media are controlled, and settling emerging conflicts are among the problems currently needing to be settled. Under the leadership of professional press organizations in this context and in order to prevent strict legal controls and increase the prestige of the profession, journalists have developed various professional codes referred to as the moral principles of the press, the professional principles of the press, and as professional obligation declarations and are committed to abiding by these principles. Various self-checking mechanisms have been established within the body of professional journalism organizations and media organizations in order to check whether these rules are being adhered to.

@ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Erciyes Üniversitesi, mskosedag@erciyes.edu.tr

0000-0003-2210-580X

Köseadağ, M. S. (2021). Basın Konseyi Kararları Bağlamında Medyada Etik İhlaller. İş Ahlakı Dergisi, 14 (1), ss 167-190.

Research Paper

© İGİAD
DOI: 10.12711/tjbe.2021.14.1.2094
Turkish Journal of Business Ethics, 2021
isahlakidergisi.com

Başvuru : 26.01.2021
Revizyon : 09.04.2021
Kabul : 31.05.2021
Basım : 06.2021

Ethics suggest rules of conduct for the general public and are defined as a chain of values, principles, and rules based on what is considered appropriate or inappropriate, allowed or not allowed, and right or wrong for society as a whole (Evers, 2010, p. 45). Meanwhile, media ethics is a sub-category of professional ethics and is defined as the set of rules and principles that media professionals and journalists have to abide by while performing their profession (İrvan, 2005, p. 62). Media ethics have emerged as the set of rules journalists who perform their duties in a relatively free manner pledge to follow in order to protect themselves and their profession against pressure groups, to reassure readers, and to reduce legal controls (Alemdar, 1999, p. 253).

The rules journalists are required to follow while performing their duties are framed within constitutions, penal laws, press laws, and other legal regulations. In addition to those mentioned above, professional codes have been established under different names such as honor laws, ethical codes, moral standards, professional principles, declarations on the rights and responsibilities of journalists, and journalistic codes of voluntary-based conduct, and professional press organizations have attempted to implement these. The purpose of these principles is to establish a common path and standards among press professionals' general and common behaviors (Girgin, 2008, pp. 233–237).

At the turn of the 20th century, the establishment of professional press organizations; the rise of an objective and specialized societal understanding; the spread of scientific journalism education; and the dominance of the objective, impartial, and professional news paradigm have strengthened due to journalism beginning to be performed with professional techniques, and the ethics of journalism have begun to settle within institutional lines. However, this only became possible after the 1980s when this concept rose to a dominant position among both academic and popular criticisms as well as among regulations in the field of information (Taş, 2010, pp. 3–13).

The professional principles press organizations have developed while carrying out their activities independent of any authority are intended to protect the mission the journalist undertakes. A self-check system has been established in order to monitor whether these principles are being followed. The self-control system is based on checking whether the moral and ethical principles media have developed are being adhered to and on sharing the results from this check with the public as well as other relevant parties (Alemdar, 1990, p. 388). These control and supervisory mechanisms (Temel & Koçak, 2015, p. 444) are essential for mass media to

be able to fulfill its function and are also important for protecting freedom of the press.

In the field of media, the adoption of ethical principles and implementation of self-regulatory mechanisms was first encountered in Western countries where journalism had developed. Meanwhile, establishing a functional self-control system in Turkey similar to the practices in the West has taken a long time. The longest-standing institutional structure in Turkey operating for the purpose of journalistic self-control without external intervention is the Press Council, established in 1988 through a contract and has no official identity. The Press Council is still active today and continues its self-control function in the Turkish media in line with the adopted Code of Professional Principles.

The work of the Press Council is based on three main legal texts. These documents are the internal regulations referred to as the Press Council Contract, Professional Principles of the Press, and Procedures for Evaluating the Press Council's Rules and Applications. Investigations on professional ethical violations and external activities aimed at protecting freedom of the press and establishing ethical values are the two main activities of the Press Council (Önok, 2019, p. 34). When no agreement is reached due to the applications made, the executive board of the Press Council can make decisions on finding a complaint to be unfounded, to warn, or to reprimand. Sanctions are based on the Professional Principles of the Press determined by the Press Council. The Council assesses all complaints and makes no distinction between those who are and aren't press members.

The Press Council fulfilled the function of voluntary control of the press in the first years of its establishment and later progressed to become an institution whose decisions were valued and adopted by Turkish society. However, in the years that followed, some journalists disagreed with the decisions made; they withdrew their signatures from the Council agreement and resigned their membership. The aim of this study is to reveal the ethical violations in Turkish media by examining the decisions the Press Council has made for the purpose of self-control.

Research Methodology

The study aims to determine the ethical violations exhibited in the Turkish Media from the perspective of the Press Council in consideration of it as an important professional press organization. In accordance with this aim, the study examines the decisions the Press Council made between 2016-2020 within the scope of the self-check function and attempts to determine the degree to which journalists have

complied with the ethical values identified within the framework of the Professional Principles of the Press. The study will reveal whether differences exist among the approaches newspapers, television, and websites used toward the subject by classifying ethical violations with respect to the type of media organization.

The Press Council was established in 1988 and since then has checked press organizations based on the Professional Principles of the Press by taking action either spontaneously or in accordance with complaints made. The Press Advertisement Institution has undertaken a similar function in Turkey. However, because the Press Advertisement Institution is not officially recognized, the activities and decisions it has made are excluded from the study. The decisions made by the Press Council have been taken as the data in the study because it is one of the longest-standing professional press organizations in Turkey and has a civil organizational structure; also, no other self-check institution exists in Turkey with a civil status. The study has been limited to a 5-year period due to the difficulty of collecting data on the subject, as well as the fact that this period is considered sufficient in terms of forming a general opinion.

The study first conducts a literature review and then uses the document analysis method, a qualitative research design, due to the nature of the problem. The decisions the Press Council made between 2016-2020 with respect to self-checks and then published as reports were collected as documents. These obtained documents are subjected to descriptive and content analyses and then converted into findings. The decisions the Press Council made on self-checks have been numbered according to type by means of descriptive analysis in accordance with the aim of the study; content analysis techniques are used to interpret the resulting data.

Discussion and Conclusion

Having gained the power to greater influence society by means of the new media order, mass media has committed to obeying these rules by establishing professional ethical codes in order to avoid strict legal regulations as well as to create prestige for the profession of journalism. Self-check mechanisms have been established in order to monitor whether these rules are being abided by. Self-check systems have developed under different names since the early periods of journalism in many countries of the world and continue to function today. The most effective self-regulatory mechanisms seen in the field of journalism appear as press councils.

In Turkey, actions have been taken to run a self-check system since the early days of the press; however, these attempts were generally unsuccessful. The longest-standing initiative in this field is the Press Council, which was established in 1988. The Pro-

Professional Principles of the Press adopted by the Press Council through the Press Council Contract lays out the general framework of ethical principles that media organs and journalists in Turkey can follow while performing their duties. The Press Council examines complaints regarding publications in the media and decides whether an ethical violation has occurred within the framework of the Professional Principles of the Press. When the Press Council decides that the Professional Principles of Press have been violated, it decides on sanctions either as a “warning” or a “reprimand” against the violating media organ(s) or media employee(s) and shares its decision with the public.

According to the findings obtained through this study, 64% of the complaints the Press Council examined within the scope of its self-check function between 2016 and 2020 were found to be justified and sanctioned. In regard to decisions on sanctions, it penalized with more reprimands than with warnings. When examining the applications made from the first days of the Press Council to the present, the number of applications was determined to have decreased. Despite the diversification in the world of media and the increase in the number of broadcasting organizations and publications, the decrease in the number of applications made to the Council is thought-provoking. This situation points to both a decrease in the effectiveness of the Press Council and a weakening of the only civilian self-check mechanism in Turkey.

When examining the complaints made to the Press Council, most applications were found to be involved with printed media outlets. The media outlets that violate the Professional Principles of the Press the most are national newspapers. An increase in the violations caused by websites and social media accounts has been recently observed. No application has been made to the Press Council regarding the national and local radio organizations with respect to alleged violations during the 5-year period.

The article subject to the most ethical violations in Turkish media is Article 4 of the Professional Principles of the Press, followed directly by Article 6. The third most violated article is Article 10. According to these data, ethical violations in the media in Turkey are mostly gathered around the issues of attacking personal rights, publishing inaccurate news, and attributing legally criminal acts to others. The Press Council has made no ethical violation decision regarding Articles 8, 11, 14, or 15 of the Professional Principles of the Press.

Various problems have been observed to exist regarding the functioning of the self-check mechanism in the field of journalism in Turkey. On this point, the study may suggest having the Press Council possess a more encompassing and active structure as a solution.

Kaynakça | References

- Almagor, R. C. (2002). *İfade, medya ve etik*. (S. N. Şat. Çev.). Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi.
- Alemdar, K. (1999). *Medya ve etik. Medya gücü ve demokratik kurumlar içinde*. İstanbul: Afa Yayıncılık ve TÜSS Vakfı.
- Alemdar, Z. (1990). *Oyunun kuralı "basında özdenetim"*. Ankara: Kasım, Bilgi Yayınevi
- Avşar Z., Demir, V. (2005). *Düzenleme ve uygulamalarla medyada denetim*. Ankara: Piramit Yayınları.
- Basın Konseyi Sözleşmesi. (2020). 10.10.2020, <https://www.basinkonseyi.org.tr/basin-konseyi-sozlesmesi-2/>.
- Basın Meslek İlkeleri. 7.11.2020, <https://www.basinkonseyi.org.tr/basin-meslek-ilkeleleri/>,
- Basın Konseyi Basın Özgürlüğü Raporları. (2009-2020). İstanbul: Basın Konseyi yayınları.
- Belsey A., ve R. Chadwick (1998). *Medya ve gazetecilikte etik sorunlar*. (N. Türkoğlu, Çev.). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Evers, H. (2010). *Televizyon haberciliğinde etik*. B. Çaplı ve H. Tuncel, (Ed.). Ankara: Fersa Matbaacılık.
- Girgin, A. (2008). *Gazeteciliğin temel ilkeleri*. İstanbul: Der Yayınları, İstanbul.
- İrvan, S. (2005). *Medya ve etik*. S. Alankuş, (Der). *Medya, etik ve hukuk içinde*. İstanbul: IPS İletişim Vakfı Yayınları.
- İşık, M. (2002). *Dünya ve Türkiye bağlamında kitle iletişim sistemleri*. Konya: Eğitim Kitabevi.
- Kösedağ, M. S. (2018). Yazılı basında öz denetim sorunu ve Basın İlan Kurumunun denetim işlevinin basın özgürlüğü açısından değerlendirilmesi. *Turkish Studies Social Sciences*, 13 (10) 497-513, DOI Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.13509>.
- Özgen, M. (1998). *Gazetecinin etik kimliği*. İstanbul: Türkiye Gazeteciler Cemiyeti Yayınları.
- Önok, M. (2019). *Medyada öz denetimin önemi ve dijital çağda öz denetim. Proceedings of the international conference held on 7 March 2019 içinde*. İstanbul: Basın Konseyi Yayınları.
- Taş, O. (2010). *Medya etiğinin tarihsel temelleri ve gelişimi*. B. Çaplı, H. Tuncel, (Ed.). *Televizyon haberciliğinde etik içinde*. Ankara: Fersa Matbaacılık.
- Temel, M. ve Koçak, Ö. F. (2015). Kitle iletişim araçları ile düşüncüyü açıklama ve yayma hürriyetinin kapsam ve sınırları üzerine bir değerlendirme. *E-journal of Intermedia*, Fall –December 2 (2), 440-459.
- Tokgöz, O. (1994). *Temel gazetecilik* (3. Baskı). Ankara: İmge Kitabevi.
- Yıldırım, A. ve Şimşek, H. (2013). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri* (9. Baskı). Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.