

## Issues of Domestic Journalism Ethics in Shaping Uzbekistan's International Image

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### Introduction

This article examines the problems of journalism ethics, particularly the criteria of *objectivity* and *impartiality*, as part of the process of shaping Uzbekistan's image in the world media space. These issues are of critical importance for a young state which is emerging as a new player in the geopolitical map despite a lack of full integration into the regional and international community, and whose internal and external policies have yet to achieve full stability. A preference to start with the benefits and a penchant to freely express attitudes in mediated news violates the expected Uzbek journalistic practice of neutrality and impartiality.

The article begins by identifying the current state of Uzbekistan journalism in the modern global public sphere. It then surveys the contemporary landscape for Uzbek journalists and the three different ethical tasks that need to be addressed: (1) Issues of objectivity as part of the process of shaping the country's international image; (2) The lack of a journalism code of ethics and its impact on nation building and national interests and nation building, and (3) Norms of professional ethics that are simultaneous triaded but difficult to balance. This article concludes by identifying news tasks for Uzbek professional journalism ethics.

### Uzbekistan Journalism in the Modern Global Public Sphere

Uzbekistan journalism is in an evolving state. There is a growing sense of journalistic freedom today as opposed to a few years ago when some journalists were jailed for criticizing the Uzbek government (see Corless, 2010). Under new president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, journalists are enjoying an "open media environment" (Dam, 2018). In addition, Turon24, an independent regional news organization, was recently registered by the Uzbek government (BBC Monitoring Unit Central Asia Unit, 2018a). But issues remain. While the new leadership allows all state media to be freer, in effect there remains reticence and fear to openly criticize the government. For example, in September 2018, four Facebook bloggers were arrested for their posts regarding "social and religious issues, often advocating for a greater role of Islam in society" (News Bites, 2018). As Amnesty International Ukraine Director Oksana Pokhalchuk stated, "In Uzbekistan, independent journalists and human rights activists are often victims of systematic harassment and intimidation, surveillance, arrests, attacks, and deliberate discrediting," (BBC Monitoring Kiev Unit, 2018).

Independent local journalists also find themselves in treacherous waters. For example, journalists working for Podrobno.uz compiled a list of complaints that severely limits their ability to report the news. Those complaints include being excluded from events in favor of select, larger media agencies, being expected to serve as mouthpieces transmitting the press releases of government agencies and businesses, losing accreditation for voicing personal opinions, and being asked retroactively to edit or remove entirely an article a journalist has penned (BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, 2018b). In addition, the Uzbek government issues licenses to Internet providers and requires them to censor online content that does not follow "official guidelines" to retain that license (Curran, 2019), although the situation is improving in this Central Asian country. The Uzbek press was recently ranked 165 out of 180 in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2018), up one spot from its 166 ranking in 2016 (Reporters Without Borders, 2017). Reporters Without Borders also noted that

Uzbekistan was the only country to increase its ranking in the Central Asian region (Reporters Without Borders, 2018).

Under the new president there are calls to allow journalists to “do their jobs without fear of reprisal” (Global English, 2018). But in a country long dominated by corruption, a predomination of state-owned media outlets, and the government keeping a cautious eye on independent media after eliminating print censorship in 2002 (State Department, 2002), it seems today that journalists may not know how to do their jobs. It is understandable, then, that questions arise about journalism ethics in Uzbekistan.

### **State of Domestic Uzbek Journalism Ethics**

Today’s globalized world is witnessing an uptick in international media *melodrama*, where journalists play the role of *actors* and news consumers fulfill the role of *spectators*. Nowadays, after thirty years of the ending of the Cold War, anyone can locate and read any kind of news stories from any individual country without any technical barriers or “iron curtains.” Regardless of topic, geographic location, or media type – print, radio, television, computer, or social media – questions remain. Who is creating and disseminating the information? Is the information bias-free? Are ethical standards being followed?

It is no surprise that questions continue to be asked during a contentious time where the international community, as iterated in other articles, is living in a period of media transformation. While these questions are important for established countries, they are particularly acute for young, independent states like Uzbekistan that is just stepping onto the developmental path.

### **The rise of citizen journalism**

For example, one of the changes of this era regards the activity of information access, dissemination, and sharing by everyday citizens which is an end result of the latest technological advances. These individuals can now become a recorder of the status quo and report “news” to others, hence giving rise to the twenty-first century concept of *citizen journalism*. This transitional shift has resulted in questions regarding the place of professionalism in journalistic activities. It has also illuminated the issue of journalism ethics, particularly for those who have no formal awareness or training in the moral and value-laden concepts and issues that accompany public dissemination of information. As international environs change, so too must the criteria for professional ethics. If these topical issues challenging today’s professionals are not addressed and resolved soon, it is quite possible that current trends will have serious negative effects on present and future theories and practices of global journalism, and in particular, Uzbekistan. This former Soviet Union-bloc country turned young, independent state may very well be in a vulnerable position where domestic and international news may significantly impact the scope and tractor of information access by and reception of Uzbek citizens and potentially shape the future trajectory of journalism studies in our country, and in particular, the role of ethics in a evolutionary mediated society.

Countries like Uzbekistan are experiencing an ethical divide. Older, established journalists generally follow a code of ethics that younger, newer ones have not learned it or choose not to utilize their knowledge. The etiquette of disseminating information when communicating to the public has existed for ages, especially, the concept of justice. This concept never changes in any epoch, in any country, or in any situation. A journalist can have a high-level approach to his or her creative work, but if he or she acts against the principle of justness, their efforts will be in vain. The same consequences will await journalists in cases of biasness or inaccuracies. This is especially crucial for citizen journalists who do not have an ethical code but need one because they are becoming more and more active in the media sphere.

### Issues arising from civil journalism

When it comes to speaking about the Internet and “citizen journalism” that is becoming more and more popular as the opportunities of the internet are expanding, besides the advantages that it is giving, “citizen journalism” is arising serious trouble in terms of media ethics.

The fact that any person in any time can spread information through any medium on any topic is creating an extremely free environment. However, it does not mean that any person who are spreading the information is a journalist or he or she can bring down the journalism as a sphere and profession. Recognition of any piece of information or number distributed on social media or through mobile devices as related to journalistic activity would be at least basically the humiliation of the piece of journalistic art. Russia’s Monakhov (2000) rightly states, “Due to the emergence of the internet, thousands and millions of amateurs joined the list of journalists — traditional and professional subjects who work with media. Majority of them has no idea about traditions and norms of the journalistic professions” (p. 35).

The lack of standard journalistic ethical practices among professionals in Uzbekistan are now compounded by the advent of ordinary citizens recording and reporting about events within their spheres. It is not hard to realize the consequences of disseminating and receiving news could have a strong effect on the fate and image of the Uzbek nation and its people due to consuming information from amateur sources.

One result of the speed of the news distribution by online media correspondents is their pressure to produce and post content quickly. Working in this kind of rapid mode is difficult for those who have high journalistic and professional practices. For example, the website anonz.us publishes Uzbek news stories in Uzbek, Russian and English. Like most regional and international online websites, it contains a wide range of news categories ranging from politics, economics and culture to society and sporting events. Observing their published articles in the different languages reveals errors due to time constraints, including the quality of the texts, proper language usage, and writing style. Unfortunately, we cannot say that all of its articles are prepared in professional level in terms of the quality of the texts, language and the style. For example, on November 22, 2018, the Uzbekistan National News Agency published on its official web site a very old-style news report with a long title – “Ways of improving competitiveness of local producers and stimulating foreign trade” - which is very boring. It looks like an old Soviet-style report from a local newspaper. But modern readers, especially foreigners, do not like long titles. Unfortunately, the Uzbek mass media does not have any foreign journalists who could work as a stylistic editor and assist with modernization (para. 1).

To add insult to injury, the Anons website itself contains a crucial error, as their homepage, last accessed in June 2018, misspells the motto *Latest Uzbekistan News* as Сўнги Ўзбекистон Хабарлари instead of Ўзбекистон: сўнги хабарлар. While this error may seem trivial, it has the potential of influencing international viewer’s perception of news legitimacy or quality of news reporting by Anons. Actually, to convey the message in an easy, understandable manner, they should simply say “Uzbekistan: Latest News.” It is imperative that Uzbek news organizations privilege accurate news reporting over time and their rush to post news stories. It is errors like these that contribute to the perceptions of poor reporting skills as well as the authenticity and legitimacy of the news organization itself.

In summary, journalists who follow accepted professional ethics and expected news reporting norms will garner their audiences’ respect. As ambassadors of their respective news organizations, they will also give the impression that their work is objective, accurate, and truthful. Since news stories are easily accessible by anyone globally, it has become important for said organizations to adhere to the principles of information unbiasedness, accuracy and credibility as part of a much needed national code of ethics.

Now Uzbek audiences decide which sources they will read more. 2-3 years ago, ordinary citizens were hungry for critical information about their country from outside sources despite the

government's ban on such information within its borders. Today, there are more balanced sources within the country. Also, it seems that Uzbeks are consuming predominantly domestic sources, yet problems with journalistic objectivity remain.

### **Issues of Objectivity in the Process of Shaping Uzbekistan's International Image**

The contemporary state of Uzbek journalism prompts several questions: What does the theoretical notion of impartiality for media journalists include? How should information be interpreted in the context of globalisation and in the consideration of national and geopolitical interests? What is needed to develop and maintain a country's image? What should be kept in mind to achieve a harmonious balance between neutrality and nation branding? And what is the role of media, and of journalists, in particular?

Objectivity, that is, unbiasedness, is one of the main principles of an activity of any media worker and the journalism in general. Arkhangelskiy (2008) argues "media objectivity" is the complex of subjective opinions that principally differ from each other and is characterized by the diversity of functioning magazines, newspapers and TV channels.

Dostmuhammad (2005) argues that unbiasedness, balance, and compromise together create a real democracy (p. 44). As such, objectivity is a meaningful notion for it can be interpreted and evaluated from different perspectives. Scientific, political, social, cultural, national, historical and geographic objectivities will be noticed in mediated materials, particularly in articles and commentaries related to an image of a country. Then consumers can easily detect the author(s) and the media(s) position.

Arendt (1996) characterizes media news by stating that unilateral media coverage of a conflict topic is the sign of totalitarian journalism, not a democratic one (p. 451). If the Uzbek media wants to become a part of the larger democratic journalistic sphere, they should cover any kind of topic from both sides. In addition, local journalists must be encouraged to follow expected protocols of objectivity when reporting information and subsequently shaping their country's media image.

Based on these and other theoretical principles about objectivity, one can surmise that the issue of objectivity in the media as it pertains to the formation of a country's image involves several complexities and serious challenges.

### **The Lack of an Official Journalism Code of Ethics in Uzbekistan**

Unlike many of our global counterparts, there is a lack of an official journalism code of ethics, or even a widely established informal code for the majority of professional journalists. It is imperative that such a code be created for Uzbekistan.

Every journalist is considered to be responsible in due course for the information's accuracy, objectivity and justness. This norm, established in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, is aligned with one of the normative documents regulating the journalistic activity globally: UNESCO's *Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War* from November 28 1978. The second of its total of eleven principles states that it is the journalist's obligation to report the events objectively: "Access by the public to information should be guaranteed by the diversity of the sources and means of information available to it, thus enabling each individual to check the accuracy of facts and to appraise events objectively" (para. 20). This principle applies to any mediated entity that publishes articles designed to creating the image of subjects both independent and functioning in world media space. It is imperative that journalists who take an active part in the process of shaping country's image keep this principle in mind.

More than ten legislative documents that coordinate the activity of the media have been adopted in Uzbekistan. Many of them address journalistic ethics. Particularly, Article 7 entitled “Rules of Professional Ethics of Journalists” of Uzbekistan’s Journalistic Activity Protection Law says: “Rules of professional ethics of journalists are a set of rules that define the requirements for journalists’ personality and their behavior upon accomplishing the professional tasks. Journalists’ professional ethics are set by unions of journalists and media organizations” (Republic of Uzbekistan’s Law). In addition, Article 6 of the Law of Mass Media, created by the Uzbekistan government, describes the protections afforded to journalists: “In carrying out professional activities, a journalist is obliged to: observe the rules of professional ethics of journalists, respect rights and freedoms, honor and dignity of an individual, publish facts about the private life of an individual, and use audio and video recordings without the consent of the source of information or the author” (Republic of Uzbekistan).

It should be noted that Uzbekistan’s Creative Union of Journalists and other relevant organizations have not adopted any Code of Ethics for the country’s journalists thus far. As a result, there is no common code on a national level for the country. The unpublished *The Code of Professional Ethics of Journalists of Uzbekistan*, a trilingual (Uzbek, Russian, English) code consisting of eight pages and nine paragraphs, was developed in 2016 with the support of UNESCO’s office, in Tashkent. The principle architects included Krista Pikkat, head of Tashkent’s UNESCO office, Sanjar Allayorov, chief of Press and Culture division of Tashkent’s UNESCO office, Abdulaziz Abdullaev, director of Public Fund for Support and Development of Independent Print Media and News Agencies of Uzbekistan, Dr Hurshid Dostmuhammad, professor of International Journalism Faculty of Uzbek State World Languages University, and Dr Gulnara Babajanova, In-Service Training Center for Journalists of Uzbekistan. To date, it has not yet been officially adopted due to unknown reasons. While some country-wide editorial offices have adopted an internal, organizational code, but it is only for their staff members, the majority around the country have not adopted an ethical code nor realize its importance. There is some national hope, though, as some of Uzbekistan’s Parliament members are keen to assist our Journalism Union to adopt a unique National Journalism Code in the near future.

### **Emerging Issues with Uzbekistan’s Nation Building and National Interests**

As Muitov (2014), an expert on geopolitical issues in journalism says, “information factor is important in globalization of geopolitical processes. Here strengthening of geopolitical competition in regions and peculiarities of the information threats, information supply of the foreign policy should be considered as government’s strategic intention” (p. 152). In other words, governments need to recognize the significant capital mediated communication offers in nation-building and regional geopolitical competitions. However, as Muitov observed, “the effectiveness of the utilization of today’s foreign policy promotion main principles is remaining low” (p. 152). Muitov also points out that “credibility of the sources in today’s era of information threats is becoming more serious” (p. 97). At the turn of the century, Rashidova (2002) stated that “In the conditions of information market, the requirements on the journalist’s selectivity on picking the facts of social occurrences as well as on his or her culture of expression increase” (p. 15). Her comment illustrates the point that the more important the truthfulness of the information source is, the more serious importance will the style and culture of selecting facts that belong to an occurrence. Meanwhile the conflict of interests and geopolitical competition between the powers intensifies; it may impact not only information stage, but also puts ordinary journalists in critical situation. In this situation journalists should not be involved in geopolitical games.

It is also certain that the truthfulness of sources or the culture of selective facts selection is considered to be one of the main problems in this period of information attacks, because the selection order of facts or the source references help determine issues of unbiasedness. However,

though it is up to the journalist to approach to these two conditions, he or she does not have right to ignore the principle of truth when in using data, facts, or numbers. Since truthfulness is considered to be the root, the main vessel therefore must be objectivity.

For example, a former journalist from *Uzbekistan Today*, a newspaper that aims at raising Uzbekistan's national profile in the international media space, shared an article and photo collage from Troll.uz referencing the familial ties between the heads of Uzbekistan football federation and Uzbekistan futsal association. Madina Ruzmatova (2016) posted the story on her Facebook page and commented, "No, no, this is not a nepotism, this is Uzbekism." While it is not a journalist's duty to promote Uzbekistan in a positive manner on a personal social media account, journalists such as Rozmetova should understand their position of reporting the news as precluding them from leaving sarcastic comments or participating in mediated social media debates as such postings could be construed as journalistic commentary and not individual opinion.

Unfortunately, there are additional examples of poor judgment by Uzbek journalists. For example, Jasur Kengboyev of *Oila Davrasida*, a Tashkent newspaper, posted on his Facebook page the following: "In one of the neighbouring countries, where they cultivate the softest cotton, a female deputy or teacher told her boss: Every population centre should carry your name..." (2016a). In another post on the same day (2016b), he posted a joke about a black and a white man. Kengboyev wrote, "Is it a joke about U.S. and Russia? That's hilarious." In a further reply, the Uzbek journalist suggested that the joke referred to then American president Barack Obama and Russian president Vladimir Putin. In both of these posts, the sarcasm from the talented *Oila Davrasida* representative could be construed as inappropriate politically, and portray to the global community an incorrect perception of racial bias in Uzbekistan.

### **Separating Professional Duties from Personal Posting Activities**

In order to avoid this kind of misunderstanding, Uzbek journalists should embrace Agence France Presse's Editorial Standards and Best Practices, which suggest journalists who "solely want to comment in a private context," they should post under a separate, different account that does not acknowledge their professional occupation of journalism (p. 14). Agence France Presse's document of journalism ethics states that their journalists need to avoid making comments that would subsequently raise doubts about their ability to provide unbiased news coverage, or could damage AFP's reputation for impartiality. This is an important ethical standard that Uzbek journalists need to adopt as social networks in Uzbekistan have the same, if not greater reach, than traditional forms of media, and as such must be taken into account when posting comments or expressing an opinion.

One of the serious problems confronting Uzbek and many other international journalists today is the difficulties corresponding to the requirements of keeping balance and harmony between following the principle of unbiasedness and national interests. As the famous journalist and researcher Halim Saidov (2008) once said, "For the press that sets the national interests of his compatriots as a high goal, it is very important to clarify the concepts of his activity, in other words, to equip itself with necessary tools for first of all becoming the fourth estate and the mirror that shows the wills of the community" (p. 23).

### **Protection of National Interests**

The practice of journalism ethics is an evolving science in Uzbekistan. While global and national organizations have assisted with the development of several documents regarding journalism practices, more work is needed. The basic principles and unchangeable values of journalism ethics should encompass the global standards of unbiasedness, accuracy, and truthfulness. In addition, Uzbek journalists need to employ sensitivity while journalism ethics are evolving and developing as a separate and independent branch of science.

This notion of sensitivity introduces a second aspect of Uzbek journalism ethics, namely the *protection of national interests*. What I mean is that what theoretical fundamentals or political requirements should a journalist follow, in case he or she is opposed to their conceptions of ethical norms for journalists because of the matter of national interests? The question confronting Uzbek journalism professionals regards the development of a theoretical model or guidelines for practical applications when confronted with these cases that occur too far often today.

In the Soviet era, journalism was one sided. As a result, professionalism suffered as journalists were mouthpieces of the political regime and servants to the Communist party. In contemporary post-Soviet society, journalism cannot develop any further without a set of general professional standards and guidelines. Concepts of professional ethics such as commitment to profession, equality, and obligations are now becoming associated with high-level professionalism and are manifesting themselves in a symbiotic, mutual harmony. It is time that these concepts filter down to regional and local journalists. Like their national counterparts they too serve as bridges for the public, the government, the country, and the globe. They have an obligation to their readers as well as their country. The modern media sphere now requires them to maintain a balance between ethics and professionalism. As such it is crucial for journalists to master their respective areas and identify correct and fair solutions for news reporting, particularly in critical situations. That is why concepts of professional abilities and ethics have always been hand in hand.

Today, we can observe and reflect upon the plentiful cases of freedom infringements in previous historical eras, where human rights were violated. In some cases those infringements remain today as a result of social and political law breakings. History illustrates the abridgement of such human rights like the freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom of faith for many years during the Soviet Union era. But the power of the creative writer's word is so infinite that ways and chances to speak the truth under the repression of the former communistic ideology were found. The gist is in how and with what tools was this realized. How journalists were able to speak is what matters.

### **Norms of Professional Ethics**

The problem of ethical norms in Uzbek journalism has practical relevance in two aspects. First, the creation of a modern, democratic society requires responsible journalism, which can be expressed through the development and observance of widely accepted ethical standards by journalists. Secondly, as suggested earlier, local journalists themselves need ethical benchmarks for their professional activities. These unified benchmarks can also serve as the basis for professional solidarity and contribute to a stronger and increasingly positive global image of Uzbekistan

### **When a Major Trio Collides**

In the circumstances when the triad of truthfulness – national interest – professional ethics cross, the creative talent, style of reasoning, voice of expressing the attitude and, most importantly, the genuine ambition of the journalist plays an important role. For example, the ethical journalist should follow the demands of truthfulness principle but simultaneously must weigh national interests and act accordingly.

The decisions of what to reveal publicly and to forgo hasty, irresponsible news reporting to attract readership requires level-headedness and experience by journalists. In many ways their delivery of messages about social and political changes to public is, in a certain sense, puts them in the position of possessing *political power*. The journalist reports his interpretation of an event to the public, many of whom did not witness that event first hand. The public relies on the journalist to adhere to the truthfulness triad and deliver information objectively. If the journalist

places personal ego or professional or political ambitions ahead of their basic news reporting responsibility, they run the risk of failing and subsequently tarnishing the reputation of their employer.

### **Activist Journalism**

Here in Uzbekistan, individual culture and ethics of the journalist occasionally supersedes their professional requirements, and advances his or her position by commenting on events instead of reporting them. We could call this *activist journalism*. These occurrences are similar to the activities of some American journalists who criticized the Cold War or the invasion of Vietnam by American troops. In other words, the objective reporter becomes the subjective critic.

The research of Ahmedova (2016) from Uzbekistan State World Languages University illustrates this point. She argues that “now one can strike out considerably at the country through negatively impacting on the reputation of the country’s leader” (p. 89). Her position stems from her analysis of a 2015 article from Austria’s *Contra* magazine that started with words “German media’s main task is to discredit Russia and its president.” She claimed that the “German media are not interested in truthfulness criteria” but instead their main goal was to denigrate Vladimir Putin and Russia. This example demonstrates that any reader of this article’s title could easily draw conclusions not only about the German media, but also about Germany as a country, and the journalistic practices of its news organizations. As such, reader conclusions will subsequently reflect their image of the German nation, regardless of the truthfulness (or lack thereof) in the actual article. In other words, objectivity has been superseded by the government’s dislike of criticism by its reporters.

This practice is not germane to Uzbekistan only but neighboring countries as well. In 2010, while reporting from the ground about the ethnic conflict in Osh, Kyrgyz Republic, journalist Vladimir Farafonov wrote: “...got wild and never punished for the crimes they did, drunken rural Kyrgyz men cut the head of Uzbek children.” Two years later, he apologized for writing his article while on trial for his publications and prosecutors were suggesting he be sentenced to a settlement colony for eight years. At the trial the journalist apologized if others saw “excessive emotions” in this reporting that they construed as insults or humiliation of the Kyrgyz nation (para. 3). Farafonov was eventually fined \$1100 for inciting “ethnic hatred,” and was spared the harsher penalty of imprisonment (para. 1).

### **Political power**

These two examples illustrate the paradoxical nature of Uzbek and Central Asian journalism. On the one hand, they mirror a trend of “commentary” or “opinionated” journalism (*activist journalism*) that has become prevalent in many parts of the world. But on the other hand, they illuminate an activity of prosecuting journalists for their reporting by a government’s judicial system, an event that does not typically occur in those countries that embrace the notions of “freedom of speech” and “freedom of the press.”

It is the *political power* reporting of this kind, and its subsequent critical eye toward a government that results in the press being restricted from zones of conflict. It is not a coincidence that that numerous Russian media outlets, including *VGTRK*, *Zvezda*, and *Lifenews*, were officially prohibited from entering the eastern regions of Ukraine since the beginning of warfare in those territories because of the political and ethnic conflicts between Russia and Ukraine (“SBU,” 2014).

That same *political power* has been used by some of the foreign media with their reporting about Uzbekistan activities, which has resulted in damaging the country’s reputation based on unverified or biased information, or slander. Over a decade ago, Dostmuhammad (2007) linked journalism ethics to professionalism when he argued “As it is in traditional

journalism, in the online journalism as well, it is the ability to select the necessary and unbiased information from the ocean of information that defines the level and potential of the journalist” (p. 71).

In today’s information era, journalism ethics have become more important than ever. As Dostmuhammad (2007) noted about Uzbek reporting,

The thought expressed online is unlimited. The threatening aspect of this feature is that, say, the opinion of internet “authors” about an occurrence in the territory of Uzbekistan is read particularly by people who live in distant corners of the worlds, who are physically far from the place, where the events are happening. Of course, it is not difficult to anticipate how destructive and distracting the effect of the thoughts can be when people in distance are reading the personal subjective pieces” (p. 75).

It seems that the 1990 declaration of journalistic ethics by Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan’s first president, has not materialized: “We are not going to limit the journalists. Let them write, let them criticize. But unbiasedness and respect should not be forgotten” (Karimov, 1990). As Uzbekistan nears its thirtieth year of independence, it is clear that our nation’s journalism practices are plagued with issues of objective reporting and varying levels of professional ethics. The traditional approaches of journalism has given way to the newer brand of news reporting that is unserious, of low-quality, and embraces the “sensational content” of the “entertainment media” that could very well lead to the literacy decline of the Uzbek public citizenry. It also illuminates an alarming trend of journalists placing their interests ahead of the nation’s and citizen’s interests, and illustrates the need of a national code of professional ethics for all national journalists.

### **New Tasks of Uzbek Professional Journalism Ethics**

Nowadays, journalism ethics are being tested by more and more by new views and interpretations. Humans have strived for the discovery and realization of *truth* since its creation. They have also tried to make sense of the events occurring around them and understand the circumstances that have lead to their emergence. As such, it is imperative that modern Uzbek journalists keep in mind basic ethical standards of objectivity, accountability, and accuracy.

### **Technology’s Role in Current Uzbek Journalistic Practices**

The advent of technology over the past few decades has resulted in information barriers being eliminated and a parallel increase of global knowledge of other cultures. And it is natural for a culture of information to evolve along with elite, national and popular culture, including the screen arts. For contemporary journalists, this means having a deep knowledge about the historical stages of the cultural processes of the world but at the same time not blindly copying the features of global civilizations. One of the modern journalists’ task, therefore, is to maintain a sense of national identity that has been developed since the nation’s birth as an independent state (see Khari, 2018) as they pursue their activities and gain knowledge of the practices of others. And countries like Uzbekistan must balance ethics and the journalism practices of others with that national identity.

Part II, Chapter 5, Article 18 of the Uzbekistan’s Constitution states “All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have equal rights and freedoms, and shall be equal before the law, without discrimination by sex, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, convictions, individual and social status” (“Permanent Mission,” para. 28). The policy, led by Uzbekistan, recognizes the very ideas that were pushed forward in the World Human Rights Declaration. It means that tolerance towards a person’s religion, race and faith is characterized as the long living values of the Uzbek nation. This traditional principle is being put into realization at the state political level. Today, it is important that the state protect journalists and their activities, the like

right to gather and disseminate information, as indicated in Article 5 and 6 of Uzbekistan's Law on the Mass Media (Republic of Uzbekistan). This law allows journalists to address any high-level government or non-government organization. It also allows journalists to acquire and analyse documents through technological means, and to consult specialists about the validity and credibility of that information. If protocols such as these are organized and followed in this manner, journalists can employ much-needed professional ethics to prepare and disseminate improved version of the *truth*.

Judicial and literary standards are also needed. Today's online journalism, both in Uzbekistan and internationally, is littered incorrect information, misspellings, click-bait headlines, and an over-exuberant use of negative words and phrases as well as sarcasm that has transformed traditional journalistic news stories into cyber journalistic commentary-trash. The only salve is that journalism is not the only area where this negative trend has occurred, and can thus only be partially blamed for this downward trajectory.

It is important to note that the category of the objectivity has strong roots in the world practice. The principle II of the International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism adopted by members of international and regional professional organisations of journalists in Paris on November 20, 1983 is the dedication to objective reality, meaning journalists must not break the objectivity principle upon covering the events and occurrences (Ethicnet). It means that anyone considering him or herself a professional correspondent in international media space today must follow the parameters of objective reality as expressed in the Principles.

### **Ensuring Theory and Practice Coalesce**

Unfortunately, there are a few conflicting cases between journalistic theory and practice in young, developing countries like Uzbekistan. In other words, theoretical recommendations given by experts are not always practically executed by this nation's journalistic pool. As a result, our media's global image by our global counterparts is not strong and is in need of immediate attention.

In addition, there remains little progress toward finding the balance and harmony between objective reality and Uzbek journalism practices. That is why numerous Uzbek media specialists think it is important and appropriate to push this suggestion forward: professionals should not be hasty in publicizing or even hiding the real happenings (objective reality), no matter how it is, whether positive or negative. Tactically, we should find the symmetry of timely information dissemination, for ethically-targeted purposes, and appropriate for enhancing global image. In doing so, hastiness, irresponsibility and risking cannot be acceptable.

To commence this process, the following directives and proposals for objectivity and professional ethics should be advanced to all Uzbek journalists and academic specialists:

- As the scale of the information regarding Uzbekistan's image in the world media space expands, we need to analyse that information according to international ethical norms in addition to our nation's principles and laws, and then develop useful conclusions and suggestions that best suits Uzbek media practices, like Kenny and Gross (2008) similarly suggested some ten years ago:

- News organizations should distribute some of the documents referenced in this chapter, including the Law on Mass Media and the International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism, to all of its employees, and insist that they start adhering to them. News organizations also need to impress upon their employees the need to elevate their image locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally;

- News organizations need to ensure they are hiring qualified individuals who are willing to engage in objective and authentic news reporting and dissemination, as the International Principles of Professional Ethics states;

- News organizations need to clearly establish to current employees they are practicing journalism that is the equivalent of international organizations, but with an eye on Uzbek national identity and culture. News organizations can also promote their brand of journalism to help educate readers of the difference between professional and citizen journalism through the use of professionalism, and appropriate writing and style for different journalistic genres;
- Media representatives should independently analyze the information they constantly receive from the foreign media as the *consumer* of information, not only as a *distributor* of the information
- Media representatives should be educated and brought up as fighters against ideological pressures and information attacks by the foreign media, and develop a media literacy “ideological immunity” for readers
- Media representatives should engage in a program of continuous professional development
- Academics should ensure they are training budding journalists in all types of media, ensure they know professional ethics, encourage them to approach their work conscientiously, and give full and accurate information;
- News organizations, media representatives, and journalism academics should work with established, reputable international news organizations like the Society for Professional Journalists, the International Federation of Journalists, the International Center for Journalists, and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, as well as the national Creative Union of Journalists, to work collectively to elevate the level of professional ethics in Uzbekistan;
- The Uzbek government needs to abide by official documents stating there is freedom of the press in Uzbekistan and forgo censorship at all mediated levels. Modern Uzbek journalism is able to accomplish many of this kind of tasks, engage in new measures, and work towards increasing media development.

### Conclusion

The state of journalism in Uzbekistan is in need of modernization. It is time that laws are followed, guidelines established, and ethics employed. It is imperative that Uzbek journalists from all levels participate in the three ethical tasks identified in this article so that the country’s global image is elevated. Those tasks including engaging in objectivity so that it becomes more accepted and practiced nationwide, a professional code of ethics be erected and followed, and more development of procedures for professional ethic so they become normative for all Uzbek journalists.

From an academic standpoint, there are several areas of research that can be conducted to extend and expand the thoughts explicated here. They include a comparative analysis of traditional print news stories and modern online news stories to identify similarities and differences, particularly differences that contribute to negative impressions by the readers. A similar area for new research is to analyze online stories by various Uzbek news organizations and identify any breaches of professional ethics and practices. A third area of future research would be to compare Uzbek to international reporting of a global event to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Uzbek version. A fourth area of research centers on the gap between news stories disseminated by Uzbek journalists about our nation and stories written by Westerners, especially US and UK journalists to identify different descriptions of events as well as perspectives, commentary, and conclusion. It is very possible that what Uzbek journalists see here, Western journalists view it from a different point. A fifth area of research would to survey foreign audience knowledge about Uzbekistan, their degree of acceptance of information in Uzbek-authored news stories, and any stereotypes these audiences have of Uzbekistan. For many

years foreign journalists were unable to enter Uzbekistan, so their knowledge, reporting, and conceptions of Uzbeks is of critical importance to us.

The contemporary world has a diverse repertoire of mass and social media that provide plentiful means of publicizing a variety of information. As such, these mediated forms prompt analysis individually. Separate comparative analyses will allow for broader conclusions to be drawn and assist global media educators, scholars, and practitioners identify the next steps to take at this point of the media (r)evolution.

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