

1(a). Accountability and Transparency

*Meeting summary report by rapporteur Rehema Muniko, University of Dar es Salaam, School of Journalism & Mass Communication, Tanzania; syndicate expert/background report written by Harmen Groenhart, Fontys University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands; chair, Jiafei Yin, Central Michigan University, College of Communication & Fine Arts, USA; and team members.**

This group began by reviewing its background report on “accountability and transparency” and concentrating on the following two questions:

1. How can we best teach our students about transparency in light of five key report-described issues: morality, legitimacy, commercial profit, operational efficiency and as debate providers.
2. How can we profit from being transparent without harming our profession?

As a result, it raised the following seven key issues:

1. Freedom of press and issues of accountability

In countries with limited press freedom, like Turkey, journalists are accountable to the government. Such relationships compromise journalists’ duties and responsibilities to the public.

2. Anonymous sources and transparency

On one hand, it’s appropriate for journalists to use anonymous sources when the sources need protection. On the other hand, for transparency purposes, a journalists need to justify the use of anonymous sources, especially political ones.

3. Increasing use of social media and transparency

Journalists need to be transparent when using social media in their reporting.

4. Accuracy versus speed and transparency

Although journalists are pressured to break news first, for accuracy’s sake they need to take time to cross-check their facts and for transparency’s sake they need to keep a track-record of all information gathered.

5. Relationships between journalists and PR practitioners

Journalists face challenges when using PR practitioners as news sources. Accuracy/transparency-related ones include the taking of bribes. In countries where journalists receive low wages, they are often tempted to accept cash bribes. And even in countries where journalists are paid well, bribes sometimes change hands. As a result, objectivity and transparency suffer.

6. Theory and the practice are different

Students themselves have different motivations in the journalism profession. Students also use multiple frames of ethics when they move from one company to another. Accordingly, teaching them to be transparent is like teaching them to have one kind of thinking, which is a real challenge.

7. Institutional versus personal transparency

Even though journalists, in the process of branding themselves, often want to publish information gathering and source-usage details, institutions may forbid such moves.

Recommendations

It then concluded with the five following recommendations:

1. In countries where media are not free, educators have the responsibility to caution students about the risks that accountability and transparency represent.
2. Students should be taught to use anonymous sources only when necessary.
3. Students should be taught that since they live in informed societies, where people turn to social media for information, they need to report such information in a transparent fashion. Such transparency shows that they are accountable for their reporting.
4. Students should be taught about accuracy versus speed reporting problems and how to manage such circumstances for transparency purposes.
5. Students need to be taught ideal versus real journalistic actions related to accountability and transparency so they can anticipate, and be prepared to handle, such issues when they face them in the field.

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