



Journalism and moonlighting: An international comparison of 242 codes of ethics

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Abstract: According to journalistic norms journalists must avoid situations that create a conflict of interests. Those norms are developed and shaped via a continuous interaction between media and society, including the political institution, as well as between journalists as employees and their employers. From a professional point of view, journalists are expected to avoid any deed which may disrespect the profession. Codes of ethics are used by journalistic organizations to express their professional norms and values, which are perceived as the “conscience” of journalism. How do codes of ethics relate to the idea of additional jobs and/or occupations for journalists? Does every additional job necessarily entail a conflict of interests? Is volunteer activity outside working hours also considered “moonlighting?” Our study, that seeks to examine ethical conceptions regarding additional work and activity, is an international comparative study examining 242 codes of ethics applied by the media in 94 countries. Discussions focus on three issues: First, do codes of ethics address the issue of additional work, and if so, how? Second, are there differences in the ways the issue is addressed according to geo-political and geo-economic characteristics? And, third, are there differences according to type of organization for which a given code was formulated?

Keywords: Journalism, additional work/ moonlighting, journalism ethic, international codes of ethics

My lecture today will focus on a widely practiced phenomenon which may endanger journalistic integrity. I mean journalists' additional work, in many cases nicknamed "moonlightings". Codes of ethics, perceived as the "conscience" of journalism, were used to examine attitudes towards the phenomenon

A couple of years ago, a celebrated columnist, James Glassman, published an article in the *Washington Post* in which he warned of the "next great American scandal." Glassman went on to claim that the scandal "will involve not politicians, not corporate executives, but journalists," sparked by highly lucrative side interests. He claimed that while the scandal had not yet broken out, one often hears of American journalists who earn large sums of money – not from their journalistic pursuits but from moonlighting. One writer even called moonlighting "the key to earning big bucks in business journalism."

The problem is not unique to the United States. The Croatian Journalists Union, for example, maintained that "the nation's media is dramatically deteriorating, as 'moonlighting' by journalists continues to be widespread". In Pakistan, it was reported that there are "many spies doubling as reporters, and journalists moonlighting as government agents".

Reports from Zambia indicate that "teachers, university lecturers, accountants, bookkeepers, journalists and doctors are all moonlighting", and in Yugoslavia, it is said that about half the journalists are moonlighting. During the war in Iraq, it was reported that "Jordanian journalists are moonlighting as 'fixers.' For a US \$200 fee, they will help open doors to their contacts in the government, the military and the academia".

According to journalistic norms journalists must avoid situations that create a conflict of interests, whether actual or merely perceived, in order to remain loyal to their major stakeholder: the public. Those norms are developed and shaped via a continuous interaction between media and society, including the political institution, as well as between journalists as employees and their employers. Furthermore, from a professional point of view, journalists are expected to avoid any deed which may disrespect the profession. Codes of ethics are used by journalistic organizations to express their professional norms and values, which are perceived as the "conscience" of journalism, and therefore constitute a useful means of assessing the dos and don'ts applying to media personnel. How, then, do codes of ethics relate to the

idea of additional jobs and/or occupations for journalists? Does every additional job necessarily entail a conflict of interests? Is volunteer activity outside working hours also considered “moonlighting?” And what about political activity?

Our study, that seeks to examine ethical conceptions regarding additional work and activity, is an international comparative study examining 242 codes of ethics applied by the media in 94 countries. Discussions focus on three issues: First, do codes of ethics address the issue of additional work, and if so, how? Second, are there differences in the ways the issue is addressed according to geo-political and geo-economic characteristics? And, third, are there differences according to type of organization for which a given code was formulated.

We have first to explain the general expressions *additional work* or *moonlighting*. Those terms as used in our study, refer to both paid and volunteer work. From the ethical point of view there is considerable resemblance between the two types of work, as journalists may engage in activities that bear no financial recompense yet still provide other types of benefits such as publicity, social recognition, social ties and the like. Additional work is not the only issue that may cause conflicts of interests. However, it is a world wide practice with little attention in literature, and therefore deserves a special discussion.

The theoretical background

The discussion of moonlighting among journalists should reflect at least two fundamental theoretical perspectives: The philosophical-ethical and the professional-normative. While ethics paves the way for variety of approaches and principles, professionalism demands standardization.

Ethics is culturally and politically dependent, and therefore journalism and media are expected to form different ethical approaches and principles across societies. Even in the western world, there is no one agreed philosophical school. The continuing ethical debates among philosophers reflects this reality.

Beside their journalistic Journalists may choose to engage in a variety of additional activities, such as political engagements, advertising and public relations positions, educational as well as celebrity-type activities as

interviews. While the different additional jobs activities are different from each other, they all contain a potential for conflict of interests. As public trust is the supreme interest of the media, they aspire to avoid such conflicts, whether real or perceived. As Black, Steele and Barney stated:

The principle of independence calls on journalists to remain free of associations or activities that may compromise their integrity or damage their credibility. It is essential for individual journalists and news organizations to honor that principle if they are to be effective in fulfilling the primary obligation of journalism, seeking truth and reporting is as fully as possible.”

The conflicted interests and the ethical way to address them, may be the similar over differences in institutional and cultural norm, or depend on them. For example, journalist who work for advertising agency may jeopardizes its commitment to the public to report in an unbiased manner, because of its obligation to promote the interests of its customers in the advertising agency. However, the way to address the problem can be dependent on the economic environment. In western countries the underlying conflict may be between the professional interest and the individual right for occupation, in third world counties, where many journalists' salaries are very low, and the professional interest may conflict with the very basic commitment of the individual journalist to put food on the table for his family. Economic distress is also liable to lead journalists to sell their services to the highest bidder. Such is the case, for example, in some African countries, where – if to quote one report - “a small sum of money, on or under the table, will guarantee favorable coverage”.

The professional-normative approach.

From a professional standpoint, norms should be standardized over cultures and societies. Physicians, for example, share a commitment to save human life, regardless cultural characteristics. If journalism is a profession, norms regarding moonlightings and journalists are expected to show at least some coherence across societies.

A profession declares that its members know better than society at large and its clients in particular, about the nature of certain spheres of activity. At least two of the demands derived from this basic statement justify what the

profession requires of itself and of society, if we do follow Hughes's definition: Exclusivity and credibility. Professional credibility is also the basis for a profession's insistence on autonomy.

Research scholars (including Dan Schiller) have long wrestled with the fascinating question of whether journalism is a profession, a semi-profession or perhaps only an occupation. Regardless the lack of sociological-theoretical agreement, widespread of codes of ethics around the world, suggests that in practice journalism perceives itself as a profession or at least semi-profession. Consequently, journalists must avoid any activity liable to be interpreted as a conflict of interests. On the other hand, if journalism is not a profession but merely an occupation in which anyone who desires to do so may engage, why are media personnel obliged to adhere to professional behavioral and ethical codes and to demonstrate professional responsibility?

Professional commitment, both internal and external, gives rise to at least two reasons for limiting professionals' additional work:

(1). A demand that professionals devote all their time to their work. As Abbot stated: "Professions begin when people start doing full time the thing that needs doing".

(2). Exclusivity of a profession and its isolation from other occupations preserves its special social status and the hierarchical relations among it, the public and other occupations.

Mass media codes of ethics

Like in many professions, media organizations and personnel, use codes of ethics as a conventional means for expressing their credo, as well as to maintain a certain normative standards within the profession. Code of ethics, thus, address both within the media institution and outside it, means mainly the public and the authorities. The codes, a collection of dos and [primarily] don'ts of professional activity, may thus serve as a yardstick for assessing accepted professional norms regarding various issues, including moonlighting.

It should be noted that the media institution produces varies types of codes of ethics. Some, are issued by media organizations (newspapers, radio stations, televisions, etc.), some by non-media organizations, such as journalists unions, and press or news councils. Some codes are local, some

national and some international. Some codes are formulated by journalists, others by journalists and public representatives together, while there are also codes created by journalists and media owners.

The variety of codes is expected to reflect both the geo-political characteristics of societies in which codes are formulated as well as the relations between journalists and their employers.

Research questions

Three questions lie at the core of our study:

- (1) Do codes of journalistic ethics address the issue of additional work – and if so, how?
- (2) Do the different approaches towards additional work differ over geopolitical and geoeconomic differences?
- (3) Are there differences in approach according to type of organization for which a given code was formulated?

METHODOLOGY

Our study examined, at previously noted, 242 codes of ethics applying to press councils, media conglomerates, media organizations and professional organizations of press and broadcast journalists in 94 countries.

Codes were classified according to four parameters: Geographic location, degree of freedom of the press (based on the Freedom House Report), average per capita income (i.e. economic level in the given state; according to the World Bank Report) and type of organization. Only the codes of national organizations were classified by geographic region, freedom of the press and economic level because most individual organization codes apply to media outlets in the United States.

Classification of moonlighting or additional works performed by journalists was made based on a preliminary qualitative study, where all codes were examined. Codes have addressed a variety of additional work, with or without financial remuneration, of seven basic categories: a. Additional work for the media that is not part of the journalist's full-time job; b. Public relations; c. Advertising; d. Government and government agency work; e. Political party or ideological organization work; f. Lecturing or writing books; g. Work on behalf of the community or public organizations.

For each category, different restrictions were recorded: 1. Total ban; 2. Limited permission: not if involves conflict of interests, 3. Limited permission, and 4. Blanket permission.

FINDINGS

The first research question was:

Do codes of journalistic ethics address the issue of additional work – and if so, how?

Analysis of the 242 codes revealed that only about half of them relate to moonlighting (table 1). The codes mainly address political activities (26%) and ban in general all work that may be conducive to conflict of interests (21%). Overall, Codes of ethics often addresses secondary jobs and activities by banning them (table 2). 50 codes, 21% of the total, include a general ban on any outside work that engenders a conflict of interest with journalistic activity or is liable to do so. The most comprehensive ban of all refers to government agency work, as mentioned in 30 codes (12% of the total), none of which offers blanket permission to do so. Some 74% of these codes impose a sweeping prohibition on journalists' activity on behalf of government agencies, while another 26% permit it on condition that there is no conflict of interests with journalistic activity. Also 63% of codes ban moonlighting in advertising and 52% in public relations.

Of codes that address political activities, 47% of codes ban it while 47% allow it as long as it does not create conflict of interests. With regarding to community volunteering work and working in other media outlets, codes that address those issues typically permit it as long as it does not create conflict of interests.

The second research question was:

Do the different approaches towards additional work differ over geopolitical and geo-economic differences?

Classification of all national codes by geographic location reveals that the most attention paid to moonlighting may be found in Eastern European countries: 68% of 25 codes in this region were found to relate to the issue (table 2). North America is in second place (58%), followed by Africa (54%) and Western Europe (52%). In Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the Pacific Rim, only in a handful of counties codes of ethics have addressed the issue.

No meaningful or coherent differences were found when codes were classified based on countries' level of freedom of press and economic level.

The third research question was:

Are there differences in approach according to type of organization for which a given code was formulated?

The most attention to the subject may be found in codes for newspapers and chains (86% of all codes in this category, as compared with only 43% of national codes of journalistic ethics).

DISCUSSION

The data shows that about half codes of ethics address additional work, or moonlighting, indicating that the issue is not some marginal aspect of journalistic ethics but rather one of concern to the professional community throughout the world. On the other hand, it is also true that half the codes ignore the issue altogether. How can these findings be explained? Due to the lack of literature on the issue, two alternative and complementary explanations are suggested:

(1) Some countries have no moonlighting problem because the prevailing conception declaring that journalists may not perform any additional work outside their regular jobs is so well-rooted and accepted that there is no need to mention the issue in codes of ethics.

(2) The social and professional norms prevailing in certain countries perceive no harm in journalists' working at outside jobs besides their regular ones. Economic conditions in some of these countries compel journalists to moonlight – a fact of life to which the surrounding society appears reconciled.

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Only about 10% of all codes consider the matter of journalists who moonlight for other media. All permit it on condition that there are no conflicts of interests. Only 16 codes (about 7% of the total) deal with

additional works as giving lectures and teaching; a minority permits it outright and the remainder imposes various constraints.

Note that 50 codes, 21% of the total, include a general ban on any outside work that engenders a conflict of interest with journalistic activity or is liable to do so. The following clause – from the Israel’s code of journalistic ethics - is an example:

No newspapers or journalists shall put themselves into a position in which there is a suspicion of conflict of interests between their obligations as newspapers and journalists and any other interest.

While only an in depth field research would explain the limited attention accorded to advertising and public relations, three alternative explanations should be considered:

(1) Engaging in such occupations is recognized almost universally as taboo. This assumption is corroborated by the observation that the subject is mentioned only in 12% of the codes newspapers and broadcasting system codes (most of them North American) and 11% of the national ones in North America. On the other hand, extensive coverage of the issue in Eastern and Western European and African codes may indicate an attempt to deal with a real problem.

(2) Advertising and public relations work are not expressly absolutely forbidden, but must be regarded with all due attention to the “conflict of interests” issue that each media organization translates according to its own conceptions and policies.

(3) No restrictions whatsoever are imposed on work of this type, which means that such activities are not considered as prohibited for journalists. .

The classification of all national codes based geographic location shows a relatively high attention to moonlightings in code from eastern European countries. This may have two interrelated explanations:

(1) Economic conditions in these countries, that are in transition from communist regimes to democratic states with a market economy, are liable to encourage journalists to seek additional income outside their regular jobs. Hence they should be deterred from doing so.

(2) These countries seek to adopt overtly Western norms that encourage a professional ethos for journalism and thus to limit journalists' additional jobs.

Attention to journalists' moonlighting in national codes of journalistic ethics indicates that the declared norms expressed therein cross national and political borders, reinforcing the claim that professional press norms are largely "made in USA." On the other hand, it also buttresses contentions regarding the hegemony of Western values and even some manifestations of cultural colonialism. Codes originating in Africa provide an example: Journalists in African countries receive low salaries and are largely financially insecure, turning prohibitions and constraints on additional work into lip service only, as the journalists find themselves unable to abide by these rulings. Moreover, the liberal-Western philosophy on which the codes of developed countries are based emphasize the responsibility of individuals to themselves and to society, a social-ideological conception that conflicts with African countries' on commitment to society in the spirit of the "social responsibility" model.

About a third of the Eastern European codes address holding governmental position in addition to the journalistic one, possibly in an attempt to expunge memories of the past, when journalists served as agents of communist regimes and their security services.

Analysis of the attitudes of ethical codes to various issues according to type of organization for which the codes were formulated reveals that codes of newspapers and chains deal with moonlighting more than those of other organizations. By generalizing, moreover, they also impose more constraints than the other codes. The principal explanation for this observation is the applicability of employer-employee relationships in media organizations, meaning that the resulting constraints are not derived exclusively from the ethical system but also from organizational needs, particularly cultivation of credibility, usually with financial objectives in mind.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings show that journalism, via its codes of ethics, do not allege clear and strict rules regarding additional works. Only half of the codes address the issues; when it is addressed, there is rarely a clear definition of the issue.

Only 43% of national organizations address the issue or put any limitation related to additional work. However, the most coherent and widely spread

definition of moonlighting is given by media organizations, mainly newspapers and chains. Does it mean that media organizations became the new defender of journalism ethics and the journalistic proper behavior? Probably not.

Ironically, profit-driven media organizations and their owners promote ethical practices, not necessarily for the sake of ethics itself, but as a mechanism to establish credibility, respectability and public trust, all contribute to revenues. Paradoxically, the profit-driven organizations, product of the free market, restrain the freedom of occupation of their employees.

The lack of a clear and common definition of moonlighting among journalists' organizations, especially the dos and don'ts, creates a blurred boundaries between journalism and other occupations and it might explain the ease for journalists to step in and out the "revolving door." The "door" is open to and from many occupations and fields, including politics, public relations, and advertising.

From the academic point of view the issue of journalism and additional work deserve further research including comparative, cross cultural studies. From the journalistic point of view, it might require reconsideration of ethical norms and practices, for example requiring a "chilling period" when journalist decides to give up journalism, even for a while, for another occupation.

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