Journalism, ethics and post-truth

Periodismo, ética y posverdad

Jornalismo, ética e pós-verdade

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the neologism post-truth raises once again the question of journalism's capacity to distort reality. Social networks have entered the world of communication with great force, but their responsibility is not comparable to that of journalism. Non-professional communicators have a personal ethic code, but the profession has a deontological code. Informative journalism is based on its credibility and the truth of its stories. In this paper, we will reflect on the ethical crises of journalism and the dangers they entail to its credibility, if not resolved properly.

RESUMEN

La aparición del neologismo posverdad vuelve a plantear cómo el periodismo puede distorsionar la realidad. Las redes sociales han irrumpido con gran fuerza en el mundo de la comunicación, pero su responsabilidad no es equiparable con la del periodismo. Frente a una ética personal del comunicador no profesional está el código deontológico de una profesión. El periodismo informativo se sustenta en su credibilidad y en la verdad de sus relatos. En este texto, reflexionaremos sobre las crisis éticas del periodismo y de los peligros que tiene para su credibilidad no resolverlas adecuadamente.

RESUMO

O surgimento do neologismo pós-verdade volta a considerar a capacidade do jornalismo de distorcer a realidade. Redes sociais invadiram o mundo da comunicação com grande força. Mas sua responsabilidade não é comparável com a do jornalismo. Diante de uma ética pessoal do comunicador não profissional está o código deontológico de uma profissão. O jornalismo informativo é baseado em sua credibilidade e na verdade de suas histórias. Neste texto, refletiremos sobre as crises éticas do jornalismo e os perigos que trazem para a credibilidade do jornalismo, se não resolvidas adequadamente.

INTRODUCTION

A phantom traverse the world of journalism: the phantom of post-truth. It is an ancient ghost, which has been reborn with this neologism (McIntyre, 2018, p. 43; Urmeneta, 2016). The Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language defines post-truth as the "deliberate distortion of a reality that manipulates beliefs and emotions to influence public opinion and social attitudes" (Posverdad, n.d.). Its origin is the translation of the English term post-truth.

However, a different nuance can be seen in the English definition of the term. For the English Oxford Living Dictionary (n.d.b), post-truth is related or denotes circumstances in which objective facts influence less the formation of public opinion than those that appeal to emotion or personal belief. On the other hand, the Cambridge Dictionary (Post-truth, n.d.) considers that post-truth is related to a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than one based on facts.

The definitions of the two British dictionaries are very similar. Basically, they differentiate facts from emotions and beliefs. Then, they point out that the stories that connect with the emotions and beliefs of the recipients have a greater influence on them and on public opinion. These are two definitions significantly different from the Spanish one, which speaks of a deliberate distortion of reality. I.e., in the Spanish definition there is a communicative intentionality of the story enunciator that we do not find in the English definitions, and it also includes the concept of manipulation. The three definitions agree on the influence of emotions and beliefs on people and public opinion, but the Spanish definition focuses on the intentionality of the enunciator, while the English refer us to the recipients. For DRAE, post-truth is still a lie. Post-truth is not a mistake, because it is a deliberate distortion. I.e., post-truth is related to the so-called fake news: it feeds on fake news and the distortion of reality.

However, the concepts of fake news and post-truth are not synonyms, although they would be in the same semantic field (Carrera, 2018, p. 1477), and many academic works relate them (Brisman, 2018; Caridad-Sebastián, Morales-García, Martínez-Cardama, & García López, 2018; Carrera, 2018; Carlson, 2018; Carson & Farhall, 2018; Hannan, 2018; Himma-Kadakas, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Müller Spinelli & de Almeida Santos, 2018; Palomo & Sedano, 2018; Slavtcheca-Petkova, 2018; Waisbord, 2018). In a first

approach, we could say that post-truth refers to more general problems, for example, epistemological. Fake news refers to more specific phenomena and should be registered in the world of communication. McIntyre (2018, p. 42) proposes the following definition: "Post-truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not". On the other hand, Gelfert (2018, p. 95) points out that any definition of fake news is related to different forms of public misinformation and distortions in the communication process. Both concepts will surely need more specificities until a consensus definition is established among academics, since these are certainly complex phenomena. Charity-Sebastián et al. (2018, pp. 893-894), on the other hand, point out that post-truth is a multifaceted phenomenon in which three defining elements stand out.

First, the new habits in the access and use of information have changed the means of information of citizens, as we will see in the next section (Marcos Recio, Sánchez Vigil, & Olivera Zaldua, 2017). Secondly, the political and social context of the beginning of the 21st century has led to the polarization of populations (Spohr, 2017) and a politics-show in which the impact of the story prevails over its veracity (Hannan, 2018; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Third, there is the technological context (Elgan, 2017) in which "the process of exchanging information in the social media is mediated by the operation of the programmed algorithms called bots, responsible for the creation of information bubbles…" (Caridad-Sebastián et al., 2018, p. 894).

Fake news would only be a part of this post-truth era, as different authors call it (Arboleda, 2018; Brisman, 2018; Carlson, 2018; Urmeneta, 2016). Even for Carrera (2018, p. 1472) it would be a subsidiary phenomenon of post-truth, from a systemic point of view. As Hannan (2018, p. 224) states, "the problem with zeroing in on fake news as the culprit for a post-truth world is that it does not explain what is driving the fake news".

Thus, the concept of post-truth, beyond the aforementioned definitions, refers to a reality that is less specific and more general than that of fake news, with which it is related. Thus, for example, Gelfert (2018, p. 108) proposes the following definition: "deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where the claims are misleading *by design*".

However, different authors (Lazer et al., 2018; Frank, 2018; Gelfert, 2018; Mold, 2018; Tandoc Jr., Lim, &

Ling, 2018) have problematized and discussed the concept of fake news. The conceptualization of fake news also poses problems, since there are concomitant phenomena that need to be delimited. For example, Nielsen and Graves (2017) establish a series of contents that audiences relate to fake news, ranging from superficial, sensationalist and inaccurate journalism, to propaganda, the lies of politicians and hyper-partisan content, as well as some advertising such as content sponsorship, to end with fake news. On the other hand, Zimdars (Martenson, 2017) establishes a series of criteria for classifying website sources with little reliability. Thus, it distinguishes fake news, satire, bias, conspiracy theories, creators of rumors, state news, junk science, hate generators, sensationalist information, with unreliable labels, political and credible.

In this paper, we do not intend to make a proposal for a stronger definition of post-truth or fake news to be verified and refined, but to reflect on the role of journalism in the early 21st century in the face of such phenomena. It is true, as Waisbord (2018, p. 1868) points out, that "Neither fake news nor post-truth is strictly about journalism; instead, it is indicative of fluid conditions in public communication across the globe that have destabilized the modern assumptions about news and the truth". Thus, our research questions are, first of all, how can fake news affect journalism? Secondly, we ask ourselves how should journalism face the phenomenon of fake news in the era of post-truth?

JOURNALISM AND THE DISTORTION OF REALITY

Throughout the history of journalism, there have always been fake news. Disinformation is not something new (Fraguas de Pablo, 1985; McIntyre, 2018). Surely, the great change of our digital age is in the consumption of information.

> In the 21st century, news consumers have no debts or commitments to the mainstream media. They coexist with digital news and very few have had daily contact with the media every day. It was a total exchange. They did not need to read the newspaper sequentially to be informed. They were informed because they had their main social networks open, from which they obtained the news. Sometimes, when the news required it and after asking for opinion from other friends or people who were in the same circle, they would complete that information in some mainstream media (Marcos et al., 2017, p. 17).

With the emergence of social networks, the communicative ecosystem has changed greatly. In an opinion article in the newspaper *El País*, of which he was director, Juan Luis Cebrián (2018) attributes post-truth especially to social networks, an idea with which we could agree. As Marcos et al. (2017, p. 22) state, "the post-truth society is no longer a responsibility of the media, as in the 20th century. Now many lies move on the Internet with the danger of others copying them, spreading them and making them viral". But Cebrián (2018) also partially exonerates journalism of falling into post-truth. At most, he criticizes those who fall into the following of social networks: "Many traditional media, once respected, have also been dragged by the banality of the contents that circulate through the network" (Cebrián, 2018, n.p.). This could lead us to believe that, before the existence of social networks, lies did not exist in journalism. And nothing is further from the truth (Burguet Ardiaca, 2004; Mas de Xaxàs, 2005; McIntyre, 2018, pp. 87-105). In fact, power, institutionalized or not, tries to control information and stories about the reality that journalism builds (Aguilar et al., 1991; Collins & Glover, 2003; Jacquard, 1988; Gillen, 1991; Ramonet, 1998; Schiller, 1974).

But in the 21st century, although there are still false news, fake news appears. Social networks allow hoaxes to have very diverse origins and, sometimes, difficult to identify. Surely because of this diversification of fake news, the media and, above all, the public authorities feel especially alarmed. However, the responsibility for fake news spread by the media is not comparable with that of private citizens, nor is its public impact the same. In short, the relevant fake news remains the heritage, although no longer exclusive, of the political and communicative powers. First, because fake news are still being built from power. Secondly, because the lies that circulate through social networks acquire their public relevance when they are collected by the media. Perhaps the novelty is their origin, different from the traditional media system, and their proliferation through different channels, thanks to the emergence of social networks. But how does this affect the news construction (Rodrigo-Alsina, 2005)?

For a fake new to be successful it must be true, paradoxically as it may sound. As unlikely as they may seem, fake news must meet some requirements to be effective. In the construction of the news as a possible world, Rodrigo-Alsina (2005, pp. 334-346) distinguished the real world, the reference world and the possible world.

The real world refers to the facts before adopting a mental frame to interpret them. What is narrated must be based on certain sources that, like the facts, can be true or false. In the veracity of the facts or the sources is where falsehood occurs in fake news. Facts are told that have not happened or are attributed to false sources. This is the key of fake news and should be easier to fight against. The strength of the media system is that, if it is plural and does not fall into a patriotic journalism (Ginosar, 2015; Ginosar & Cohen, 2017), the falsehoods of the competition end up being denounced. In the case of social networks, there are many fact-checking initiatives (Caridad-Sebastián et al., 2018; Haig, Haig, & Kozak, 2018; Müller & de Almeida, 2018; Palomo & Sedano, 2018) to try to uncover fake news.

The reference world is the interpretative frame of the real world. It is not a question of truth or falsehood, but about the mental frame with which the facts are given meaning. Of course, mental frames can diverge greatly from each other. In 2005, the Moroccan newspaper *Attajdid* proclaimed: "The tsunami that has devastated some areas of Southeast Asia and has caused around 300,000 dead or missing is a result of divine punishment for the establishment in these areas of sex tourism, reported yesterday the British chain BBC" (Polémica en Marruecos..., 2005).

As we can see, it is not that the facts are false, but that the interpretation of the tsunami is based on a religious mental framework that explains the events of the world. The world of reference must be credible to the reader; divine revenge is clearly unlikely, at the very least, for a lay reader. In the reference world a struggle is established to define the mental frame with which the fact is interpreted. Interpretive frames are very important to explain the facts. As Lakoff reminds us (2010, p. 71), "all of our knowledge makes use of frames, and every word is defined through the frames it neutrally activates".

Finally, there is the possible world (Farré, 2004), which is the news built from the real world and the reference world. The possible world must be plausible. I.e., at a minimum, it must seem to be true. The news is presented as a speech built to be believed. Journalists use different narrative strategies to support the credibility of their information: they cite sources, accumulate facts that reaffirm what happened, look for sources of authority that certify the truthfulness of the facts and the mental frame with which the journalist interprets them, etc. As different authors point out (Levy, 2017; Rini, 2017), one of the features of fake news is that they try to represent reality with a content and format similar to that of the news of the media.

Both true news and fake news should be constructed as true stories. If the facts narrated are false, fake news will sooner or later be unmasked by the competitive communicative system of democratic countries. But if the facts are true, the news is more credible for those readers whose mental framework is similar to that of the journalistic story and who would be willing to think that the interpretation of the events narrated is very plausible. This reader does not seek verification of what is narrated or of the interpretation of the medium, it is enough that it could be true. We are faced with what McIntyre (2018, pp. 63-84) calls the cognitive bias, which is evident in the reasoning implied by the tendency to "accommodate our beliefs to our feelings" (McIntyre, 2018, p. 70), as well as in the confirmation bias, "the mechanism by which we may try to accomplish this, by interpreting the information so that it confirms our preexisting beliefs" (McIntyre, 2018, p. 70). As different authors have pointed out,

> Research also shows that people prefer information that confirms their preexisting attitudes (selective exposure), see information consistent with their pre-existing beliefs as more persuasive than dissonant information (confirmation bias), and are inclined to accept the information they like (desirability bias) (Lazer et al., 2018, p. 1095).

The casuistry of fake news is broad, its objectives are multiple and its authors or promoters, diverse. Following these bad information practices, the role of ethics in journalism should be considered in this scenario.

JOURNALISM AND ETHICS

Is it possible to think about journalism without ethics? In principle, journalism ethics is assumed. The journalistic account, by default, is attributed with an ethical component when transmitting true information. However, as we shall see, the relations between ethics and journalism are not without tension.

Journalism without ethics ceases to be journalism; it can be propaganda, a fiction story or news that should not have been published. We could say that, without ethics, journalism is bad journalism, it is not an informative story, or it is a distortion of reality. Sometimes, journalism without ethics may not be a distortion of reality, but it may be a story that undermines the basic rights of citizens, such as

the right to privacy, to the good name, to the self-image. Journalism without ethics is an irresponsible journalism, which breaks with its social function towards citizens.

But we must also remember that journalism is based on the interest and trust of its audience. And the best way to get it is by doing a responsible job. But what does this mean? In the first place, an understandable account must be offered, in which it is possible to observe the truth based on a personal testimony, on documents or on the account of reliable sources, but also with an interpretation of data and facts, clarifying the starting mental framework. Likewise, the effects of information on people's lives should be considered. Finally, it is expected that, in order to obtain the information, the methods have also been the most correct, with lawful methods and without the ethical principles of obtaining the information being run over by a questionable interest of the public. Let us remember that, sometimes, journalists can also fool their sources (Malcolm, 2004).

The journalistic product is not a random creation, a fiction. It is assumed that the voices are real, that the story is a precise and correct fragment of reality, and that the journalist uses his/her technical capacity to reconstruct a story in the most faithful and responsible way. There is a relationship of trust (Vizeu, 2009), a fiduciary contract (Rodrigo-Alsina, 2005) governed by a responsible behavior of the journalist, credibility generator and respectful of his/her deontological codes. The fiduciary contract is the tacit agreement between the reader and the media, by which the reader relies on its credibility.

The same cannot be demanded from a journalism professional than from a citizen in the production of information. This does not mean that only journalists can narrate with rigor, but that journalists are compelled to do so. The position of the enunciator and the enunciative demands are different. The journalist is credited with professional competencies and a code of ethics that are not necessarily comparable with those that can be requested from an informing citizen. As Bilbeny (2012, p. 51) points out, "if the press has a privilege, the power to say and decide what it says, is because in return the press is expected to report rigorously and freely on what is of interest to society".

It is ethics, in all its dimensions, that governs this process. It is the ethical responsibility that allows the permanent union between the media and its public and makes journalism a form of knowledge (Park, 1940; Vizeu, 2014), a unique knowledge (Genro Filho,

1987), which fulfills its social function. Although we cannot forget that information, on multiple occasions, collides with interests of political, economic, ideological groups, etc. "The daily limits, in journalism, suffer the tension between the possibility of realization of ethics and the theoretical-operational difficulties for the execution of the principles, which is equivalent to saying that the moral movement is always present" (Karam, 2014, p. 52).

This point is important because the journalist's ethics has a professional, social and public dimension, which is not so clearly found in a citizen who sends a tweet.

On the other hand, by highlighting the social role of ethics, Guareschi (2000, pp. 52-55) establishes its relationship with justice. For him, the two mediate relations between people, but justice is the central virtue of ethics, because it commands the acts that govern the attitudes of human beings with each other. It refers to the fundamental principles of justice, equality and solidarity. Justice fosters a more just and fraternal society, with norms that are builders of free and supportive human beings. This is why the spirit underlying ethics is so important.

For Sánchez Vásquez (1984), the value of ethics as a theory is in what it explains and not in prescribing or recommending with a view to action in specific situations, although ethics is usually specified in a set of norms and prescriptions. In the cases of professions, such as journalism, ethical issues crystallize in the deontological codes (Alsius, 1999). In the words of Karam (2014, p. 34), ethics is "the provisional crystallization of the moral world, validated by ethical reflection, in concrete social norms, in formal principles and, in some cases, legal norms".

From an analysis of the contents of deontological codes for the performance of journalists, Cornu (1994, p. 57) pointed out four axes that design the orientation of journalistic ethics. The first is the mission of the journalistic company that oscillates between its social function and the economic benefit that makes its existence possible (Bustamante, 2002; Herman & Chomsky, 2000; Schiller, 1989). The second axis is the freedom of information that implies the right of citizens to be well informed (Czedek, Hellwig, & Novak, 2009; Mac Hale, 1988). The third axis is the truth as a fundamental duty, which opens a whole debate about truth and its characteristics (Baggini, 2018; Benson & Stangroom, 2007; Blat, 2018; Macdonald, 2018). The fourth axis is respect for the person as a limit to the previous axes (Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya,

2010, 2015, 2017).

As Cornu (1994, p. 83) states, "the freedom of the press and the duty of information do not authorize everything". Therefore, we are not faced with four incontrovertible axes. In fact, various dilemmas cross these axes. Thus, for example, the understanding of this truth of the facts may place the ethics of journalistic communication in the face of a dilemma. There may be a conflict between journalistic rigor and the understanding of facts and stories. Journalistic stories must be understandable to the audience, but, on the other hand, rigor in explaining the event must not be compromised to make the story understandable by the public. An extreme rigor, which makes the story only for specialists, can make the text not understandable.

However, the total absence of rigor, so that the text is understandable to any reader, can misrepresent the event. Another dilemma is when journalists themselves can voluntarily renounce the truth. What happens when the journalist must choose between two conflicting values? Does the truth have to prevail over the safety of people, as can happen in cases of terrorism? What happens when the journalist is faced with the dilemma of defending the truth or his/her country? If the defense of the interests of the country is imposed, the ethical criteria are suspended. As they say, the first victim of wars is freedom of expression. The tension between different values encourages the emergence of dilemmas to journalistic ethics.

THE ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF JOURNALISM

Deontological codes cannot avoid the need, nor is it their function, for the professional to reflect on the circumstances of each situation in which they find themselves. What the codes do is to facilitate the normative guidelines that the professional should apply to certain cases and that serve as a guide (Aznar Gómez, 2005, pp. 4-5). For Karam (2014), deontological codes are just references that are not exhausted in the constant creation of a professional practice. "It is an axis that guides professional action, both to fulfill and to deny a principle" (Karam, 2014, p. 60). As we have seen, on the one hand, the four axes can produce interference between them and, on the other, it is not always easy to mechanically apply deontological codes.

The ethical problems in journalistic coverage are not alien to business and political interests, present in large private media conglomerates or in public groups, with political-party interference. Thus, groups with communicative power look for spaces to impose events, mental frames and stories. Media silences (Anuari Mèdia.Cat, 2018) are one of the first strategies followed by power groups that have an impact on journalistic work. As Ferrés (1996, p. 67) points out, political censorship is usually replaced by economic censorship and self-censorship exercised within each medium based on their own interests. Even in democracies there are censorship filters derived from the concentration of media ownership, the professionals' selection systems, the demands of advertising that helps support these media, and the dependence on the information generated by the government itself or by the institutions.

As stated by Marcos et al. (2017, p. 15),

> a great identity crisis has been affecting newspapers and other media for two decades. Until then, most of the news came from a small core of media corporations that were able to reach a large audience.

Currently, social networks (Sampedro, 2005) can become an important counterweight to this control of events by power. Journalism has the challenge of coexisting with social networks (Sáez, 2015). The historical vertical process of dissemination of journalistic information, imposed by the large communication groups, holders of the means of production and dissemination, of the sources and of the "absolute and unique truths", loses strength. The public has access to other forms of journalistic content production (Waisbord, 2018, p. 1875), from collaborative research journalism (Carson & Farhall, 2018) through social journalism (Cytrynblum, 2009) to citizen journalism (Salvat-Martinrey & Paniagua, 2007; Salvat-Martinrey & Serrano-Martín, 2011), which provide different versions and bring other points of view, to name just a few examples of alternative communication (Navarro Nicoletti & Rodríguez Marino, 2018).

The new channels and sources of information not only expand the offer of the knowledge production generated by journalism, but also allow the reader and the audience to have access to the different versions of the facts or to new facts, which implies inevitable comparisons of coverage and frames.

Social networks have been, on the one hand, one of the main vehicles of fake news to produce post-truth. As McIntyre (2018, p. 135) points out, "social media has played an important role in facilitating post-truth, but again this is a tool rather than an outcome". In any case, there are multiple works (Brummette, DiStaso, Vafeiadis, & Messner, 2018; Gelfert, 2018; Hannan,

2018; McIntyre, 2018; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Sphor, 2017; Waisbord, 2018) that identify the post-truth with the appearance of fake news on social media in the 2016 US presidential elections and in the British Brexit referendum of the same year.

But, on the other hand, social media are an alternative to communication that takes place in the different centers of economic, political or communicational power, and allow contrasting information that is disseminated from these centers. Thus, through Twitter or YouTube, citizens can publicize facts that are not always accepted by traditional media (Spanish police, 2017). Internet also allows to denounce the lies of politicians when confronting their affirmations with reality (https://chequeado.com). Ruiz, Masip and Micó (2007) highlight the real possibility of detecting errors, since today's *traditional* journalism no longer has exclusive access to many sources and a monopoly on the dissemination of information. This expands the possibilities of interpretation of the world.

This is where there is a confrontation between different mental frameworks. The media not only influence the determination of the issues that audiences will see as relevant (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), but also influence the attributes with which they narrate the topic, as noted in the second level of the theory of agenda setting (McCombs, 2006).

On the other hand, the framing theory shows how the frames organize reality (Sádaba Garranza, 2001). Through framing, narratives impose certain points of view on reality. The influence of the journalistic story has in the interpretative frameworks one of the most important elements, because, as Lakoff reminds us (2010, p. 73), "the facts must make sense in terms of their system of frames, or they will be ignored". In other words, it is the mental framework that gives meaning to the news. The possible lack of balance and the unilaterality of the journalistic stories become clearer when there are new sources of information that allow the comparison of coverage, journalistic approaches and frames. It is obvious that on social media there may be fake news, but also on social networks there are alternative versions and videos that can be the evidence against the journalistic story.

In these circumstances it is easy to lose credibility and public confidence. Therefore, the fight for more rigor, precision, plurality and transparency must be even greater. Bilbeny (2012, p. 51) recalls that this is one of the paradoxes of current journalism: even though there are more means of information than ever, and

accessible to more people, the profession of informant is today one of the most debated. As Karam points out (2014, p. 157),

> in the information society and with the technological convergence that reaches journalism, the importance of the journalistic practice –the result of a theory and ethics applied to professional practice, with its values, methods and techniques– is twice as important.

It is precisely in a hyper-information scenario when the relevance of professional journalism work is renewed. Never, thanks to information technologies, has the citizen had access to such a large amount of information. Journalism has the hard task of attracting its audience with reliable information. For this, it must use its narrative professionalism, its access to difficult sources, its capacity for interpretation, its mastery of the forms of symbolic construction and, of course, its ethical order to produce knowledge.

Professionalism is what distinguishes a good journalist from a bad one. Bilbeny (2012) recalls that information belongs to all citizens, as well as freedom of expression, but the responsible use of this freedom, with information transmitted competently, is what distinguishes journalism from other ways of doing and communicating (Bilbeny, 2012, p. 16). For Bilbeny (2012), the principles that guide journalistic activity are: the duty of truth, the search for the preservation of autonomy, the defense of the public interest, and the commitment to justice. These principles are the generators of credibility, a crucial element in serious and non-sensationalist journalism that, in the era of post-truth, sometimes approaches emotionality.

This movement weakens the fiduciary contract, based on the confidence of journalistic work, leading to the emergence of an emotional adhesion to the journalistic account by which the proposed emotion is shared without a critical look. The partisan vision of reality, reinforced with a strong emotional bond, conditions the interpretation of the facts. McIntyre (2018, pp. 72-81) talks about two cognitive biases that condition the willingness to accept facts and evidence. The first is the counterproductive effect by which the presentation of evidence against the beliefs of partisan people increases faith in their erroneous beliefs, instead of making them rethink them. The second is the Dunning-Kruger effect, also known as the effect *too stupid to know that they are stupid*, which refers to those whose low capacities prevent them from recognizing their ineptitude.

As can be seen, these cognitive biases are related to post-truth. Only in a post-truth context can Donald Trump's statements be understood when he said: "I have the most loyal people. Did you ever see that? Where I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters" (Elecciones en los Estados Unidos, 2016).

We must remember that emotions play a very important role in the messages' impact. As Ferrés i Prats (2014, p. 102) reminds us, "when stimuli that have a strong emotional load coincide with others that do not, the former will eclipse the latter, blocking their communicative effectiveness. And when two divergent emotions coincide, the most powerful will prevail". But emotions are not per se negative. Let us recall that the dichotomy between emotion and reason has already been clearly ruled out by neurobiology (Damasio, 2001, 2005). Lupia and Menning (2007, p. 355) point out that studies on our brain reveal the deep connections between emotion, reason and strategic thinking.

Although we must bear in mind that there are multiple factors, "emotions play a significant role in the outcome of our political processes" (Lupia & Menning, 2007, p. 355). But as Cassino and Lodge point out, "emotion certainly serves to alter the course of the evaluative process but, in doing so, may make it more, not less, efficient" (2007, p. 107). Different authors (Neuman, Marcus, Crigler, & MacKuen, 2007) collect studies that, from neuroscience, analyze how emotions affect human judgment and political decision-making. Thus, they show that emotions are not necessarily negative when making our reasoning and making our political decisions (Spezio & Adolphs, 2007, p. 72). Furthermore,

> One very important factor in the real world of politics and emotions is the media. Technology in the form of television and the Internet clearly exerts an enormous effect on the creating and manipulation of emotional symbols and ideas (McDermott, 2007, p. 386).

The problem in journalism is not emotions, the problem is above all that emotional stories are based on falsehoods.

With the fiduciary contract, the journalistic story had to win and justify its credibility. With the post-truth, emotional factors start to take center stage in the construction of the possible world. This may result in the substitution of understandability, of the real meaning, for impact. Journalists seek news with visible impact to attract the public. Sometimes, they skip the rules of professional ethics, as in the case of the false

photo about the operation of Hugo Chávez published by the newspaper *El País* (El País publica…, 2013). Ethics goes to the background, it loses space due to the search for immediate impact, because that is how the success of the news is measured. The big problem is when the emotion exceeds the facts in the construction of reality and cancels self-criticism. To be self-critical, people must begin to distrust their own interpretations, because reality is polyhedral, it has multiple facets that can lead to different interpretations.

Although the power tends to qualify as fake news that information that does not fit their interests, the post-truth is generally used from the centers of power. Therefore, we are at a time when journalism must be critical enough to denounce these lies that come from power. Bilbeny (2012) recalls that, in relation to political power, the press acts in three ways. First, we have the press as a competitor of political power, when it is an instrument of domination over politics, over society and over the rest of the press.

Second, the press can be at the service of political power, when it is manipulated by political sources and accepts it, acting in a complacent manner. In this case it is offered

> much more information about the government than about the opposition and the rest of the parties, official and unofficial information is systematically published; they constantly interview rulers and political positions (…) disseminate both institutional and party slogans and messages; and follow the official guidelines (Bilbeny 2012, p. 59).

This could be called a State journalism.

Third, the press acts as a watchdog of political power. In this case, according to the author, it does not support power or exert a role of domination. Its role is to remain vigilant, being critical, and oppose when necessary, acting with freedom and responsibility. It is important to emphasize that the power has tried to manipulate always. However, it seems that nowadays it can lie with impunity. The lie does not entail a punishment for the liar, he/she recognizes that he/she has lied, and the public does not penalize the lie. This is why Katharine Viner (2016), the director of The Guardian, wonders if the truth does not matter anymore.

CONCLUSION

When shocking emotionality surpasses the understandability of events, and their causes and

consequences, journalism abandons its main social function. The temptation to get a larger audience based on emotional resources makes the informative value succumb to the effectiveness of the emotional shock. Thus, sometimes even the deontological principles of journalism are violated. In the case of the false photo about the operation of Hugo Chávez published by *El País*, which we have already commented, we find that the newspaper itself recognizes the error. But in the story that *El País* makes about the decision to publish the image (Irujo & Elola, 2013) at no time there is a questioning regarding the fact of the Venezuelan president's own image being violated. However, the media readers themselves (Delclós, 2013) criticized the dissemination of the false photo of Chávez intubated, even if it had been authentic.

When journalism becomes a State journalism or patriotic journalism, journalistic ethics enters into crisis. As Ignacio Escolar (Algunos medios practican…, 2014), director of eldiario.es, points out, doing State journalism is not doing good journalism. When a media does State or patriotic journalism, it decides that the State or country is more important than the truth.

All this raises the ethical dilemma of deciding which value is superior. The solution to the dilemma is not simple. But maybe Max Weber (1992) can help us. Weber (1992, pp. 163-179) distinguishes the ethics of conviction of the ethics of responsibility. The first is based on the deep belief that the action is fair and adequate, beyond the means used and the consequences of the actions. The ethics of responsibility, on the contrary, considers the consequences derived from the actions. Journalism must opt for the ethics of conviction or the ethics of responsibility. The first gives the security of shared faith, the second gives the peace of mind that the goodness of the consequences of the acts is sought. It is true that in some circumstances it is possible to opt for one and in others for the other, but this also has consequences, as we will see in the end.

Likewise, Weber states what happens when morally doubtful means are used to obtain good ends and concludes that "no ethics in the world can dodge the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of 'good' ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones" (Weber, 1992, p. 165). Although he later acknowledges that in "the sanctification of the means for the end, the breaking of any moral of the conviction seems inevitable". As a matter of fact, "logically it has only the possibility of rejecting all action that employs morally dangerous means" (1992, p. 166). In journalism, the means used to obtain the information and the consequences that the publication of the information has are fundamental to preserve an ethic of journalism. The illicit means of obtaining the information do not justify an apparently good end, as well as the illegal consequences that the information could produce, for example, of an attack on the honor of the people.

We agree with Charaudeau (2003, p. 302) when he states:

> What interests us is to be able to define an ethics of the responsibility of media discourse that is part of a pragmatic framework of action and influence. For this, lucidity is required, that is, awareness of the action contract, the available room for maneuver and the effects produced by the components of that conditioning framework itself. Now, it seems to us that this type of ethics can be part of this specificity of media information discourse (…).

In the post-truth era, journalism cannot give up the ethics of responsibility because it can be a fatal injury to the value of its informative media discourse. If the ethics of conviction is the dominant one, it is very possible that it connects emotionally with the most faithful audience. Those recipients who consider that the cause defended is fair and adequate (for example, the defense of the homeland) can grant a privilege to that cause in detriment of the truth. The tuning between the media and that audience will be reinforced, and the fake news would not be of excessive importance, if connects with the emotion of that audience. As stated by McIntyre, "when we are emotionally invested in a subject, all of the experimental evidence shows that our ability to reason well will probably be affected" (2018, p. 77).

Reliability seems less important; the important thing is the emotional adherence to the story and the world of ideological reference with which the information is interpreted. Only the permanent reinforcement of this public's adhesion to the media will allow this journalism to survive, in the short term, in an ecosystem with a multitude of voices and channels. But, for another part of the audience, the fiduciary contract will go into crisis. The credibility of journalism and trust in the media will be questioned. Fake news will become the proof that the media should be under suspicion. Post-truth manipulates the main value of journalism, which is the informational truth. Fake news puts the foundation of the fiduciary contract in crisis: the

credibility of the media. The solution to this informative pandemic is journalistic ethics. Journalism can meet this challenge of the 21st century by strengthening its ethical postulates and its codes of ethics to gain the trust of its recipients.

In short, journalism cannot afford to fall into fake news and post-truth, because it would distort its informative and cognitive function. Although it is accepted that the right to information has limits, this does not validate fake news. In the best case, what is validated is silence, and in no case the distortion of reality. The future of journalism lies in the strengthening of the fiduciary contract with its audience, which must be based on rigor and ethics. If credibility and trust are broken, the audience will seek more reliable information from the multiple sources currently available. Traditional journalism models will not survive in such a competitive ecosystem if they do not provide the added value of the depth of information and professional strength that their ethical codes postulate.

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