Crisis of journalism?  
A sociological sketch on the journalism and media credibility in the age of globalization

Introduction

Neil Postman claimed that we do not perceive reality in the way it is but through our languages, and our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture. Therefore, we can assume that reality accessible to us is in great measure a product of the media. It is mainly the media from where we draw our knowledge about the world we live in. It is the media which inform us what happened close to us or far away in places we did not know they ever existed. Development and changes of the media influence the sort of information which reaches us, the way it is delivered, but they also change the way we perceive reality. It should be emphasized that our contact with media begins increasingly early and is becoming increasingly intensive. The media are ubiquitous, imposing on us their own vision of reality which often becomes the only vision we know and deem true.

The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries created favorable conditions for the development of media, especially the electronic ones. Paul Levinson refers to this period as “the century of the screen”. According to him, it all began with a “silver screen competing with novels and plays for story-yearning audiences”. The radio fully developed as an entertaining and informative medium only in 1930’s and by that time the screen with talking films had flourished. In 1950’s television combined film and radio on a new screen and, although the radio did develop after that, it was television that became the main medium defining our culture. With the arrival of computers, another screen was added to this collection. It is a screen which displays texts created by its users and by other authors and which, thanks to global connections, brings completely new opportunities and consequences.

The development of electronic media has led to a situation when we can often talk about two realities: the real one and the media one which is seen on the screens of our TV sets or computers. The problem is that, if previously the reality on the screen reflected the real world or it was inspired by it, nowadays this relationship has become very loose or does not exist at all. The world on the screen has become an independent reality which does not relate to the real world around us. Moreover, for some of us it often becomes the more “genuine” reality which is more real than the outside world. As Jean Baudrillard points out, “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal”. Another phenomenon worth mentioning is blurring of the line between the online and offline worlds resulting in creation of a hybrid world which changes our relations and ways of communication with other people.

It could be assumed that the information society with its ability to instantly spread information, with multiplicity of sources of information and technological potential will contribute to the development of journalism and improvement of its quality. However, in the era of globalization more and more frequently we ask ourselves questions about credibility and reliability of the media, and particularly about credibility and reliability of contemporary journalism. We wonder where the subtle line between the truth and fiction, information and comment is, how far one can go in one's attempt to acquire and sell information, how important responsibility for one's words is.

As Piotr Legutko and Dobroslaw Rodziewicz quote from Maciej Illowiecki, the change of the basic criterion of truth, which now constitutes credibility of TV broadcasts, has become the essence of tele-reality. What is considered credible by the audience must be easy to believe. This partly results from the overload of information which reaches us. The audiences, tired of the deluge of information, do not look for facts but for something they could believe in. That is why untrue information or distorted facts which stir up our emotions and make us identify with people or problems shown to us frequently turn out to be more credible. Truth, when confronted with attractively presented fiction often turns out to be less convincing:

“A lie or fiction shown in a convincing way always win. Truth is not able to defend itself, if journalists do not help it by bearing witness to it. However, they do not often want to help because they either do not understand it themselves or prefer to assume that people have their own “common sense”. And the truth is they do, but they can only use it in reality which is well known to them. In tele-reality given to us “for granted” the ordinary human mind is not enough because it “works with data which cannot be verified as true”.

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6 P. Legutko, B. Rodziewicz, ibidem, p. 211.
Thus, it is worth considering to what extent the media, which used to be a very important part of the public domain where debates on social issues were held, still perform their function. Does public discourse in the media still exist? Or has it been completely replaced by media shows starring journalists who stopped believing in their professional mission a long time ago and simply became celebrities. Tomasz Goban-Klas, answering the question what television journalism is like nowadays, writes:

“I do not see journalism in its classic sense on television at all. We do have some rings where everybody fights - like in American wrestling the referee also joins in the fight. The so called moderator is in fact an instigator. I do not think that anybody can say that after watching some television feature programme they are better informed or more knowledgeable about public issues. Since here the rule of a bigger hammer is applied: people who pound most loudly – appear as winners”.

The article does not aspire to be a comprehensive study of the problem. It is rather a short sketch concerning changes taking place in the media at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly the problems of their reliability and credibility.

**The crisis of journalism?**

The information society with the new media which “combine written, oral and audiovisual modalities of human communication in one system” should promote the development of journalism and influence its quality mainly through technical means which enable to instantly spread information from the most remote areas in the world, diversify the media and related to them competition on the media market. However, it appears that the new means in great measure contribute to the crisis of journalism. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, but due to limited format of this paper, we will only focus on a few of them.

The first problem is the very nature of the electronic media. In the past, as Tomasz Szlendak and Tomasz Koźlowski point out:

“The amount of unimportant information was slight, or at least it had a small influence on people. The specificity of the printing press, limited amount of paper, work required to prepare the type, and also the same (small, but very expensive) speed of information spread [...] made people think twice before they decided to print and further spread anything. The nature of communication was also influenced by readers themselves”.

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An article needed to have some reason. Arguments presented in it had to be logical and comprehensible for readers. Every text was subject to correction and its author took full responsibility for its content. This resulted both from respect for the reader and from the fact that opinions presented in articles influenced the way in which the author was perceived. Through articles printed in press the author could gain popularity but at the same time he could lose it. The loss of author’s popularity could definitively eliminate him/her form the world of journalism. As Postman points out, the printed word had a monopoly both on drawing people’s attention and on people's intellect because - apart from oral tradition - there were no other means of access to social consciousness. Most public figures, for example, were known exclusively because of the words they had written, not because of their looks or even the orations they gave. Those people were perceived in the same way as their works, they were judged by their public statements, their arguments and their knowledge presented in printed texts.10

On the other hand, the reader who spent some time reading a text had to possess some knowledge enabling him/her to understand often very complicated issues. The press not only required from readers to be greatly committed, but it became one of the most important factors influencing civic engagement of its readers. Alexis de Tocqueville, describing American society claims that in real life it is newspapers that represent communities. Newspapers not only give many people “the same aims but also suggest the means to jointly carry out the plans they have made individually”11.

Nowadays most information reaches us through electronic media, mainly television and the Internet. What is more, there are more and more of them and we are flooded by them. Unfortunately, the quantity of information does not translate into high quality. Most of what we hear or read every day is useless to us. It is mainly due to the fact that, unlike the press, electronic media are geared towards speed and emotions. Once favoured by the press “comprehensive information, appealing to sober judgment and usually concerning questions crucial for individuals has become a tidbit, aiming at drawing people’s attention and completely irrelevant to decisions made by the audience in their everyday lives”12.

For many years established in 1980 CNN International specializing in live transmissions from places affected by crisis situations was an unattainable model for most broadcasting stations. It was CNN which showed to the whole world the disaster of the space shuttle Challenger, American bombing of Libya in 1986, and three years later the famous reports from Tiananmen Square. The station, however, gained real popularity in 1991 when, as the first and at that time the only station, it offered its audience a “live” war in Persian Gulf. CNN’s position was reinforced by reports and news about the trial of O. J. Simpson when the number of viewers

12 T. Szlendak, T. Kozlowski, Naga małpa..., p.123.
increased by 20% together with the profits of advertising. Another increase of viewing was recorded after the terrorist attack on WTC in 2001. For specialists CNN is a typical example of “crisis oriented television” which is normally less popular among Americans than Fox News, but during important events the number of its viewers increases considerably. In such moments CNN becomes, according to its slogan, the world’s news leader. The station in Poland which follows the approach taken by CNN is TVN24, today the oldest information channel on Polish market operating since 2001. Like CNN, it established its position during the attacks on WTC.

Neil Postman claims that information programs found in most television stations stopped fulfilling their role a long time ago. They do not serve education, reflection or catharsis. Providing us daily with “shots of tragedies and cruelties the newscasters insistently urge us to: join them tomorrow. What for? One would think that several minutes of murder and mayhem would suffice as material for a month of sleepless nights. We accept the newscasters’ invitation because we know that the “news” is not to be taken seriously, that it is all in fun, so to say. Everything about a news show tells us this - the good looks and amiability of the cast, their pleasant banter, the exciting music that opens and closes the show, the vivid film footage, the attractive commercials - all these and more suggest that what we have just seen is no cause for weeping. A news show, to put it plainly, is a format for entertainment [...]”.

The main principle of information television is the motto “if it bleeds, it leads” which mostly means that stories dedicated to drugs, violence and disasters become dominant topics of information channels. However,

“paradoxically, television can hide by showing. That is, it can hide things by showing something other than what would be shown if television did what it was supposed to do, provide information. Or by showing what has to be shown, but in such a way that it isn’t really shown, or is turned into something insignificant; or by constructing it in such a way that it takes on a meaning that has nothing at all to do with reality”.

As Pierre Bourdieu points out, journalists look at the world through special “glasses”. Through these glasses they can see some things but they cannot see others, and the things they can see are seen by them in a specific way. The main determinant of this selection is the search for the “sensational and the spectacular”. The reason for that is simple – seeking viewers journalists more and more often reach for topics which guarantee popularity. Today much of journalism

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13 See: Ch. Sullivan, Clarity Principle. How Great Leaders Make the Most Important Decision in Business (And What Happens When They Don’t), San Francisco 2013, pp. 43-44.
14 N. Postman, Amusing Ourselves To Death, Pt II, Chapter Six, The Age Of Show Business, pp. 92-93.
15 B. Glassner, The Culture of Fear. Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things, New York, p. XXI.
17 Ibidem, p. 45.
consist of sensationalism, scandal, personalization, excessive dramatization. Galtung and Ruge believed that our perception of what constitutes an event is culturally determined. They identified 12 factors which in their opinion helped determine whether events would be covered in newspapers. This factors were: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, reference to something negative\(^\text{18}\). This trend can be regarded as the second reason for crisis of journalism to which we will come back later in this paper.

William Rivers and Cleve Mathews, attempting to define expectations of audiences, notice that when a protestor pours petrol over himself and sets himself alight, the viewers would expect the reporter first of all - instead of filming - to save the man from the fire. The majority of viewers or readers think that reporters who report disasters striking people should be compassionate towards the victims. The public does not want the new mass media to be used for undermining social morality or harming social health. Researchers into ethical issues claim that people expect mass media to respect the values they cherish most of all – compassion and moderation, the values which strengthen social relations\(^\text{19}\). These social expectations were confirmed, for example, by a strong reaction of the international community following the CNN’s broadcast of 22\(^\text{rd}\) January 2010 when some American journalists passing through Port-au-Prince found two Haitians who had been shot by the Haitian police. Instead of helping them, they were filming the agony of one of the men and the begging for help of the other one at the same time relating and commenting on the situation. This incident triggered an avalanche of questions about the limits of journalistic decency or even humanity. The discussion, however, soon died down and, as we can assume, it did not manage to curb sensational journalism. The case of a suicide attempt by the Polish army prosecutor M. Przybył (9\(^\text{th}\) January 2012) confirms that it can be also observed in Poland. When the prosecutor shot himself just after the end of a press conference, some journalists who were still at the scene, instead of helping him, began to film the whole incident. At the end of 2012 “New York Times” published a photo of a man pushed onto New York’s subway tracks by a mad woman. The photographer did not help, but until the very last moment kept taking pictures of the man who died at the scene. Neither the publisher nor the photographer had problems with publishing the photographs of the accident. What is more, the photographer maintained that people waiting at the platform during the incident were also taking pictures with their mobile phone cameras.

In contemporary press, television and Internet the lines between fact and fiction, information and comment have been blurred. Moreover, sometimes the moral lines


are also blurring. There are no good and bad broadcasts, just broadcasts which can gather millions of viewers in front of television and sell very well or cannot.

The crisis of journalism also results from the fact that more and more often “the Fourth Estate” becomes a commodity sold by large media concerns. Breaking up the monopoly of the state media means, according to Benjamin Barber “the end of protection of public interest and consolidation of the monopoly in its new shape”. It is the large media companies who become monopolists, and who impose their own standardization, although they do it behind the cover of free market competition. Monopolists keep up appearances of unlimited diversity, which makes unaware members of the audience think that they can make their own choice and chose the most attractive offer, adjusted to their needs and taste. The problem is that their desires are directed by monopolists. A good example of that may be information or feature programmes which not so long ago fulfilled information and educational functions and, more importantly, provided basis for the well-functioning civil society by being “critical of the traditional three branches of power”. Currently they play a role of “info-entertainment” and focus mainly on, as Benjamin Barber puts it, “showing branded stars “sold” by television networks in order to attract the largest number of viewers”. This means that nowadays journalists, instead of informing people about facts, have become stars who are more important than the guests they invite to their programmes or problems they discuss in them. Their personalities and emotions they express are more important than the issues they talk about. Describing this phenomenon, Barber refers to modern brand marketing where quality goods do not matter and only sensations which are sold are deemed valuable. What counts is the brand image. Journalists themselves have become such brands. The examples of Larry King, Barbara Walters, Charlie Rose, Katie Couric show it clearly.

The problem of “journalistic stars” appeared in Poland not so long ago together with the appearance of commercial television stations. This group of journalists includes celebrities such as Monika Olejnik, Tomasz Lis, Justyna Pochanke or Bogdan Rymanowski. The problem is not their fame but the way in which it affects the programmes they run. More and more often, instead of interesting discussions on

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23 Larry King has continually run his talk-show since 1978, first on Radio Mutual Network, then on CNN. He has interviewed over 40,000 politicians, sportspeople and people from show-business.
24 She has run her own programme “The View” on ABC station since 1997. Her interviews with political leaders are thought to be the chronicle of the end of 20th century. Her most famous interviewees were: F. Castro, B. Yeltsin, I. Ghandi, R. Pahlavi, or Monika Levinsky whose interview in 1999 had the largest television audience ever – it was viewed by 74 million people.
25 Since 1991 has run his own program “Charlie Rose Show” which has been broadcast by PBS since 1993.
26 Currently runs her own programme @katiecouric on CBS News, her interviewees were e.g. Al. Gore, Michelle Obama, Thomas Friedman.
vital topics, we can observe an interviewee being flooded with questions and not given any opportunity to answer them. Piotr Pacewicz trying to assess modern television journalism noticed that:

“Opening their television sets Polish people unknowingly get on this carousel of stupidity, although they probably think that they take part in some public debate. It is neither a debate nor a kind of journalism. It is a slanging match which finally discourages us from thinking, from sound judgment of public life, from confronting politics with values or at least common sense. At most it attracts our attention for a moment, like a fight in a street, and like in a fight our attention is drawn to who is kicking whom.”

Dominika Wielowieyska, trying to defend journalists writes:

“There is no debate because the ultimate cause of such level of journalism is the “muzzle” of the audience ratings put on journalists. Some of them have a stipulation in their contracts that if their programme fails to attract certain numbers of viewers it will be taken off the air. Others might not have it in the contract but they know they will disappear from television programming if they fail to reach high viewing figures. This applies to both public and commercial television.”

Not listening to what other people invited to the studio have to say has become another standard. Presenters very often do not want to listen to their interviewee’s opinions: they have their own views on given topics and they do not intend to change them. It also happens that such a programme is not intended to present a discussion, but is simply one of the many ways to create the image of a journalist. In such a skirmish the guest is doomed from the start, regardless of what he or she wants to say and how important or true it is. Such broadcast only promotes the journalist star. It is him/her who is supposed to shine in floodlit, to charm or to annoy the viewers, to be expressive, recognizable and remembered. An excellent example here may be Bill O’Reilly’s programme „The Factor O’Reilly” broadcast on Fox News. „The Factor O’Reilly” is one of the most popular information programmes broadcast by American television stations with an average audience of 3 million viewers. O’Reilly has the same number of supporters as opponents. He is famous for being aggressive in his programmes, attacking his guests, making controversial statements, and lacking political correctness. O’Reilly can shout his interviewees down when they do not agree with him and ask them to shut up, and when they protest he orders to switch

29 According to the research by Nielsen Media Reaserch, at the beginning of March 2010 “The Factor o’Reilley” was seen by 3,0 to 4,0 million viewers what made the programme the fourth most popular information broadcast, just after programmes such as: NBC Nightly News, ABC Nightly News i CBS Evening News.
30 A good example is the broadcast of the 4th February 2003, when O’Reilly showed a very emotional reaction to the criticism of US government actions following the events of the 11th September 2001. His guest was a son of one of the victims of the attacks Jeremy Glick, member of founded in 2002 organization “Not In Our Name” which criticized George Bush and his administration for their actions after the 11th September 2001. During a discussion O’Reilly accused Glick of not respecting his father, extreme leftist views and supporting terrorism. All attempts of discussion were finished by him with a statement that he would not talk to Glick on this subject. Eventually, he ordered him to shut up and turned off his microphone.
off their microphone. On many occasions O'Reilly was accused of distorting facts and using wrong statistics by organizations such as Media Matters, Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting.

Two good examples of presenting such attitude on Polish television are programmes by Bronislaw Wildstein and Jan Pospieszalski. The former is the author of the feature programme „Bronisław Wildestein przedstawia” (Engl. „Bronislaw Wildestein presents”) broadcast on Channel 1 of public television from the 25th September 2008 to the 24th October 2010, and currently re-activated on TV Republika. The format of the programme is simple—each part presents some current problem and the programme follows typical conventions of investigative journalism. There is, however, one small but quite important difference if we assume that the essence of this kind of programmes is an attempt to find the truth: the evidence and comments presented by the journalist are hardly ever objective, they are usually coincident with political views of the presenter. One may also have some reservations about the choice of commentators and guests invited by him to his programmes. A good example is the programme of the 23rd March 2010. A starting point for the discussion was a verdict on the biography of Lech Walesa written by Pawel Zyzak published by Arkana publishing. The court recognized that Zyzak's publication infringed personal interests of the former president's daughter. In the lawsuit Anna Domińska indicated that the book hurt her feelings and her dignity, spread insults and slander about Lech Walesa, especially when it referred to the allegations of his collaboration with the secret police in communist Poland. The guests invited to the studio raised the issue of freedom of speech, the researcher's right to analyze historical facts, limitation of access to temporary historical materials in Poland, but they completely forgot about legally valid decision of the Vetting Court which cleared Lech Walesa of all charges of collaboration. Another example of limitation on freedom of speech in Poland was the case of Andrzej Zybertowicz who was ordered by the court to apologize Adam Michnik for infringement of personal interests by saying that he had been sued by “two agents and one of their eager defender”. Only Zybertowicz was invited to the studio. The discussion was completed with written comments “Michnik gags his polemicists”, “Court forbids criticism of Michnik”. Zybertowicz's claims were not referred to, the fact that he had failed to carry out the decision of the court was not mentioned either.

Talking about problems of Polish journalism we cannot omit the articles about Alicja Tysiac published in the catholic weekly “Gosc Niedzielny”. One of the most nonobjective and one-sided publications was a comment placed by the editor-in-chief of this journal after Tysiac had won a lawsuit against Poland in the European Court of Human Rights. Garnarczyk in his article “Siła przyzwyczajenia” (“Force of habit”) wrote:

“Three months ago Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum received photographs from a private photo album of Karl Hoecker, an SS man from Auschwitz. In the pictures you can see what the Nazis who “worked” in the camp did “after working hours”. They went on holiday to Miedzybrodzie Bialskie. You can see the famous doctor Mengele in company of Hoess and other officers. They are cheerful and relaxed. They got used to murders committed behind the fence of the camp. And what is the situation like today? Slightly different, but still horrifying. The European Court of Justice in Strasbourg has just rejected the appeal of Polish government against the famous case of Alicja Tysiac. As its result Mrs Tysiac will receive a compensation of 25 thousand euro plus costs of proceedings just because she was not allowed to kill her baby. In other words, we live in the world where the mother is rewarded for wanting to kill her child but not being allowed to do it”32.

The lack of ability to distinguish between facts and opinions, especially a shocking comparison of Nazi camps with a woman claiming compensation for putting her life and health at risk and refusing her the right to abortion she was entitled to, shows how it is difficult to remain objective and reliable in the world of media.

The last example we would like to quote is the article by Cezary Gmyz “Trotyl na wraku Tupolewa” (“TNT on Tupolev wreckage”) devoted to Smolensk air disaster. The title of the article suggests that there were some traces of explosives found on the Tupolev wreckage. In the article Gmyz cites some anonymous informants and, most importantly, investigators' expert opinions. He claims that the information that public prosecutor’s office is familiar with the expert opinion was confirmed by the Public Prosecutor General Andrzej Seremet. The problem is that such opinion never existed, Seremet never made the statement quoted by Gmyz, investigators did not confirm the journalist's revelations about traces of TNT and nitroglycerine which could indicate a prepared attack.

Journalists and editors in order to gain recognition of their superiors, owners or politicians often resort to minor or gross manipulations. Among the most frequently used manipulations we can quote the examples given by P. Legutko and D. Rodziewicz: “It never happened” – concealment of an event or some of its details which are for some reason uncomfortable or which question the arguments being presented; “This happened because we know about it” – creating media facts based on one’s own account or alleged sources of information; “The majority of people think this, the minority think that” – selecting of commentators' statements so that the supporters or opponents of some opinion gain favour with the audience; “I am only a sking” – asking the interviewee questions which allow to smuggle various suggestions for the use of the audience; “Hierarchy and context” – introducing complex hierarchies indicating greater importance of some topics or people than others, etc33. Those technics can be seen in many feature programmes both on public and commercial television stations.

Along with the changing role of the media the status of journalism is also changing. Not so long ago an impartial commentator, known to audiences through

32 M. Garnarczyk; Siła przyzwyczajenia, „Gość niedzielny” no 40, 7th October 2007.
33 P. Legutko, B. Rodziewicz, Mity czwartej..., p. 140-156.
his press publications, radio or television programmes was transformed into a celebrity from tabloids or web portals gossiping about the lives of real and wannable stars of show-business. Journalists more and more often talk about their private lives, family, hobbies. They also sick fame and try to earn extra money by participating in various events, from cultural events or promotional campaigns introducing new brands to Polish market to opening of new shopping centers. A journalist who sells himself in such a way loses his credibility.

**Poles' opinions on journalism and journalists**

Analyzing the condition of journalism, we cannot ignore the opinion of the Polish audience about this topic. CBOS (Centre for Public Opinion Research) regularly releases reports presenting opinions of Polish people on journalists' work. In this paper we will refer to the research of 2002 and 2012.

In the light of the research conducted by CBOS journalist's work is more often considered just a way of earning money like any other profession (55% in 2002 and 52% in 2012) than a kind of public mission (40% - 2002; 43% 2012). Although the assumed role of the media, particularly of the public media, is fulfilling a public mission (which is mainly mentioned in the context of TV license fee), more than a half of the respondents did not see such a role with reference to work of journalists. Perception of journalism as a mission is to a large extent correlated with respondents' interest in politics. The more interest in politics they declared, the more often they pointed to the fact that journalism is more a public mission than an ordinary profession. This might result from greater awareness of to what extent journalists shape the image of particular parties, politicians and people's voting preferences which can be directly translated into the functioning of the state.

The respondents were also asked who is more concerned about the public interest – journalists or politicians? For almost a half of the subjects of the 2002 research (49%) and for 52% of the subjects of the 2012 research, neither journalists nor politicians were believed to be more concerned about the public interest. Nevertheless, in that research journalists came out better than politicians as both in 2002 and 2012 over 30% of respondents gave journalists more credit for acting in favor of public interest, while politicians were given credit by 11% of subjects in 2002 and only by 8% of respondents in 2012. Obviously, people who treated journalism as a public mission gave more credit to journalists not to politicians, which is quite understandable.

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36 Ibidem.
37 Ibidem.
What are then journalists expected to do, if not only to serve the public? The most often indicated and desirable features were impartiality and objectivism (62% in 2002 and 59% in 2012). Those most important features, as Legutko and Rodziewicz point out, bring some questions in the very way they are defined. According to the authors, impartiality can be both a virtue and a vice

“(…) whenever a journalist acts as a mediator or an arbiter of a debate we do prefer him/her to maintain impartiality so that he/she does not take sides with any of the parties in a conflict. But do we like the same attitude when a journalist reports a case of Mr. Kowalski who has been a victim of the abuse of power or clerical callousness. Thus discussing objectivism in the media reminds walking in fog: you hardly ever get to the point you hoped to reach” 38.

Regardless of all the doubts, those features are constantly indicated as the most important characteristics of good journalism. They are followed by good knowledge of reported topics (35%-2002 and 36%-2012), and the sense of responsibility for one’s words and for the consequences of one’s work (38%-2002; 30% in 2012). Less frequently respondents mentioned: resistance to different kinds of pressure, suggestions and corruption (27%), respect for other people and their privacy (27%) and courage to raise difficult and risky topics (25%). Almost every fifth respondent deems inquisitiveness, perseverance in finding information (21%), tact, politeness (19%), self-control, mastering one’s emotions (18%), and the ability to express one’s thoughts clearly (16%) the most important characteristics of a good journalist 39.

The researchers also attempted to find out how respondents perceived journalists who were known to them, considering chosen characteristics related both to the professional and moral spheres. The responses given by the subjects showed that the most dominant features displayed by journalists are: inquisitiveness (66%), preparation for the topics they discuss (57%), honesty (52%) and credibility (48%), although referring to the last two features more than 20% of respondents indicated their lack in journalists 40. On a seven-point trust rating scale an average rating was “4” which was more or less the level of trust in journalists presented in research in 2012 (4,02) 41.

Among the weakest points of journalists the respondents mentioned lack of respect for privacy (68%), pursuit of sensation (58%) and ignoring potential consequences of material published by them (55%). Thus, CBOS research has revealed that features thought to be the most important in journalists, such as impartiality and objectivism are not, unfortunately, a standard in Polish journalism.

38 P. Legutko, B. Rodziewicz, Mity czwartej ..., p. 113-114.
40 Ibidem.
41 Ibidem.
Nearly half of respondents thought that journalists are biased (46%) and guided by their own political sympathies (50%). Only 34% of respondents had an opposite opinion (34%)\(^\text{42}\).

When we compare the 2012 research to the 2002 research we can clearly see that the perception of the work of journalists has changed for worse. “More people think that they look for sensation at all costs and do not strive for truth. Their honesty and credibility is rated worse. More often than ten years ago, journalists nowadays are perceived as biased and guided by their political sympathies.”\(^\text{43}\) Worsening opinion about journalists is related to developing tabloidization of the media which is nothing else but a result of an attempt to reach the largest audience possible in order to ensure good profits.  

**Final comment**

The main cause of the media crisis is the fact that they have ceased to fulfill their function or, in other words, currently more and more often they do not take any responsibility for information they spread\(^\text{44}\). This is mainly due to the big media concerns which, in their pursuit of profits, turn to quite a specific form of journalism, mainly based on uncomplicated content which quickly gains attention of viewers, spread fast and often without proper checking just to beat competitors. As Wiliam Rivers and Cleve Mathiews point out, journalists who „attempt to present truth to people should be above all loyal to these people, not to their publishers or sources of information. The key to being ethical is presenting information in a thorough and effective way”\(^\text{45}\).

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**Crisis of journalism?**  
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**Summary**

The article is devoted to the changes in journalism taking place at the turn of the 20\(^\text{th}\) and 21\(^\text{st}\) centuries. One may think that the information society, along with the opportunities of immediate spread of information, multiplicity of sources and technological potential will contribute to the development of journalism and the improvement of its quality. However, at the age of globalization more and more often do we ask ourselves the questions about credibility and reliability of the media.

\(^{42}\) Ibidem.  
\(^{43}\) Ibidem.  
\(^{44}\) This problem is described, among others, by James Fallows in his book „Breaking News. How the Media Undermine American Democracy” devoted to the influence of the media on the American people, and more specifically, how the media contribute to the crisis of democracy in The United States. He emphasizes the fact that the media presents social life as a “depressing spectacle” and they focus on information which can be sold. As a result, the audience receives a superficial, not entirely true image of reality they live in. This in turn makes the world seem even less comprehensible than before. In the end Americans trust the media to a much lesser extent than before.  
and above all about the credibility and reliability of contemporary journalism. We wonder where this subtle line between the truth and fiction, information and comment appears to be, how far one can go on in one's attempt to acquire and sell information, how important responsibility for one's words is. To what extent do the media which, as Jurgen Harbermas claims, used to be a very important part of the public sphere, so as to hold debates on social issues, still perform their function? Is there still such a thing as public discourse in the media? Or, maybe, it has been completely replaced by media shows with the journalists who stopped believing in the mission of their profession a long time ago so as to become celebrities only.