

BULGARIAN STATE EXAMINATION
Journalism and Mass Communication
American University in Bulgaria

Choose two of the questions below and write short essays on them, limiting the length of each to one side of an A4 sheet of paper. Indicate the number of the question you are addressing at the top of each essay.

Your grade will take into consideration:

The power of your theoretical argument.

The specific examples used to illustrate the argument.

The structure of your essay.

The clarity of your English.

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1. WikiLeaks is a nonprofit new media organization specializing in making secret government documents public on the web. It has been the focus of news and commentary frequently during 2010, most recently for the release of 250,000 secret U.S. diplomatic cables.

In a recent letter to President Obama, the faculty of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, the chief executive to forego any prosecution of WikiLeaks staff in relation to the diplomatic cables. "...We all believe that in publishing diplomatic cables," they wrote, "WikiLeaks is engaging in journalistic activity protected by the First Amendment." The letter went on to say that "Any prosecution of Wikileaks' staff for receiving, possessing or publishing classified materials will set a dangerous precedent for reporters in any publication or medium...."

By contrast, George Packer, who writes about international affairs for The New Yorker magazine, argued in a blog that the goals of Wikileaks and most journalists "are not the same." He noted that the diplomatic cables "contain no My Lais, no black sites, no Abu Ghraibs....Will [the leaks] be worth the damage? Should no government secret remain secret?"

So which is it? Does the WikiLeaks release of government documents meet the test for journalism of the kind protected by the free speech laws around the world? If so, why? If not, why not? Discuss.

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2. In its code of ethics, the U.S. Society of Professional Journalists urges journalists to "minimize harm" by treating sources and subjects of stories as human beings deserving of respect. But how does the ethical journalist minimize harm when using information and sources gathered through social networks where the boundaries between public and private information are fuzzy, and the rules yet to be fully established?

In the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech, for example, a reporter set up a memorial group for the victims on a social network specifically to find close friends of victims to interview for a story.

In the 2009 murder of a Yale University student, a reporter used Facebook to locate a former girlfriend of the prime suspect in the case. The reporter identified himself as a

journalist to his new Facebook friend and gathered information from her about her relationship with the suspect for use in his story. What if, in the course of his exchange with the girlfriend, the reporter noticed additional information about the suspect on the girlfriend's wall, posted as she and her friends discussed the murder and her relationship with the suspect. Should the reporter use the wall information or not?

What's ethical and unethical behavior for the journalist in gathering information via an online social network? Discuss.

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3. In March 1989, over 10 million gallons of crude oil spilled into Alaska's Prince William Sound when the tanker Exxon Valdez hit a reef. Miles of coastline were fouled, thousands of birds, fish and marine mammals died. In the end, Exxon paid about \$1.1 billion to settle law suits against the company, and the clean-up cost the company another \$2.5 billion. Exxon's name became synonymous with "environmental disaster."

During the crisis, the company's CEO was not available to the media. The company also at times laid blame on other institutions such as the U.S. Coast Guard. Exxon also established its media center at Valdez, a community near the spill site, but too small to handle the onslaught of journalists from around the world.

Ten days into the spill aftermath, the company ran a full page ad, called "An open letter to the public," in 165 daily newspapers plus a handful of major magazines. The ads, which cost the company \$1.8 million, were intended to offer an apology for the environmental disaster and promise that the company will be involved in the clean-up "for the duration."

During the crisis, the company issued 12 video news releases (VNRs) featuring stunning aerials of Alaskan scenery and shots of majestic ships. The voiceover exclaimed, for example, "It's cruise time in Alaska, and business is booming....None of the cruise lines are skipping (the port called Valdez)." The spots also offered testimony from tourists not at all unhappy about their Valdez vacations and shots of whales and seals without crude oil on them. The "news" of the VNRs was that concerns about the spill had abated. Exxon's public affairs manager told a reporter that between 27 to 30 million viewers saw at least one of the dozen VNRs with the Exxon messages. However, most networks refused to air the Exxon VNRs preferring to cover the story themselves.

Discuss crisis communications, its functions and tools in relation to a company's public relations efforts and with reference to the Exxon Valdez case. Can such a crisis be some kind of opportunity for a company?

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4. Today's consumers live in a world where not only do trivial products – the portable steam bath, the Chia pet, telephone apps that belch or send a message to a woman on a bad date so she has an excuse to leave – exist, they are widely advertised and then bought. Joining that motley crew are advertisements that, for example, push a cola drink as nutritional through an expensive, multi-page insert to a glossy national woman's magazine, explaining good nutrition, including the cola as part of the healthy mix of food and drink.

What's going on here? It is often said of advertising that it is "not much more than an effort to make us buy products and services we don't need and cannot afford." Is that correct? If so, why? If not, why not? Discuss.

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5. On October 13, after 69 days trapped underground, 33 Chilean miners were brought safely to the surface of the earth. The copper and gold mine, near San Jose, Chile, where they worked had collapsed in August, trapping the miners 700 meters (2,300 feet) underground. The operation to save the miners and their successful rescue were covered extensively the media worldwide, including on live television. It is estimated that 1 billion people watched the rescue unfold live.

After the miners emerged from their underground darkness, they wore Oakley sunglasses until they adjusted to the bright sunlight. On its website, the Oakley says that it was alerted to the miners need by Jonathan Franklin, “a journalist who works for [Addict Village](#), a boutique media agency in Santiago, Chile.” He also recommended the brand to the Chilean insurer working with the miners health needs, and through the insurer, Oakley donated 35 pairs of sunglasses -- the Oakley Radar® with Black Iridium® lenses in Path™ and Range® lens shapes.

On its website, Addict Village calls itself a “media agency”; Franklin is one of its principals. Franklin’s biography says that he “trained at the New York Times” and then moved to South America to become a foreign correspondent. Now he lives in Chile. Addict Village has clients that include the BBC, “60 Minutes,” Esquire, GQ and The Guardian.

On its “services” page, Addict Village offers to produce everything from feature length magazines articles to brief videos for a webpage and “production and access support” for documentaries. As a sample of its work, it says that, for A&E, the U.S. cable channel, it “embedded a team inside the Kidnapping Unit of the Sao Paulo Police Department” and for six weeks documented “the wild world of kidnapping in Brazil.

With the above background, discuss Franklin’s actions with Oakley in behalf in the context of journalism. Then discuss the subject as public relations. Finally, define Addict Village in relation to the two. Is it journalism or is it public relations?

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6. In “The Elements of Journalism,” Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel declare the traditional concept of objectivity in reporting and editing as “lost” to modern journalism and “thoroughly misunderstood.”

Idea of objectivity has fallen into disfavor, they say, is because “no person can ever be objective.” They quote Dan Gillmor in “We the Media” advocating that the word “objectivity” be dropped from the journalist’s lexicon in favor of the ideas of “thoroughness, accuracy, fairness and transparency.”

Kovach and Rosenstiel explain that the idea of objectivity was first advocated for journalism precisely because no person can ever be objective. In the 19th century when the notion of objectivity first caught on in Western journalism, it was used to signal methodology, specifically the scientific method as applied to the gathering of news. Walter Lippmann, they write, advocated objectivity and its methodology so that the individual journalist could “remain clear and free of his irrational, his unexamined, his unacknowledged prejudgments in observing, understanding and presenting the news.”

Discuss objectivity and journalism. Should the term be dropped in favor of Kovach and Rosenstiel’s term “verification”? Or should it be revived to mean a unified, consistent methodology in which, as Lippmann said, “complex and slippery” reporting is subject to “the

exercise of the highest scientific virtues.” Or is the concept no longer needed in a world with web browsers where everyone can verify his or her own information?

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