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## Evolution of ethical standards in the press policy of state higher education institutions

### Abstract

State higher schools (mainly universities) play a special role in shaping social attitudes. Hence the reasonable conclusion that they themselves must present a high level of ethics. On the one hand, it is not difficult, because moral standards are inscribed in academic life *per se*. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the academic community consists of very diverse groups, often with divergent interests, which makes it difficult to harmonise existing standards (of course, unification on paper is very easy, but it is about the practical application of norms, preferably in the spirit of categorical imperative – that is, through the internal awareness of necessity of their use). So, the question is – is effective and ethical communication possible at one and the same time?

**Key words:** media, ethics, press, media relations, PR, press officer, universities, communication

Ethical standards in the conducted activity are an indispensable element of the operating strategy. It does not change the fact that in many cases they are treated negligently, and thus they are only an incomplete supplement, for example communication activities.

In the era of corporate social responsibility, it seems even more reasonable to realize the role of values in the functioning of an institution, especially if it concerns an entity with such an important social role as a state university.

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the other hand, it should be remembered that the academic community consists of very diverse groups, often with divergent interests, which makes it difficult to harmonise existing standards (of course, unification on paper is very easy, but it is about the practical application of norms, preferably in the spirit of categorical imperative – that is, through internal awareness of the necessity of their use).

Communication of content related to ethical standards falls within the area of internal public relations, or internal relations. Nowadays, this area of communication activity is within the competence of the press officer. As a result, it seems reasonable to present the evolution of ethical standards in press policy.

It should also be remembered that ethical standards can and should be contemplated from two perspectives. On the one hand, in general terms related to compliance with generally applicable rules. On the other hand – ethical standards related to professionalism. This distinction seems particularly important, if it is noted that the professional performance of the duties entrusted may be in opposition to generally applicable rules. However unethical it may sound as an everyday practice, it seems to confirm this model.

Since the actions related to value communication belong to the press officers, one should first look at the press officers themselves.

At the outset, attention should be paid to the fact that the ethical codes of spokespersons do not exist in principle. It does not change the fact that the key to the issue of the title problem is to realize that spokesperson in higher schools often operates in the element of ethical double standards. On the one hand, the already mentioned values of a general nature, on the other – the system of values in force in the institution, and on the other – the private system of the values of the spokesperson. Ideally, all systems are coherent, but as is well-known – ideals rarely withstand confrontation with reality.

According to the popular definition taken from the internet a spokesperson is a person responsible for contacts of a given institution or organization with the media. Having a competent spokesperson is an important element of public relations. A spokesperson is a profession from the border between public relations and journalism. On the one hand, a person in this profession must use methods other than journalistic, and on the other, they must know how journalists work and what information they need. There are of course codes of journalistic ethics, but spokespersons, although they must know them, are not obliged to comply with them.

A spokesperson is responsible for all information about the company or institution that gets into the media. Their duties are not only to provide sporadic information, but also develop and implement a permanent strategy applied in media relations. So, on the one hand, they are very well informed about what is happening in the company (usually he also performs other tasks related to internal communication in the company), and on the other hand, he must spread this information outside. From this brief introduction it is clear that the spokesperson's task area is not clearly defined.

Many people probably have a fairly precise idea about the work of spokespersons. However, it seems legitimate question this notion. The press spokesperson is not only the person responsible for providing the media with information, and more specifically – responding to media enquiries. Nowadays, a spokesperson is an element of a larger marketing machine, which often creates not only external but also internal communication. In addition, they are responsible for creating the image of the represented institution and planning long-term communication and promotional activities.

Of course, the scope of entrusted tasks can significantly differ between institutions, just as the structural models present in different universities differ. Regardless, it is possible to distinguish a certain basic set of tasks and necessary competences common for representatives of this profession. This alone creates a communication problem, because often the context inside the university is different from that in which the recipients operate.

In addition, universities usually communicate to a mass audience – either directly or through the media. The current definition of mass communication has now gained a new dimension, because mass communication has become interactive. If, as in the case of some universities, one person is responsible for the entire communication process, he must interact with the mass recipient... Castels calls this state “massive personalized communication” (Castels 2013: 66).

The changes that have taken place over the last twenty years complement the changing working conditions of spokespeople:

- “widespread commercialization of the media in most countries in the world,
- globalization and concentration of the media industry through the creation of conglomerates and networks,
- segmentation, tailoring the message to the client's needs and diversification of media markets with an emphasis on cultural identification of the audience,

- creating multimedia business groups that cover all forms of communication, including – of course – the internet,
- more and more convergent business convergence of telecommunications, computer, internet and media enterprises.” (Castels 2013: 66).

Due to the fact that media communication must reconcile global tendencies with the individualized preferences of individual groups and taking into account the technological revolution, the domain of the spokesperson becomes difficult to define precisely. Of course, it is relatively easy for institutional spokespersons with a homogeneous profile and precisely defined target group, but none of these conditions seems to be met by public higher education institutions.

What features, therefore, should have a press officer of a higher school, what tools to use and what authority should it have in the represented institution in order to operate efficiently in such a reality?

On the one hand, the press spokesperson is “«a bumper». They accept responsibility, go away, resign, get fired overnight. Spokespeople are just as important – as some say – as directors, bosses. Others add that they are the most important – in contacts with the public, with one fundamental difference: the ultimate decisions (...) are always taken by the head, not the spokesperson.” (Drzycimski 2000: 35).

We know such spokespersons from television, films and politics. They are the publishers of the content, but they do not create it very often. On the other hand, we deal with non-formally defined spokespersons, that is, those who occupy independent positions, have a lot of freedom, imprecisely defined responsibilities and operate in an unspecified communication situation – because the strategy of communications has not been defined. Sometimes the lack of definition results from a misunderstanding of the role of such a document in the functioning of the institution, sometimes, as often happens in the case of universities, the role seems so obvious that the need for clarification seemed obsolete. In such a situation, the ethical standard is most often determined by the value system of the spokesperson themselves.

What is more, it seems that the lack of precise definition of the role of the press spokesman agrees with the colloquial image of this profession. Everybody heard the spokesperson's speech a few times. Many people think that this is someone who answers the media questions and with that their work ends. Nothing could be further from the truth. Of course, for example, in public universities with an established position, the work of a spokesperson may look like this. Often, nothing wrong with this fact is apparent. Apart from the obvious waste of the institution's potential. Many people, especially those connected with the media,

think that it is a dream job – not very demanding, well paid with a guarantee of presence in the media, that is, an opportunity to build your own image for future.

In the real world, a spokesperson is a profession from the borderline of journalism and Public Relations. Properly understood it is someone who improves the flow of information between the editorial offices and the organization and is always available. The spokesperson not only broadcasts messages but also receives them from the surrounding environment in order to adjust the narrative to the current conditions and plan the strategy of operation. A person in such a position must be familiar with the journalist's background and understand the specificity of the editorial work. He must know the methods of journalists' work, as well as the expectations of recipients of individual media, so as to provide journalists with useful information. In theory, the spokesperson is responsible for all information about the institution they represent (Gajdka 2012: 18–19). In the practice of higher education institutions, in the era of distorted understanding of decentralization, spokespersons often face the resistance of the authorities of individual entities before informing them in a certain, top-down manner. Faculty authorities are convinced that they know better what is important from their point of view. And if this is true, then they lose sight the broader picture, while the spokesperson can assess what is better from the point of view of the institution as a whole. A potential ethical dilemma appears here, boiling down to a valuable prioritization – the reason of the department, or the interest of the university as a whole. Depending on the decision, the spokesperson may have to inform the superior about the arbitrariness of the department, and therefore condemn the reluctance of the faculty authorities. Theoretically, this dilemma can be settled by itself, but then it will bear its own consequences.

Against this background, disputes arise with the authorities of individual units, which result in the breakdown of the overall narration, and sometimes, depending on the strength of the employee's breakthrough, the dismissal of the spokesperson, or marginalisation of their role. That is why it is so important that the spokesperson is well and firmly embedded in the structure of the institution. They must have access to all relevant information. They can't be surprised by questions from journalists about issues important to the university, because it reduces their value, as well as directly affecting the image of the represented institution.

Issues within the institution that translate into the efficiency of the Spokesperson's work bring us closer to determining the features that a spokesperson should have. In addition to the obvious – should be

a media person – be free to appear in front of the camera, be able to focus on the media and their recipients, have appropriate diction, and control of facial expression and gestures. (Gierwazik 2002: 11 and n.). In addition, a good spokesperson should be open to the media, including accessibility beyond normal office hours. Sometimes it can be cumbersome, but it is *ex definitione* inscribed in this profession. They can't afford to avoid journalists, and must be open to the world and constantly ready to talk. Taking into consideration the specificity of public higher education institutions, it must also be characterized by calmness and skills in the area of persuasion, negotiations and diplomacy. (Gajdka 2012: 19). It could also be said that the spokesperson must be able to captivate the people he contacts. (Pietrzak 2003: 11). The introduction of the category of “infatuation” raises ethical/moral doubts, because it is associated with the area of manipulation and non-object-oriented argumentation rather than with the truth.

In this context, the work of the spokesperson is very close to ordinary interpersonal relations. In other words – the first impression is important, which, according to psychological research, develops within the first 30 seconds. Then the original emotional assessment of a given person arises, which then verbalises in the form of short assessment messages leading to acceptance or rejection. It comes down to the statement “I like him” / “I don't like him”, “I trust him” / “I don't trust him”, etc. (Pietrzak 2003: 12). If representatives of the media recognize the spokesperson X as interesting and trustworthy, there is a significant chance that they will be more willing to obtain information from him and rarely doubt their veracity. This will bear fruit in the future when, for example, in a crisis situation it will be necessary to additionally mute or publicize, or simply to provide some additional content – for example strictly promotional (of course within the limits provided for by law). This aspect of the functioning of press spokesmen would also have to be classified as a borderline of ethical acceptability, because it uses non-formal relationships built up thanks to various social engineering practices to achieve institutional goals.

Knowledge of the law – in the area related to the area of operation of the institution, the media, personal data protection or advertising – is also a “must have” for the arsenal of spokespersons. Observing the law seems to be quite obvious, but the fact of observing the law does not say anything about the ethical condition of a person. It is easy to imagine a situation in which legal provisions justify unethical activities.

Details in the image of the press spokesman play an equally important role as the broadly defined professionalism and preparation for

the profession. Although journalists should not make hasty judgments, like all people, they often rely on a stereotypical perception of reality and its conclusions. Consequently – a well-dressed spokesperson is decent, so he informs us honestly. This is, of course, only a simplification, but still a true picture of journalist-spokesperson relations. (Pietrzak 2003: 14). This is another area of borderline activities where, using simple sociological and psychological tricks, the spokesperson builds an image that is not necessarily true.

The work of a spokesman is like a spectacle where the spokesperson plays the role of a moderator of the performance. In a sense, it is him who, with the approval of the supervisor, decides who/what will be in the foreground and if and when the next actors will join the game. (Pietrzak 2003: 15). Incidentally, it should be added that the Spokesperson's work doesn't end when they leave the office. Practitioners recommend keeping strictly business relations with representatives of the media. The second aspect worth mentioning is also the fact that it is impossible to place a clear line between John Smith and spokesman John Smith. If someone wants to interpret the private opinion of the spokesperson and assign them to the institution, he will do it easily. Therefore, a spokesperson must be characterized by advanced vigilance. Not only does this apply to personal relationships with other people, but also, for example, social media activity. The work of the spokesperson outside of work is inseparable from ethics and professional ethics. The ethical doubts of the spokesperson's behaviour in the private sphere will cast a shadow over his/her professionalism and, consequently, on the represented institution. It's probably the most evident thing here – press spokespeople are rarely accidental people. They are professionals always and everywhere, and thus – they almost never leave the role, which means that the spokesperson is not known exactly, which in turn makes it impossible to determine its value system, so it is not known what ethical system would define it. In other words – a professional spokesperson acts somehow beyond ethics (which does not mean unethical).

The above information gives a certain picture of the features that a spokesperson should have, but of course they do not exhaust the description of the person holding this function. Going further, it should be noted that the spokesperson should be dynamic and creative (especially if the task area assigned to them assumes a great deal of freedom in creating information). It should have the willingness and skills to create a new quality. It must have the ability to quickly express, write, comment, make speeches or occasional letters and correct. They must move freely in the area of Public Relations and advertising, know the current

economic and legal contexts. It is also worth mentioning humility. A spokesperson should be aware that they do not know everything, that they are not always right and that some things may go beyond him. (Gajdka 2012: 20).

As Anna Adamus-Matuszyńska writes, the ideal spokesperson focuses the qualities that both the employer and the media expect from him. These are:

1. A position in the structure of the organization, affecting both the prestige of the person occupying this position and the freedom of its operation during the implementation of the designated tasks.
2. Substantive knowledge and experience in actions characteristic of the spokesperson's work, such as knowledge in the field of journalism, negotiation and mediation skills, knowledge in social psychology, sociology, culture, economics, law (including press law) and other sciences, in depending on the industry represented.<sup>2</sup>
3. Self-presentation - that is, the ability to manage impressions, and thus the process of controlling the manner in which the spokesperson receives the person treating him as the main representative of the organization.
4. The level of professional ethics – means the compliance of the action with postulates (prohibitions and orders), defining the way of performing the profession and the purposes it serves.” (Adamus-Matuszyńska 2010: 17–18).

Such sketching of the image of the press spokesman should verify the willingness of the parts aspiring to this function. Of course, here we are talking about cases when someone wants to do their job well and honestly because, as mentioned above, there are institutions in which one can work as a spokesperson with a minimum of effort. In addition, while the reference to codes of professional ethics is fully justified, there is not much to refer to. Assumptions about the professional ethics of the spokesperson are the resultant of: journalistic ethics, PR ethics and advertising as well as ethics of the represented institution.

An important element in understanding the specifics of a spokesperson's work is that they cannot be limited to answering questions. They must initiate contacts with the media, have curiosities for journalists and

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of press spokespersons of public and non-public higher education institutions, the represented industry requires knowledge of almost all sciences. Of course, we are not talking about knowledge at the academic level, but one that allows them to clarify scientific issues for the needs of media recipients to whom specific content is communicated. In addition, knowledge of the methodology of particular sciences is useful, as well as knowledge of current research results in given disciplines.



useful information from the point of view of their recipients. It is also worth remembering that not just the information itself is used to maintain relations with the media. A good spokesperson should remember the media patronage of events organized by the institution or promotion tools such as a sponsored article or a paid advertisement (Gajdka 2012: 22).

An important aspect of the press spokesperson's work is also his position in the hierarchy of institutions. This apparent truism should be viewed in two ways. First of all, as mentioned above – colloquially speaking – the position must hold sufficient rank to easily and efficiently extract information from within. However, it can't be brought to the fore, because its actions can be perceived as, for example, an attempt to usurp someone's position. On the other hand, appearing in the media, they must remember that they are the representative of the institution and act on its behalf, and not their own - in other words – excessive “pressure on glass” is not a desirable feature of the press spokesperson. (Buller 2003: 97).

Although, in formal terms, spokespeople have and should (by caring for the interest of the represented institution) facilitate the life of journalists (which in itself may raise ethical doubts), they do not have such a possibility. This happens in institutions where we are dealing with a full centralization of the decision-making process. In such cases, any, even trivial, information must be consulted with the superior. Such a model means that obtaining the simplest information, or even the most banal commentary, lasts for hours and sometimes days, which, in consequence, leads to a significant deterioration of relations with journalists. At the end of the tedious process of obtaining information, there is also a request to send the material for authorization, which extends the process and puts the proverbial dot over the I and undermines relations with the media.

As for the scope of duties of the press spokesman, it is important to present the employer and his image, and the need for a particular model. Equally important in this context is the real perception of the boss, the validity of the institution and the content it provides. It happens that the boss is convinced that all messages coming from the institution subject to him are essentially important. If the media do not want to publish material the fault, of course, lies with the incompetent spokesperson.

The question that needs to be answered is whether the superior wants to have an employee who is only responsive, in other words will be a “live website” or “answering machine” repeating top-down messages, or maybe he cares about the person who will provide added value? (Gajdka 2012: 23). In the first case, this does not require extraordinary qualifications from the spokesperson. Their task is to be able to use the

language of spoken and written machine to reproduce content efficiently. The second case is a creative unit that maintains a lively relationship with journalists who can not only respond but also create information. For this, however, a general action plan is needed that is a derivative of the institution's mission. Such a plan must include a description of communication pillars – flagships and major communication axes, and provide the ombudsman considerable freedom of action within a broad plan. Some of the superiors, as the practice shows, have a significant problem with that. They do not believe in the competences of the people they employ and do not allow them to act freely, which translates into a lowering of the quality of the message, employee frustration and the superior's dissatisfaction. Such a situation takes place very often and never ends positively for any interested party. According to some researchers, it is unacceptable for the Spokesperson to limit them selves to the buffer function, where the spokesperson becomes active only when a crisis occurs (when an effective response is usually too late). (Rozwadowska 2002: 309).

Thus, the spectrum of press spokespeople can be very wide and their tasks range from routine and clichéd answers to journalists' questions to lobbying and agenda building, which is the location of topics important for the institution in public discussion. (Gajdka 2012: 24). A certain modification of this action is the use of the expert spokesperson by the press spokesman. This action is particularly easy from the perspective of institutions of higher education, because these institutions, due to their specificity, have experts in most areas. In this context, the question about the scope of the independence of the spokesperson and their relations within the institution is again raised. If the spokesperson has considerable freedom in the selection of experts, they may try to create them as opinion leaders who, as commentators of various aspects of reality in the media, will influence recipients and, consequently, create a demand for a specific service – e.g. graduates of specific fields of study who are accidentally in the offer of their native unit. Such a measure, on a larger scale, also has the characteristics of manipulation, and is hence unethical action.

Media monitoring is also an important task area for spokespeople. Formerly it was a tedious task and consuming a large amount of time. Currently, among the tools used by spokespersons, there are specialized internet platforms, which, after purchasing the appropriate subscription, provide daily reports containing information on the presence of specified keywords in the media. Assuming some inaccuracy of results, by supplementing the received report with the traditional "press-case", the

spokesperson can easily find out who, when and how they described the institution in which the spokesperson works. On this basis, it can design further activities, indicate to the supervisor the emergence of new, potentially important trends in which the institution should enter, or pay attention to any threat that requires a reaction. (Pasionek 2012).

Spokespersonship as a media-related profession is part of a broader context that can be described as an ethical context. There are a significant number of institutions and codes defining the ethical principles of media and media-related professions. We are dealing here, among others with the Code of Ethics of the Polish Public Relations Association, the Code of Good Practices of the Union of Public Relations Companies, the Code of Ethics of the Association of Polish Journalists, the Code of Customs of the Association of Journalists of the Republic of Poland, and the Ethical Charter of Media. (Gajdka 2012: 27). It is true that the existence of ethical codes does not condition the observance of the rules. It does not change the fact that the persons holding the office of spokesperson, especially in public universities, are expected to observe universally binding ethical principles and standards and to have a transparent system of values. It seems obvious that the ethical standards of the press spokesperson will be automatically identified with the standards in force in the institution he represents. Hence, caution is advocated in formulating “private” opinions and, for example, social media activity. In one case taken from real life, the issue of the political involvement of the university spokesman on a private profile in one of the social media platforms was discussed, which led to a wider discussion related to the apolitical nature of higher education institutions. Such a case raises a very large “gray area” in which a spokesperson can function, and the actions taken by them burden only themselves and their conscience. While earlier spokespeople were former journalists or employees of media and communication universities and presented an ethical standpoint that coincides with their work, which is a conditional value in their position as a spokesperson, nowadays, when a spokesperson (or rather a communications specialist) has become a separate, highly professionalised job – the effect counts more than the value. Ethical standards are only a tool, or an element of the institution’s mission, but they do not condition the work of spokespersons.

For the needs of the thread presented above, let us assume that speaking about press officers, we will leave the notion of “media-related function” and embed it in the area of Public Relations. This enables the formulation of transparent principles of the spokesperson’s actions in relation to the wider context defined by the widely accepted rules of the

industry. The work of the contemporary press spokesman should therefore be based on five pillars:

1. Truthfulness – the spokesperson must tell the truth.
2. Harmless – the actions of the spokesperson should not harm any of the parties involved or present in the case under discussion.
3. Magnificence – the overriding goal of activities undertaken by spokespersons – especially those related to politics or higher education should be the principle of “greater good”.
4. Confidentiality – apart from the issues arising directly from the applicable law, the spokesperson should absolutely remember about the protection of the privacy of persons affected by the discussed, or matters and events created by them.
5. Justice – here strongly connected with the principle of social responsibility. If we think about a spokesperson representing one of the largest and most recognizable colleges, the impact of the content it generates is very large and can significantly affect public opinion. (Adamus-Matuszyńska 2010: 16–17).

I think that people living in the real world are well aware of the non-direct translatability of codex recommendations to life practice. Although the codes of journalist ethics say, for example, that a journalist has the right and obligation to seek and spread the truth and that he should distinguish information from opinion, we should see that we do not always manage to follow these demands when following daily media reports. The same applies to press spokespeople who (differently it looks in different institutions) must (which often results from the provisions in the contract of employment) care for the good image of the represented institution.

Another obstacle that press spokespeople have to face is their relationship with specific journalists, or, more broadly, representatives of the media. If the spokesperson happens to function according to the principle – the end justifies the means – a situation described on the basis of the research conducted by Sławomir Gawroński may occur – “At the interface between journalists and spokespersons, there may arise numerous temptations that threaten the professional and impartial fulfilment of duties based on attachment to a canon of behaviours and attitudes, based on a long-term experience platform. Signs of misappropriation of ethical principles, numerous behaviours on the borderline of corruption, sometimes even corruption actions are described in press publications, reported by participants in media relations communication processes, and sometimes visible also with the naked eye or heard among «industry friends». There is no doubt that behaviour of this kind disturbs the clarity

of relations between journalists and PR managers, as well as becoming the generator of subsequent conflicts and the growing dislike of both industries. Extremely unethical behaviour in media relations does not seem widespread, but it is difficult to research it reliably, and the results of research based on declarative responses can't always be trusted. There is no doubt, however, that every case of such actions should be revealed and stigmatized even by environmental ostracism." (Gawroński 2006: 286–287).

S. Gawroński's research, despite the declarative character of the answer he indicated, shows very aptly the practice of the functioning and relations of specialists in the area of Public Relations with journalists. For example, if the spokesperson organizes so-called press breakfasts, how and where to set the boundary between professional action and the attempt to get involved in journalistic activities beyond the journal.

We have already determined that the spokesperson should be a good, competent actor with precisely defined ethical standards and specific predispositions and technical and workshop skills. However, this is far too little to fully understand the specifics of this profession. Already quoted above, H. Pietrzak claims that the spokesperson must be a very good, if not an excellent social psychologist. Let's look at what features make them worthy of this name.

Let us remember that in the case of a press spokesperson, the acting skills and manipulation tools that they possess consist in the fact that by presenting the information they can judiciously select the means of expression and message so that each of the recipients has the impression that they received exactly the information they wanted. It is a demanding task, but it is easy for the spokesperson, that it is always (or at least should be, because in practice it turns out, especially in strongly decentralized public universities, it is not. Deans of individual faculties, conducting autonomous activities do not always inform the spokesperson. The spokesperson alone is not always able to get to this information, because it would require constant monitoring within the university, which is a feasible task, but too time-consuming that would interfere in other tasks) at the source of information and what this way, it has a lot of data that can be selectively dispense to the media. In order for the transmission of information to proceed according to the assumed scenario, the spokesperson must have knowledge and skills regarding planning and strategic thinking, as well as planning tactics for a specific speech. (Pietrzak 2003: 24). The mere fact of being able to dispense information, while knowing the facts, creates a field for abuse.

Personality traits that are needed for this kind of activity can be associated with the temperament of the person who is the spokesperson. Speaking of these characteristics, I mean the relatively predisposed personality of a given person. The first is reactivity. In a simplified way, one can say that a reactive person is sensitive to stimuli. The nervous system of such a person is quicker to arouse, and thus is more susceptible to manipulative influences. The conclusion is that in the case of a press spokesman, relatively low reactivity is desirable. (Pietrzak 2003: 24).

Another important feature is intelligence understood as openness to experience. In other words, the spokesperson must be "curious", eager and ready to constantly get to know each other. The involvement of intelligence in this process is obvious, because it allows even combining new data with already existing ones, drawing conclusions from them and creating new qualities resulting from this combination.

An important aspect of the personality of the press spokesman is the represented level of domination. The person will be excessively vulnerable to external influences. What seems obvious is that the ombudsman can't be overly dominant, because it will hinder relations both inside and outside the institution. There is probably no golden measure that is the optimal measure of the level of dominance necessary for the efficient functioning of the press spokesman. It can be assumed, however, that here too the key role is played by intelligence, which allows us to determine what attitude to take. However, this solution is effective only for the dominant persons. (Pietrzak 2003: 25).

Most of us are probably close to a real idea of what features a spokesperson should have. It is clear that they should be able to construct oral and written messages nicely and correctly, to know journalistic genres and communication tools. They should be smart, have a good presence (which means more absorbing than just being attractive). They should be characterized by a certain degree of domination combined with emotional intelligence and empathy. They must be able to control his emotions and, in demanding situations, turn off his private emotions in favour of emotions that are needed to convey specific content from the represented institution. Often, however, we do not realize that a spokesperson is always present. Ideally, the spokesperson lives the life of the institution, if only because of the necessity of being constantly up to date. In the case of public and non-public higher education institutions whose area of activity is very wide, it is extremely difficult and intellectually, temporally and emotionally involving. If we understand specific press advocacy in higher education as a very wide range of activities, it also includes planning promotional and image campaigns, attention to

detail related to the implementation of individual events and supervision over their course. Looking at the extreme case of the press spokesperson, it is impossible to properly determine their task scope in practice.

Such a case raises the question of whether being a spokesperson is simply a job or a type of mission? Is it possible in the long run to function in a dichotomous reality on the verge of split personality, having one package of emotions for private use and the other for business use? In a situation where the mission and values of the institution coincide with those of the spokesperson – this is not a major problem (although everybody sometimes has a weaker day when they do not want to smile despite the situation needing it). The situation is diametrically different if there is no consensus between the values advocated by the institution and the advocate, and even worse when there is a contradiction between them.

At this point, I want to draw attention to one aspect of the press spokesperson's work. Namely, the fact that their tasks often go beyond the office and official speeches and boil down to unofficial and social relations not only with journalists, but also with colleagues, contractors, politicians, partners of institutions or business people. (Pietrzak 2003: 103).

For such occasions in the arsenal of the press spokesman there must be broadly understood social skills, and the ability to conduct a conversation on a wide variety of topics. Unfortunately, because this is an additional difficulty, the spokesperson must remember that their statements can be treated as the position of the institution they represents. Of course, a separate issue is the level of trust resulting from having private relations with, for example, representatives of the media.

To talk, you have to have something to talk about, and this in turn requires being up-to-date not only with the situation in the institution, but also the knowledge of current side events. Apart from the unquestionable value of such knowledge in social conversations, it also has an added value in the form of the possibility of creating information contexts, i.e., colloquially speaking, “sticking to current, fashionable events”. Experts are an excellent tool for this purpose. If the university spokesperson knows what is happening in politics or in the economy and sees (thanks to media monitoring) that the current topic is, for example, the topic of taxes, can report to the expert in advance, in cooperation with who will prepare the situation analysis and send it to the media. Here, new technologies and tools come to the rescue, which enable easy preparation of not only written materials, but also audio and video.

Regardless of the individual characteristics of a spokesperson, it should be remembered that in most cases they do not work independently, i.e. in isolation from other (if there are any) structures related to marketing or Public Relations.

Summing up, it can be said that while ethical standards as such do not evolve (apart from the lack of documents clearly defining the professional ethics of spokespersons), the press advocacy itself evolves. Because it becomes more professional, the space for ethics is reduced. This, in itself, is not as terrible as it might seem, because the key is in this case the moral condition of the spokesperson as a human being. Apart from extreme cases of discrepancies in the institution's value system and its spokesperson, it seems that the spokespersons can achieve their private and institutional goals without a “moral hangover” as long as they are a true professional.

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## Ewolucja standardów etycznych w założeniach polityki komunikacyjnej państwowych uczelni wyższych

### Streszczenie

Publiczne szkoły wyższe (głównie uniwersytety) odgrywają szczególną rolę w kształtowaniu postaw społecznych. Same zatem powinny reprezentować wysoki poziom etyki. Z jednej strony nie jest to trudne, ponieważ normy moralne wpisują się w życie akademickie jako takie. Z drugiej strony należy pamiętać, że społeczność akademicka składa się z bardzo zróżnicowanych grup, często o rozbieżnych interesach, co utrudnia unifikację standardów (oczywiście unifikacja dla dokumentu jest bardzo łatwa, ale tu chodzi raczej o praktyczne stosowanie norm, najlepiej w duchu imperatywu kategorycznego – czyli poprzez wewnętrzną świadomość konieczności ich użycia). Powstaje zatem pytanie – czy możliwa jest efektywna i etyczna komunikacja z otoczeniem?

**Słowa kluczowe:** media, etyka, prasa, media relations, PR, rzecznik prasowy, uniwersytet, komunikacja