


NEWS PROMOTERS IN JOURNALISM AND SCIENCE: a reflection on ethics and social function in contemporary times

OS NEWS PROMOTERS NO JORNALISMO E NA CIÊNCIA: uma reflexão sobre ética e função social na contemporaneidade

NEWS PROMOTERS EN PERIODISMO Y CIENCIA: una reflexión sobre ética y función social en los tiempos contemporáneos

Thalita Mascarelo da Silva

Master's student in Communication at the Federal University of Espírito Santo. thalitamld@hotmail.com.

 0000-0002-0703-8226

Victor Israel Gentili

PhD in Sciences by ECA-USP. Full Professor in the Department of Social Communication / Federal University of Espírito Santo (Ufes). vgentili@gmail.com.

 0000-0003-4636-3926

Mailing address: Federal University of Espírito Santo (Ufes), Avenida Fernando Ferrari, 514, University Campus of Goiabeiras - CEP 29.075.710 - Vitória, ES - Brazil.

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ABSTRACT:

Journalism and science fulfill a social function that can only be performed if followed by ethical values. The contemporary moment creates ethical challenges about pressure for immediacy by technology evolution and by specialized actors of scientific information. The main objective of this article is based on the exposition of analyzes and articulations of various authors on ethics, journalism, science and news sources as news promoters, with emphasis on health, and their professional interlocutions, essential for quality journalism, not only utility, but which enables scientific literacy, the democratization of knowledge and the promotion of health

KEYWORDS: Ethics; Scientific journalism. News sources. Democratization of knowledg. Health promotion.

Introduction

The word ethics arises from the Greek ethos, which qualifies the expression common dwelling, that is, the concept of ethics originated in an attempt to stipulate rules for collective coexistence, which leads to duties, obligations through reflections on behalf of the collective. Ethics has a political character, of struggle between social forces.

The increasing flexibility and individualization of duties and social rights makes ethics intended as collective more complex, which has consequences for the social function of journalism. What is the social responsibility of a newsroom when receiving press releases from press offices? Barbosa (1990, p. 37) defines in a remarkable way the relationship between press and the social:

The press is the view of the Nation because through the press, the Nation follows what occurs near and far, sees who harms it, sees what they hide and conspire, collects what they evade or steal, identifies those who intend to destroy it, watch over what is of interest and beware of the threat.

While journalism is daily present in society, science appears as a very specific category, which also fulfills a social function, but which in practice takes place distant from the population in general. Society needs to follow the debates coming from science and this contact usually occurs through mass media (SIQUEIRA, 2018). Journalism plays a social role in mediating specific public interest issues in order to mean, group and broaden them in the public sphere.

It was no small feat to be the nation's visual organ. But the press, among free peoples, is not only the instrument of sight, it is not just the apparatus of seeing, the use of only one sense. It participates in these collective organisms in almost all vital functions. It is, above all, through advertising that people breathe (BARBOSA, 1990, p. 37).

Both scientific production and journalistic production only exercise a social function if followed by ethics that values the common good. This article intends to analyze the interlocution between ethics, science and journalism and their relations with the news sources recognized as news promoters in order to point out questions and reflections on the social responsibility of scientific journalism, especially health-specialized journalism.

Ethics and scientific and journalistic knowledge

Ethics consists of a philosophical concept that arises in Ancient Greece from thinkers such as Aristotle and Epithet who paid attention to the issue of kindness. Aristotle elaborated the first known theory about ethics: in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, the philosopher argues about human kindness requiring the use of rationality so that, in this way, individuals obtain a life of virtue (PLAISANCE, 2011). In agreement with the ideas of the thinker, Plaisance (2011) defines that working ethics means investigating, deliberating, prevailing, that is, it consists of rationally and toughly seeking justifications for actions that put the individual in conflict with his / her values. Therefore, ethical decisions occur from an epistemic effort in a confrontation with dilemmas in which certain moral values will stand out at the expense of others.

Journalism and science are areas intrinsically connected with ethical values, since they fulfill a social role in guaranteeing the right to information and knowledge, providing more quality of life and strengthening democratic principles. Therefore, the defense of ethics is fundamental for both journalists and scientists, who transform the quality of their products into a generator of public debate, opinion formation and inspection of public interest issues, playing a social role. Bucci (2000) states that “journalism itself is already a manifestation of ethics: it consists in publishing what others want to hide, but that the citizen has the right to know” (p. 41). Sagan (2006) reports that science acts in opposition to secrecy and associates science and democracy in a way that suggests to science the power to enforce democracy, if done with honesty and adequate reasoning, at the same time that it can subvert democracy, if not carried out with strict and ethical standards.

In view of this, the ethical issue becomes fundamental as it is fundamental for understanding the role of journalism and science in a society. The philosophical knowledge of ethics, from Aristotle in the search for theorization through a necessary reflexive habit that requires time and the construction of education in this direction, since just knowing ethical values does not mean practicing them, denotes the importance of understanding ethics as a collective and cultural resolution that currently follows as an indispensable reflection of society.

The technological transformations that permeate the journalistic environment contribute to a greater flow of information that forces professionals to deal with immediacy, with the search for instantaneousness that does not match the intellectual and moral work of journalists, which hinders their work with regard to the quality of information. In this context, press releases, coming from news agencies and press offices, look for space in newspapers, and for journalists, these press releases emerge as a useful and qualified information resource.

Technology is providing journalists with a context that includes unprecedented information, which; however, can generate a certain neglect of fundamental stages for quality journalism and that seeks a social function, such as the process of investigating the news. “The journalist today is a news bureaucrat sitting in front of a computer that serves as a source of information, newsroom, and text screen. It is likely that journalists and society no longer believe in the social function of the journalism” (ADGHIRNI, 2005, p. 47). Mc Luhan (1977, p. 60) reports: When a society invents or adopts technology that gives predominance or new importance to one of the senses, the

relationship of senses with each other is transformed. Man is transformed: his eyes, ears, all his senses are transformed.

The constant use of technology has hardened language, sustained intellectual laziness, which modifies ways of acting, although this does not mean that the standards for a clearly ethical communication have changed (PLAISANCE, 2011). On the contrary, the current context socially challenges researchers and individuals in general to think about the place of ethics and its importance in contemporary times, which works at a pace that is harmful to the hard and rational thinking necessary to do things ethically. "Ethics is present in every decision that seeks quality information. Openly debating ethical issues is a public service: it educates the critical spirit of citizens and helps to improve the press" (BUCCI, 2000, p. 211).

Although difficulties are notorious, journalism professionals need to pay attention to technological changes and hybridizations in the journalistic ecosystem in order to find the space of social function in their profession. The news market cannot completely absorb journalistic knowledge, because, if it does, it corrupts it with consequences for quality information. Bucci (2000) warns for the great ethical principle of journalism, which is to fulfill a social function before it is a business. It takes an ethical effort by journalists with regard to their role as information professional. Thus, who gives meaning to the news in the newspaper?

Journalism and news promoters

The journalist's work does not occur individually. It is inserted in a professional culture of political and economic pressures in a conflictual logic involving several social actors, and according to Pinto (2000), the quality of journalistic information is an achievement resulting from a frequent struggle that can be lost or won. Marcondes Filho (1984) contextualizes the advent of journalism within the capitalist structure. "It (the press) only exists - at least as we know it today - by transforming information into goods and placing them, transformed, altered, sometimes mutilated according to the ideological-political guidelines of their craftsmen, for sale" (p.22).

Flexible capitalism gives new meaning to time-space relations, creating dilemmas and crises, mainly from the 1960s (HARVEY, 1992). The historical contextualization of social changes is important so that the current moment of flexibilization and individualization does not seem to be the result of a moment that arose without history and previously suggested aspects and that, in fact, were only intensified through the annihilation of time and reduction of space.

Such changes in space-time generate an acceleration of capital, thus issues such as ephemerality, fragmentation, volatility, disposability, instantaneousness, discontinuity and flexibility dictate the pace of people and things making long-term planning more difficult (HARVEY, 1992). The author sees the media based on its images, narratives and advertising, capable of creating an integrating process in cultural practices, showing its importance in the growth dynamics of capitalism and globalization.

Therefore, ethical values need to remain a public debate so that news corruption is the exception and not the rule, and cannot be understood only as the role of the journalist. In the introduction of the Gomes' book (2002), Kucinski (2002) reports: "From socially constituted ethics, we move to ethics defined around each individual, which seems to be a contradiction of terms, a paradox, since personal conducts can only be evaluated in their articulation with other conducts" (p. 9).

The current moment of changes in journalism directly affects journalistic practice, reshaping the industrial style of newspapers. According to Anderson, Bell and Shirky (2013), "post-industrial journalism assumes that current institutions will lose revenue and market share and that, if they want to maintain or even increase their relevance, they will have to explore new working methods and processes based on digital media" (p. 38). Currently, journalism no longer manufactures a fixed final product; this process is not sustained at the technological moment when newsrooms work through computers (ANDERSON, BELL AND SHIRKY, 2013). Newsrooms are reducing in size; the remaining journalists are improving themselves and becoming multitask producers, forcing a restructuring of journalistic institutions and professionals (ANDERSON, BELL AND SHIRKY, 2013).

In this context, press offices and news agencies become important information actors, absorbing unemployed journalists who in a qualified and professional way, have the potential to interfere in the news environment, producing content absorbed by newspapers, thus originating a new protagonist, which Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester (1993) called news promoters.

A press release from an advisor or an agency, that is, a commissioned news that is published in its entirety in a newspaper whose content has not undergone a journalistic investigation, by any checking with other sources, which is published as if it were another journalistic news of a given newspaper, can be interpreted as lack of critical rigor in the newspaper and professional accommodation and, therefore, lack of ethics?

It is significant to observe through bibliographic search, the concern of researchers in the use of the term “source of news”. In journalistic studies, corrections and clarifications are proposed in relation to the classification of sources, as if currently the nomenclature was not sufficient to explain the role of these “sources” in journalistic practice. In this way, a major problem on the subject is proposed, generating the construction of new taxonomies that can match name and performance in the market.

The term “source”, used without any major problems, certainly does not allow us seeing that the processes of obtaining information, defining frameworks and ways of interpretation, narrative configuration of news and its apprehension involve complex dynamics in different games of interest, of power and action. Suggesting the idea of information to be naturally offered and that simply to be “collected” by journalists, the term always requires being corrected and adjusted to account for this range of relationships that it erases. In this sense, the following question emerges: if the term needs these corrections, if it is clearly insufficient, as can be seen, what is the reason for keeping it? (LEAL & CARVALHO, 2015, p. 613).

Not all sources seen in newspapers act as news promoters, so there is a difference. News promoters are qualified professionals who understand the logic of journalism and work in the communication area. Official and unofficial sources, that is, authorities and specialists who have social credibility hire communication professionals as advisers whose job is to deal with journalists on a daily basis. The specialist, therefore, can become a news promoter, whose speech frequently is not enough to legitimize a topic in the newspaper.

This characteristic is becoming common among public people; however, each actor has his own responsibilities and particularities with regard to the disclosed information, which can generate conflicts of interest. An advisor responds to his advised and not to society; a specialist in a certain area seeks visibility to reach more customers from his scientific information and the journalist seeks information of public interest. Pereira Junior (2010) reports that the unique speech of a specialized source rarely guarantees the consistency of information, in fact, it contributes for the journalist to become submissive to that source or advisory, in addition to dehumanizing information. “The press needs to be strong, independent and active. The press must exist for the citizen. When power subtracts information from the citizen, it is corrupting the bases of the exercise of ethical and good journalism and is also corrupting society” (BUCCI, 2000, p. 33).

Bucci (2000) also discusses “the truth of facts” and argues that there is no impartial and neutral report, what exists is a version of facts in the form of a discourse, being all ideological discourse. For this reason, journalistic ethics in relation to consulted and visible voices, in order to be successful in relation to the reliability of information, needs plurality, confrontation, versions and not a single version.

The Code of Ethics of the National Federation of Journalists (Fenaj), as well as the codes of ethics that journalistic institutions create for their newspapers are in theory useful for the improvement of the journalistic practice. Any journalism manual highlights the journalist's professional relationship with the source and the need for caution regarding manipulation by the source and dependence on a single source. The search for these ideals needs to be faced daily by news actors.

A necessary problematization in relation to the code of ethics consists in legitimizing the concept of journalist. According to the Fenaj code (2007), Journalists are those who work in the newsroom and those who work outside it, such as the advisor. Bucci (2000) and Adghirni (2005) contest this recognition, since the advisor does not practice journalism. Bucci (2000) clarifies that press officers work for a client or boss, and their efficiency is proven according to the amount of favorable news that appear in the newspapers and the amount of negative information about the client or boss that is silenced by newspapers. Information is investigated and denounces, alerts, indicates interest and public relevance, contributing in a critical and social way. Communication; however, does not go through investigation and can favor only the private interest, because what is revealed is directed to those who want to be communicated and not to the general public. The advisor, even if he has a degree in journalism, even if he has worked in newsroom, is not paid to communicate what is of public interest but rather to disclose what is of interest to his client or boss (BUCCI, 2000).

However, it is worth mentioning that the work of advisories can play an important role for journalistic information, as a complement, as an idea of important agenda to be constructed and disclosed in a newspaper, if such information is verified and confirmed by a journalist. The combination of the advisor's work with that of the journalist can assist in important journalistic texts of public interest. Lage (2008) explains that the insertion of a new agent between the source of information and the journalist, the advisor, was a transformation that in Brazil, although initially being viewed with suspicion, was gradually understood as necessary with “a moralizing and

ethical aspect”, which made companies to understand the information released to the public differently and not as “mere expansion of commercial advertising” (p. 51).

The role of newspapers in this scenario needs to be a practical commitment to their social function. Pinto (2000) reiterates that the journalist, in an attempt to minimize control of the source over whatever topic is debated, has the duty to select, frame and contextualize the information obtained from sources so that the news is disseminated to society according to the specific rules and speeches of the journalistic area, including and excluding sentences according to what is pertinent to the citizen. The reporter has to go beyond the technique: he needs to be more human and less machinic and to look for more knowledge and research about his news, and to be even more careful in relation to the “news” that is sent to newsrooms with the objective of immediate disclosure.

Journalism continues to have the importance of informing and providing a service to the citizen, for that, it needs to fight for its autonomy to inform, denying total submission to whatever advisories want to have as journalistic information. As long as there are professionals in search of this objective, prioritizing the search for plurality of voices in newspapers, journalism will continue to have relevance and social function. “The dialogue is democratic; the monologue is authoritarian” (MEDINA, 2002, p.7).

Health-specialized science journalism

The path of scientific journalism in Brazil occurs concurrently with that of the Brazilian press, with founder of *Correio Braziliense*, Hipólito da Costa, who left his legacy since the end of the 18th century (BUENO, 2009) as pioneer in this trajectory in science and technology. Another great name in Brazilian scientific dissemination was José Reis, who participated in the creation and consolidation of institutions such as the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC) and the São Paulo Research Support Foundation (Fapesp) (MASSARANI AND ALVES, 2019). In addition to working as a researcher, Reis also worked at Grupo Folha for almost six decades (MASSARANI AND ALVES, 2019). In the 20th century, scientific dissemination intensified, becoming more popular, and from the 1970s, being recognized by newspapers as specialization, gaining its own editorials, which guaranteed more relevance to science journalism (MORAES AND CARNEIRO, 2018).

Institutionalized science, in itself, constitutes and is valued as a social function; however, the process of science growth took place in order to distance the scientific

community from society (VOGT AND MORALES, 2018) which, in turn, enhances the role of scientific journalism: it democratizes scientific information and, at the same time, transmits knowledge providing scientific literacy.

Another problem seen as paramount in science consists in combating the so-called pseudosciences, which use non-scientific concepts, but have great appeal to the general public and, for this, Moraes and Carneiro (2018) believe that the valorization of communication professionals is important for better clarification on science subjects. In health-specialized journalism; however, difficulties, setbacks and controversies are discussed in relation to many topics that are classified as service journalism or utility journalism, sounding more like quick, miraculous and unscientific solutions to stay healthy than, in fact, science journalism.

It could then be said that although academic texts usually associate science with method, discovery, creation and the myth of the meeting of truth and reality, in the media, science is many other things! Sometimes a powerful and profitable productive enterprise, which can even become calamitous, sometimes an instrument for discovering, recording and meeting of the unexpected and even the uncontrollable! Sometimes a political instrument to promote development, allow punishment or salvation, and even the (re) enrollment of subjects in normality (WORTMANN, 2018, p. 248).

For the journalist, there is a certain complexity in writing scientific information, since he needs to give a popular meaning to specialized speeches, that is, scientific information in a newspaper must necessarily undergo decoding, translation. Bueno (2010) reports that the journalist in his role of scientific disseminator, often does not have the capacity to reformulate the specific discourse of the consulted source.

Professionals working with scientific journalism need to critically understand this situation to combat it, as it has always occurred; however, it is more accentuated in the current market moment, especially in the war, pharmaceutical and tobacco industries, which are not concerned about lack of ethics, and decide to manipulate public opinion (BUENO, 2009).

The big question today in relation to technological innovations that affect the communicational ecosystem concerns the excessive volume of information, which needs specific treatment, because much of what is accessed can be fake, at the same time that it can be useful information, as a data source. Most editorials in politics and economics use more than data sources; however, this resource should be used more in science and technology (OLIVEIRA, BONATELLI AND LIMA, 2018). The aforementioned authors contextualize data journalism as a specialization that manifested itself in the

mid-2000s, characterized by using data as a base in journalistic texts, having as a fundamental aspect the journalist as a researcher. Anderson, Bell and Shirky (2013), in their report, also presented the journalist as a hacker as a possibility for the current moment, that is, it would be precisely this researcher journalist who seeks data and is not satisfied only with official statements to add value to the news.

The differential of journalism is to practice an important exercise for the social sphere. It is not just disseminating information, but contextualizing, humanizing, interpreting, debating different perspectives, so that the collective interest prevails, generating debates, dialogues, making that ethical deliberation is collectively encouraged in the face of what is published. Journalism fulfilling a social function democratizes information and enriches knowledge. In this sense, it emerges as elementary a critical look at communication made by great companies of the scientific and technological world that search for media as a way to spread their messages and interests, because often the progress in the market causes negative impacts on the social sphere (BUENO, 2009). Exacerbated agribusiness can be positive from the commercial point of view; however, it can generate high rates of diseases, impairing the quality of life and weakening the struggle to promote the health of the population.

Since health-specialized journalism, incorporating service aspects, can actively influence, for example, the population's eating habits, ethics remains a key issue. Concepts such as healthy living are also constructed by newspapers in the social imagination and, therefore, the citizen's interest must prevail and not strictly the mercantilist side. Wortmann (2018) argues about the science represented in the media:

[...] A disfigured science, distorted and distant from the attributes that enshrined it as one of humanity's most outstanding productions? Or, is this a science outlined and (re) signified from the many contradictions and uncertainties of these so-called 'postmodern times'? (WORTMANN, 2018, p. 249).

Journalism that explains little and affirms much is often more speculative than elucidative. Much of what utilitarian journalism does consists of merely affirming and incorporating advertising properties, such as induction, being the result of consumerist society (VAZ, 2008). Luiz Beltrão (2006) does not classify service journalism as a journalistic genre, as informative, opinionated and interpretive, that is, he sees it as a category that goes beyond traditional genres, although he recognizes its presence in journalism, mainly printed, in addition to arguing that this material is received in

newsrooms and that demands differentiated attention from the journalist. Marques de Melo (2007), on the other hand, integrates the utilitarian genre in his classification in order to complement the news. According to the author (2007), the utilitarian genre emerged at the end of the 20th century as a response to societies inhabited by citizen-consumers and their needs for quick decisions that, in turn, requested immediate information.

Utility health journalism enriches news if used as an add-on, since empty statements about how to have healthy eating do not provide a critical and collective look at political guidelines that need to be known by the population. Health cannot be seen only from cold guidelines. For scientific communication, specifically in health journalism, to be carried out in favor of the population, Bueno (2007) and (2015) exemplify the importance of informing about health promotion as a prerequisite in the culture agenda, that is, expressing that collective health is intrinsically linked to social, political, environmental and economic aspects, disregarding guidelines for miraculous solutions for individual health of utilitarian but sloppy nature.

The news, as a market product, gains more serious connotations when it comes to health because, also in this field, there is a growing commercialization with predominance of reports about body, beauty and health problems that affect people. This news sells much more than other health news and, therefore, is considered strategic in the communication field. In this context, conflicts between health and communication professionals, especially journalists, intensify and those with the more general news production process. There is permanent tension between the market value of the news and the democratic character that communication must have (KUCINSKI, 2002, p. 95).

Health professionals often aim to use communication and journalistic mediation based on a pedagogical function, that is, to clarify health issues of public interest, but nothing deeper than that (KUCINSKI, 2002). However, the journalistic function has the pedagogical factor as secondary feature; the central function is critical-informative, making this information of public interest not only to serve as source of knowledge, but to strengthen the critical awareness of individuals about their rights (KUCINSKI, 2002). Thus, it is necessary to go beyond a conservative coverage on the topic, which blames and focuses much on individuals and their lifestyle, which results in the

invisibility of the manager or health professional and politicians in relation to their role as social representatives (AMARAL AND LANGUARDIA, 2014).

There is an ethical conflict in this relationship. Journalism strives to show what happens, but with the aim of demonstrating what it should be and ask for answers, together with a critical awareness of everyday life, but "science seeks only to know how nature works and not how it should work" (KUCINSKI, 2002, p. 102).

Although scientific journalism is not the only means of scientific dissemination to the population, the contribution of journalism is fundamental if linked to the necessary criticality in this process. In this context, education for the media would be important, since the media permeate social, economic, political and cultural dynamics of a nation-state. The current articulations in society cannot be neglected; therefore, the dialogue between scientific community, media and society needs to be managed (PEZZO, 2018) in favor of more ethics, more debates and more democratization of information and knowledge.

Concluding remarks

This article sought to outline the importance in relation to the understanding of the social function of newspapers, reflecting the role of Brazilian journalism in this scenario with regard mainly to news sources. What does the press currently want? The citizen still believes that it is in journalism that the truth of facts is found. It is necessary to support an ethical relationship between journalism and citizens and that occurs with quality journalism aimed at the common good.

Journalism, which was born in capitalism, is enunciated as a strengthening of democracy that transfers information and knowledge, guaranteeing popular ethic; therefore, it cannot be completely subordinated to the system's marketing precepts, as this posture can generate conflicts with its social responsibility.

How to cultivate ethical ideals above market ones? What can be done so that market interests do not swallow the social role of agents who are willing to inform the population about matters of public interest? The Greeks give us the answer: the ethics.

Globalization came with the absolute dominance of capital over labor and the primacy of business over all other aspects of human life. A

world like this, in which imperialism expresses the interest of investors, presented as a common good, competition does not obey rules nor does individualism know limits, which is a step away from barbarism, and everything that prevents it from happening is the ethical commitment (LAGE, 2008, p. 70).

It is also worth noting that, even in situations of control and precariousness, loopholes in the system will always exist.

Therefore, if the public man is to live in the faith that inspires his fellow citizens, the first, the greatest, the most inviolable of the public man's duties is the duty of truth: truth in councils, truth in debates, truth in acts; truth in government, truth in the tribune, in the press and in everything, truth and more truth (BARBOSA, 1990, p. 67).

It is necessary to rethink and prioritize values, ethics and skills of the social function of journalism at a time when there is a crisis of mediation in the profession, as information reaches the public mediated by different social actors, making the protagonism of journalistic mediation to fade away.

As for scientific and specialized journalism, it is part of this complex and arduous undertaking from Hipólito da Costa to the present day, although much has evolved, much also needs construction and challenge that go beyond technique, they need human courage. Science and the media are close to those of great interest (BUENO, 2009), silencing the place of social function that should be understood as the main role.

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RESUMO:

O jornalismo e a ciência cumprem uma função social que somente pode ser executada se seguida por valores éticos. O momento contemporâneo cria desafios éticos em relação à pressão pelo imediatismo proporcionado pela evolução da tecnologia e pelos atores especializados da informação científica. O objetivo principal deste artigo baseia-se na exposição de análises e articulações de autores sobre ética, jornalismo, ciência e fontes de notícias enquanto news promoters, com ênfase na saúde, e suas interlocuções profissionais, essenciais para um jornalismo de qualidade que possibilite a alfabetização científica, a democratização do saber e a promoção da saúde.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Ética. Jornalismo científico. Fontes de notícias. Democratização do conhecimento. Promoção da saúde.

RESUMEN:

El periodismo y la ciencia cumplen una función social que solo puede realizarse si se siguen valores éticos. El momento contemporáneo crea desafíos éticos en relación con la presión por la inmediatez proporcionada por la evolución de la tecnología y por los actores especializados de la información científica. El objetivo principal de este artículo se basa en la exposición de análisis y articulaciones de varios autores sobre ética, periodismo, ciencia y fuentes de noticias como promotores de noticias, con énfasis en la salud y sus interlocuciones profesionales, esenciales para el periodismo de calidad que permite la alfabetización científica, la democratización del conocimiento y la promoción de la salud.

PALABRAS-CLAVES: Ética. Periodismo científico. Fuentes de noticias. Democratización del conocimiento. Promoción de la salud.