



Małgorzata Laskowska


 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2192-9006>

 malgorzata.laskowska@uksw.edu.pl

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

 <https://ror.org/05sdyjv16>

Teaching media ethics through civic education in Poland: Assumptions of the core curriculum

 <https://doi.org/10.15633/sce.02101>

Abstract

Teaching media ethics through civic education in Poland: Assumptions of the core curriculum

This article presents the results of an analysis of the scope and approach to media ethics issues in the core curriculum for Civic Education in upper-secondary schools, published by the Ministry of National Education (Poland) in March 2025. The study employed qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the complete curriculum text. The analysis demonstrated that media ethics content appears in ten points (12.2% of all entries). Four dominant ethical principles were identified in the document: accuracy and truthfulness of information, countering disinformation and manipulation, responsibility for messages and their social consequences, and critical evaluation of sources and credibility. The results indicate that media ethics content is distinctly practical, focusing on developing specific civic competencies.

Keywords: civic education, ethical competence, ethics teaching, media ethics, media literacy, MEN core curriculum 2025, Poland

From the 2025/2026 academic year, a new subject entitled “Civic Education” has been introduced in post-primary schools in Poland. Its fundamental aim is to develop civic competences among pupils, encourage them to engage in pro-social activities, and increase their interest in knowledge of the functioning of the state and society (MEN 2025a). The contemporary pupil for whom the “Civic Education” curriculum is designed, however, is a young citizen of a new generation, participating in social, political, and cultural life largely through digital media. With regard, therefore, to the contemporary understanding of citizenship, one may pose the question of whether the core curriculum for “Civic Education” has considered the media context, particularly the ethical aspects of media and communication.

Literature review

The aim of civic education is to prepare the individual for active participation in democratic society. This consists in shaping the individual by providing them with information and experiences towards engaged and conscious participation in public life. It is therefore concerned with equipping the pupil

with the appropriate knowledge and skills, as well as forming the attitudes necessary for engaging in democratic processes, and also with assisting in understanding rights and duties, in developing critical thinking, and in becoming active and conscious members of society (Alehegn, 2020; White et al., 2023, p. 249). For this reason, civic education is also termed citizenship education and democracy education (Rahayu et al., 2024, p. 190; De Los Reyes Villareal et al., 2023).

Contemporary civic education takes into account the media context of the world, because media constitute natural environments of life and learning for young people, as well as for acquiring and developing civic competences. Media—both traditional and digital—and now also artificial intelligence—are most frequently the first channels of social and political communication, and thereby a source of information that shapes civic knowledge, views, and attitudes (Marcyński, 2025, pp. 198–199; Leśniczak, 2024; Zhou et al., 2025). In the network, there is an increasing number of applications or content that have a significant role in young citizens undertaking civic decisions or actions. Some of these are more conducive, while others are less so, to the development of civic competences. Certain researchers, therefore, in examining the subject of contemporary citizenship, write explicitly of “digital citizenship,” having in mind this natural participation of media in shaping civic competencies today (Sandi S & Vera, 2025, p. 57).

Another aspect, however, related to media in developing civic competencies is media and communication ethics, for instance in political, religious, or social contexts. The reliability of journalistic information, as well as political and administrative materials disseminated through the media, constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for informed civic decision-making and for the formation of individual opinions on matters of public, social, and cultural life. In this context, therefore, teaching media ethics (understanding how media and journalists ought to act in the public sphere from an ethical perspective) is increasingly treated as a core element of both media education and civic education (Laskowska, 2023; Laskowska, 2018; Karp, 2025, p. 636). The aim of formal education at various levels today is, after all, to prepare pupils for democracy in the post-truth era. For deepening civic competence, the teaching of such elements of media ethics as critical analysis of content, recognition of disinformation, manipulation, propaganda, fake news, and all other abuses of an ethical nature is particularly important (Zuhriyah, 2025, pp. 96–97; Santos Albardía et al., 2025, pp. 5–6, 8).

In the view of researchers, the combination of media education, particularly education in the sphere of media ethics, with civic values reduces susceptibility to polarisation and disinformation (Santos Albardía et al., 2025, p. 8). Curricula that combine the analysis of manipulation with public debate build critical awareness and the ability to argue in civic discourse (Nguyen, 2021, pp. 46).

Frequently cited didactic methods in the effective teaching of media ethics and media education in general regarding civic education are “analyse-create-share” and “create-reflect-act,” by means of which pupils analyse messages, create their own content, and engage civically in concrete actions (Römer et al., 2023). These are therefore mainly practical activities: workshops and exercises incorporating elements of simulation projects.

Research aims and methodology

The aim of the research presented in the article is to determine the scope and the way issues are addressed related to media ethics in the core curriculum of the Ministry of National Education for the subject “Civic Education” in post-primary schools in Poland. The research questions are as follows: RQ1: Have issues related to media ethics been included in the 2025 core curriculum of the Polish Ministry of National Education for the subject “Civic Education”? If so, to what extent and in what manner? RQ2: Do the points in the civic education core curriculum concerning the teaching of media ethics have mandatory or optional status? Research hypotheses have also been formulated: H1: The 2025 MEN core curriculum for the subject “Civic Education” contains content related to media ethics. However, this content appears marginally, in limited quantity. H2: Content on media ethics appears in the “Civic Education” core curriculum, but solely as optional. This content is practical in nature, placing particular emphasis on developing the ethical competence of the young citizen.

The research was conducted between 2 and 9 November 2025. The analysis process proceeded in a systematic manner—each unit was evaluated in terms of the presence and character of references to selected ethical categories. The chosen research methods were qualitative and quantitative content analysis, whilst the research instrument consisted of an original categorisation key (see Table 1). The term “media ethics” (the principal analytical category) refers to a set of normative principles useful in evaluating the functioning of media,

encompassing ethical guidelines characteristic of the journalism profession and broadly understood broadcasters (Kononiuk, 2015, pp. 9–10).

Table 1. Categorisation key questionnaire

Category	Media ethics
Subcategories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – truth, reliability of information, separation of information from commentary – counteracting disinformation – responsibility for message content
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – references to facts and truth in communication guidelines – concerning the avoidance of manipulation – content on critical media use
Units of Analysis	Core curriculum points
Degree of Reference to Category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – direct – indirect

Source: own elaboration.

The research material consisted of the complete text of the “Civic Education” core curriculum (basic scope) published in March 2025 (Regulation of the Minister of Education, 2025). It encompasses the following thematic sections: (1) I and Society, (2) School as Community, (3) Local and Regional Community, (4) Democracy and Law, (5) Poland–Government, the World of Politics, and the Public Sphere, (6) Poland in Europe, (7) The World of Global Dependencies. Each of these sections contains detailed requirements concerning knowledge and skills, as well as optional requirements, from amongst which the teacher implements at least one. There are 45 mandatory core curriculum points (M=45), whilst there are 37 optional points (O=37), thus 82 in total.

Results

Based on content analysis of the civic education core curriculum in general secondary schools, it has been demonstrated that issues related to media ethics have been included in ten points, which constitutes 12.2% of all

curriculum provisions. This should be assessed as a high degree of reference to this subject matter. Direct reference to media ethics was observed in six core curriculum points, of which two are mandatory (V M11[1], V M12) and four optional (V O1, V O5, VII O3, VII O6). Indirect reference to media ethics, meanwhile, appears in four points, and all of these are optional (I O4, IV O5, VII O1, VII O2).¹ This abbreviation should be read as follows: V M11 = fifth section in the core curriculum, 11th mandatory point. In the description of points, the section number is given first, then the status of the point (M—mandatory, O—optional), and finally the point number in the core curriculum.

Direct reference to media ethics

The first point classified as a direct reference to media ethics comes from the fifth section of the core curriculum (Poland—Government, the World of Politics, and the Public Sphere) and reads as follows: [the pupil] “explains the influence of traditional and social media on the beliefs and attitudes of public opinion and on the functioning of society, the state, and democracy; explains threats associated with the dissemination of unverified information” (V M11). This content refers to key issues in media ethics, namely responsibility for reliability in the public sphere and the influence that media messages exert on social attitudes and the stability of democratic institutions. The second part of this point is particularly important, in which there is information about the consequences associated with the dissemination of unverified information. This is a general provision; however, this type of reference to disinformation threats necessitates in-depth reflection on, for instance, the ethical boundaries of freedom of speech, the obligations of both creators and recipients of content, as well as the consequences of unreliable messaging.

In the subsequent core curriculum point (V M12), the reference to media ethics concerns the competence of source verification and identification of disinformation. The pupil: “searches for credible and reliable sources of information on selected socio-political topics; identifies examples of manipulation and disinformation as well as false information and is able to verify them”

.....
1 This abbreviation should be read as follows: V M11 = fifth section in the core curriculum, 11th mandatory point. In the description of points, the section number is given first, then the status of the point (M—mandatory, O—optional), and finally the point number in the core curriculum.

(V M12). This is a point from the section “Poland—Government, the World of Politics, and the Public Sphere” and is entirely devoted to ethical issues. The development of these skills is fundamental to creating a conscious civil society capable of critical evaluation of media messages in an era of widespread information noise.

Similarly with the subsequent core curriculum point, this time optional, namely V O1 (section “Poland—Government, the World of Politics, and the Public Sphere”). According to its content, the analysis of election campaigns and persuasive messages requires reflection on the boundary between honest persuasion and manipulation. The pupil: “analyses an election campaign, party programmes, and the manner of communication with citizens, and explains the influence of polls; critically evaluates persuasive messages—is able to distinguish facts from opinions and verify information” (V O1). The issues addressed here relate not only to media ethics but also to the ethics of political communication and the manner of reading and understanding media messages within its scope. This point concerns the responsibility of broadcasters for the social consequences of their persuasive actions.

Within the teaching of civic education, the competence of recognising the ideological profiles of media and evaluating their credibility is also deepened (V O5—section “Poland—Government, the World of Politics, and the Public Sphere”). The pupil: “presents the media landscape in Poland, distinguishes the ideological profiles of editorial offices, evaluates the credibility of selected publications, and formulates opinions and discusses them with others” (V O5). This content once again directly refers to media ethics. Pupils learn the practical application of ethical criteria to the evaluation of media, which constitutes the essence of media competences in the axiological dimension.

Subsequently, within civic education, the competence of evaluating the impact of, amongst others, technology corporations is also acquired and deepened (VII O3—section “The World of Global Dependencies”). The pupil: “on selected examples evaluates the impact of international corporations, including technological ones, on social and economic life as well as the environment, and also formulates an opinion on this matter and engages in discussion.” Although this point could be regarded as only an indirect reference to media ethics, it was decided to classify it as direct because nowadays—when speaking of the impact of large media and technology conglomerates—this is most frequently connected with the ethical dimension of this issue. This topic may be addressed in schools in such a manner as to refer to the dilemmas of digital

ethics: responsibility for algorithms shaping the public sphere, the balance between freedom and user protection, and the conflict between the logic of profit and the common good.

Finally, acquiring and verifying information about international events (VII O6—section “The World of Global Dependencies”) requires the application of ethical principles of reliability. According to this core curriculum point, the pupil “analyses a selected current event in the international arena, acquires and verifies information about it, formulates an opinion on the matter, and presents it” (VII O6). This competence is particularly important in an era of information conflicts, where the ability to critically evaluate sources concerning international events acquires a dimension that is not only cognitive but above all ethical.

Indirect reference to media ethics

In the qualitative content analysis, indirect reference to media ethics was demonstrated in four points, and all of these are optional (I O4, IV O5, VII O1, VII O2). Point I O4, from the section “I and Society,” concerns the transformations of Polish society after 1989, but with particular emphasis on technological development. The pupil:

characterises selected transformations of Polish society after 1989 in the cultural, demographic, social, and political dimensions, and in the sphere of technological development; formulates an opinion and engages in discussion on possible social changes in the coming decades with particular emphasis on the development of digital technologies and changes in the natural environment (I O4).

The analysis of social and cultural transformations after 1989 is indirectly, sometimes directly, connected with the ethical consequences of the digital revolution. Media ethics thus becomes—although it need not, of course, depending on the manner of implementing this point—an important normative element in evaluating whether technology favours or threatens democratic and social values.

The subsequent core curriculum point in civic education (IV O5—section “Democracy and Law”) concerns, it is true, law, as it refers to the issue of

personal data protection and violation of personal rights, particularly on the internet, but indirectly also to media ethics and digital ethics, including responsibility on the internet. According to its wording, the pupil: “indicates basic methods of protecting one’s own personal data and explains forms of violating personal rights, particularly on the Internet; is able to report a violation of personal rights” (IV O5). In this provision one can discern such ethical principles as the need to respect privacy in media, avoiding unnecessary disclosure of information in order to prevent cyberbullying, responsibility for content transmitted, particularly concerning other persons, and strengthening the culture of reliability through reporting violations.

In point VII O1 from the section “The World of Global Dependencies,” an indirect reference to media ethics is also discernible; it concerns the evaluation of arguments about the consequences of migratory movements and the verification of facts and analysis of opinions. The pupil: “evaluates arguments cited in public debate about the consequences of migratory movements in the world, and verifies facts and analyses opinions on this topic, and also formulates their position and engages in discussion” (VII O1). Public debate on migration is largely connected with media, and the evaluation of argumentation in the public sphere also possesses an ethical dimension (the extent to which content on this topic is credible). The verification of facts and analysis of opinions require, after all, the application of ethical standards of journalistic reliability.

The subsequent point (VII O2—section “The World of Global Dependencies”) concerns the competence of searching for information about the activities of social organisations towards solving a global problem. According to its wording, the pupil: “searches for information about actions undertaken by social organisations and citizens towards solving a selected global problem, evaluates them, and as far as possible engages in selected ones” (VII O2). Once again, this point also contains an element of the skill of searching for information and subsequently evaluating it in terms of credibility. Today, the activities of social organisations are communicated and promoted primarily through media. The evaluation of these activities requires ethical reflection on the communication of organisations. The pupil must be able to evaluate whether the organisation’s message is authentic, transparent, and consistent with ethical standards of communication, including being free from emotional manipulation.

Media ethical principles most frequently appearing in the core curriculum

On the basis of the analysis conducted, it is possible to distinguish the most frequently appearing guidelines of media ethics in the civic education core curriculum. The first of these is reliability of information. This is a principle included in all six points directly referring to media ethics (V M11, V M12, V O1, V O5, VII O3, VII O6) and in selected ones indirectly referring to the issue (VII O1, VII O2). The second ethical principle, similar to the first, is counteracting disinformation and manipulation in media messages. It is observable in points treating threats arising from unverified information (V M11), identification of disinformation (V M12), distinguishing facts from opinions, and verification of persuasive messages (V O1). In addition, it finds its reflection in the context of fact verification in public debate (VII O1). The third principle, meanwhile, connected with the previous ones, is the principle of critical evaluation of message credibility. It concerns the identification of reliable sources (V O12), the assessment of the credibility of publications, and the recognition of the ideological profiles of media outlets (V O5), as well as the verification of information related to international events (VII O6). The fourth principle is responsibility for communication and its social consequences. This principle is reflected in analyses of the media's influence on public opinion and democratic processes (V O11), in discussions concerning the boundary between persuasion and manipulation (V O1), and in evaluations of the impact exerted by technology corporations (VII O3).

Summary and concluding remarks

In the study, using the method of content analysis of the 2025 civic education core curriculum for post-primary schools, it has been demonstrated that issues related to media ethics are included therein; moreover, they are extensive and detailed, occupying as much as 12.2% of all core curriculum points. In connection with the above, the first hypothesis (H1)—according to which content in the sphere of media ethics was to be merely marginal in character—has not been confirmed. Regarding the second hypothesis (H2), content concerning media ethics was to be optional in character. The analysis conducted has partially confirmed these assumptions—this content appears

both in the form of mandatory points (two direct points) and optional points (eight points). This signifies that media ethics is not merely an optional addition but constitutes an integral and obligatory element of civic education in Polish schools.

In presenting the subsequent conclusions, it is worth referring to the manner of addressing issues related to media ethics in the civic education core curriculum. Firstly, these issues have not been presented in the form of a separate section but have been placed in various sections: I. “I and Society” (1 point), IV. “Democracy and Law” (1 point), V. “Poland—Government, the World of Politics, and the Public Sphere” (4 points), VII. “The World of Global Dependencies” (4 points). Sections V and VII draw particular attention in this context, in which there appear as many as 4 core curriculum points each on the topic of media ethics, on the basis of which it can be inferred that media ethical competence constitutes an important element of conscious participation in the political and public life of the country and the world (international politics). This approach to ethical issues is identical with the recommendations of researchers concerned with civic education, who emphasise that its important aim is to prepare the individual for active functioning in democratic society at the national and international levels (Alehegn, 2020; White et al., 2023).

The analysis has also demonstrated that the most frequent issues related to media ethics are: reliability of information, counteracting disinformation and manipulation, critical evaluation of sources and credibility, and responsibility for message content and its social consequences. The principle of reliability and truth of information is observable in all six points with direct reference to media ethics. According to the 2025 civic education curriculum, therefore, truth in public communication is the foundation of a well-functioning democratic system. This assumption—emphasising information reliability as an essential factor in undertaking appropriate civic decisions—corresponds with current content in the subject literature (Zuhriyah, 2025).

Bearing in mind the data obtained, it must be emphasised that it is gratifying that the teaching of media ethics is finding increasingly greater expression in formal school education. This knowledge, and above all the practical dimension of media ethical competence, is a necessity for every user of a smartphone or the internet today. This is important for many reasons, amongst others because, possessing such skills as verifying sources, credibility, manipulation, and disinformation—thus a highly developed media ethical

competence—it is possible to undertake sound decisions concerning every dimension of life, also in relation to civic matters. An uninformed citizen, after all, or one relying on false information and manipulations, is a citizen undertaking improper decisions towards themselves, loved ones, and their own country, which can lead to serious consequences. Today, media ethical competence is a set of many difficult skills, possible however to develop through the process of appropriately designed education.

References

- Alehegn, D. (2020). *Civics and ethical education*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.
- De los Reyes Villareal, E. R., Ramirez San Vicente, O., & Vargas Cruz, I. A. (2023). Civic education as a sustainable value in the formation of citizens. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(4), 399–410. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.114028>
- Karp, H. (2025). Edukacja medialna społeczeństwa. In H. Karp (Ed.), *Przyszłość systemu medialnego w Polsce: Etyka, pluralizm i wolność słowa w demokracji cyfrowej* (pp. 632–740). Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji.
- Kononiuk, T. (2015). *Etyczne dziennikarstwo: Ewolucja deontyczna zawodu*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra-JR.
- Laskowska, M. (2018). *Kształcenie w zakresie etyki dziennikarskiej w kontekście mediów społecznościowych*. Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa.
- Laskowska, M. (2023). Kompetencja etyczna: model nauczania według National Communication Association. *Społeczeństwo i Polityka*, 76, 61–80.
- Leśniczak, R. (2024). Odpowiedzialność w komunikowaniu politycznym. In K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, K. Doktorowicz, P. Płaneta et al. (Eds.), *Leksykon terminów medialnych M–Z* (p. 143). Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Marcyński, K. (2025). Consequences of AI-enhanced communicative competence: Between effectiveness, appropriateness, and aesthetics. In M. Szostak (Ed.), *Organizations, humanism and AI: An aesthetics approach* (pp. 198–218). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003662723>
- Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej. (2025). *Podstawy programowe do przedmiotów: edukacja obywatelska i edukacja zdrowotna podpisane przez Minister Edukacji*. <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/podstawy-programowe-do-predmiotow-edukacja-obywatelska-i-edukacja-zdrowotna-podpisane-przez-minister-edukacji>

- Nguyen, V. T. (2021). Citizenship education: A media literacy course taught in Japanese university. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 21(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20471734211061487>
- Rahayu, K., Yunitasari, D., Utaminingsih, E., Purwaningsih, I., & Sari, F. I. (2024). Exploring the impact of civic education on civic participation among elementary school students. *Pedagogia: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 13(2), 189–195. <https://doi.org/10.21070/pedagogia.v13i2.1658>
- Römer, L., Supa, M., & Hodboď, V. (2023). Media literacy education nurturing civic participation of disadvantaged youth, or not? *Learning, Media and Technology*, 48(3), 372–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2022.2051046>
- Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji z dnia 6 marca 2025 r. zmieniające rozporządzenie w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, technikum oraz branżowej szkoły II stopnia (Dz.U. 2025 poz. 382). <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20250000382/O/D20250382.pdf>
- Sandi, R., & Vera. (2025). Ethical Political Education in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities in Indonesia. *International Journal of Humanities, Law, and Politics*, 3(2), 57–63. <https://doi.org/10.46336/ijhlp.v3i2.220>
- Santos Albardía, M., Peña-Fernández, S., & Agirreazkuenaga, I. (2025). Technology, education and critical media literacy: Potential, challenges, and opportunities. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 7, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2025.1608911>
- White, G., Dong, D., Campbell, D., & Lee, C. (2023). The future of civic education: Implications for research, policy, and practice. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 705(1), 249–257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162231193538>
- Zhou, M., Shen, J., & Zhang, H. (2025). Research on intelligent generation and adaptation system of civic education content based on machine learning. *Journal of Combinatorial Mathematics and Combinatorial Computing*, 127b, 9097–9116. <https://doi.org/10.61091/jcmcc127b-499>
- Zuhriyah, N. F. (2025). Digital ethics and media literacy: Assessing the role of education in preventing social polarization in the post-truth era. *INJURY: Interdisciplinary Journal and Humanity*, 4(2), 96–101. <https://doi.org/10.58631/injury.v4i2.1419>

