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Report from the 20th Media Ethics Conference: „The value of the media – values in the media”

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On 20–21 May 2026, the 20th Media Ethics Conference was held in Kraków under the theme *The value of the media. Values in the media*. This special anniversary edition of the conference was devoted to issues of fundamental importance for contemporary media and communication studies, while also contributing to broader humanistic reflection.

The conference theme was grounded in the conviction that the media are not merely neutral channels of information or simple reflections of social reality. Through the selection of topics, the ways they are interpreted, the narrative frames employed, the language of commentary, and the prioritization of issues, the media actively shape society's understanding of the world. They influence the formation of attitudes, public opinion, collective imagination, and systems of values. In this sense, values -both those explicitly articulated and those embedded implicitly within the structure of media messages-are present in every act of media communication.

The program of the 20th Media Ethics Conference included a debate, two plenary sessions, twelve thematic sessions, and four student sessions. This structure enabled participants to combine broad theoretical reflection on the value of the media and values in the media with in-depth analyses of specific ethical challenges in contemporary media communication. The Organizing Committee was chaired by Rev. Prof. Sławomir Soczyński, PhD, DLitt, with Prof. Olga Nadskakuła-Kaczmarczyk, DLitt, serving as Vice-Chair. The conference secretariat consisted of Dr. Urszula Dyrz and Dr. Joanna Urbaś.

The conference brought together researchers from leading academic institutions across Poland, including universities and research centres in Lublin, Poznań, Warsaw, Gdańsk, Katowice, Wrocław, Rzeszów, and Toruń, making it one of the most significant national forums for scholarly discussion on media ethics and values in communication.

The conference covered a broad spectrum of analytical perspectives, including:

- the media as a tool for fostering social cohesion or contributing to social fragmentation;
- social trust as a measure of the value of the media;
- public service media and their axiological mission;
- freedom of expression and its value-based limitations;
- disinformation, manipulation, and propaganda as anti-axiological phenomena;
- the algorithmization of communication and the axiological neutrality of technology;
- the role of artificial intelligence in the media;
- media polarization and the erosion of a shared system of values;
- media literacy as a means of fostering audiences' value formation;
- the historical evolution of the media's mission.

Opening session and debate

Introductory remarks were delivered by His Magnificence Rev. Prof. Robert Tyrała, PhD, DLitt, Rector of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków, and by Prof. Sławomir Soczyński, PhD, DLitt, Dean of the Faculty of Communication Sciences.

The conference opened with a solemn inaugural debate, which set the tone for the entire event. The panel brought together distinguished representatives of the Church, academia, public administration, and journalistic practice. Its participants included Cardinal Grzegorz Ryś, PhD, DLitt, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kraków; Prof. Maria Mrówczyńska, PhD, DLitt, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education; Prof. Iwona Hoffman, PhD, DLitt, President of the Polish Communication Association and Director of the Institute of Social Communication and Media Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University; Brygida Grysiak, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of TVN24 and Editor for Standards and Good Journalistic Practice; and Marek Zając, Chair of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Council and Deputy Programme Director of Polish Television.

The debate was moderated by Prof. Olga Nadskakuła-Kaczmarczyk. The discussion was framed by the moderator's opening question, which referred to a classic philosophical idea. Citing Aristotle's words from *Metaphysics*: "All people by nature desire to know", Nadskakuła-Kaczmarczyk pointed to a paradox of the contemporary world: although access to information has never been easier, the crisis of truth is deepening. In an era of widespread disinformation and informational chaos, she argued, it becomes essential to return to the foundations: to the question of whether the search for truth and objectivity in the media remains possible and meaningful. "We find ourselves in a moment of such chaos, with disinformation raging around us, that we must return to the beginning: to Truth. Is there still a chance for truth, and how should it be understood?" the moderator asked.

The discussion that developed around this question focused primarily on the essence and possibility of objectivity in the media. The participants addressed the tension between the ideal of impartiality and the inevitable perspectival nature of every media message. During the debate, attention was also drawn to the need for genuine dialogue between media actors. It was emphasized that the problem today is not only access to information, but also the intention behind seeking it: whether the media truly wish to understand

their interlocutors or merely obtain statements to serve their own narratives. In this way, reflection on truth was broadened to include a dialogical dimension: truth requires not only facts, but also a readiness to listen.

Following the inaugural debate, a ceremony was held to name the hall after Rev. Prof. Andrzej Baczyński, PhD, DLitt, and Rev. Prof. Michał Drożdż, PhD, DLitt, scholars who have made outstanding contributions to the development of reflection on media ethics, social communication, and journalistic responsibility. This symbolic moment emphasized the continuity of the scholarly tradition within which the Media Ethics Conference has, for many years, served as an important forum for reflection on the moral dimension of media communication.

Plenary sessions and discussions

The first plenary session, entitled *Contexts of the value of the media*, was chaired by Prof. Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz, PhD, DLitt, from the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków. The session was devoted to various ways of understanding the value of the media: in normative, social, political, economic, and technological terms.

The first paper, entitled *There is no freedom without responsibility: Examples of the functions and dysfunctions of digital media*, was delivered by Prof. Agnieszka Hess, PhD, DLitt, from the Jagiellonian University. Her presentation focused on the relationship between freedom of communication and responsibility for the consequences of media messages in the digital environment. Next, Prof. Szymon Ossowski, PhD, DLitt, from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, presented a paper entitled *Media in the opinions of audiences and voters: Poles' political views and their use and evaluation of the media*. His presentation explored the relationship between audiences' political orientations, patterns of media use, and assessments of media credibility.

Prof. Maria Łoszevska-Ołowska, PhD, DLitt, from the University of Warsaw, in her paper *Moral dilemmas and the values and anti-values of the media*, reflected on the ethical tensions present in media practice and on situations in which the declared values of the media collide with actual practices that are far from value-oriented and may even raise legal concerns. Prof. Katarzyna Konarska, PhD, DLitt, from the University of Wrocław, then delivered a paper entitled *Idealism or realism? Ethical orientations of Polish journalists in the light*

of the Worlds of Journalism Study, addressing how professional and ethical standards are understood within the journalistic community. The session concluded with a presentation by Prof. Jerzy Gołuchowski, PhD, DLitt, from the University of Economics in Katowice, devoted to the economic value of the media in the age of artificial intelligence.

Prof. Iwona Hofman offered a synthetic summary of both this session and the final plenary session of the conference, emphasizing not only the importance of the issues discussed, but also their remarkable heuristic potential.

The discussion following the presentations in the first plenary session raised questions about the limits of users’ freedom in the digital environment, the responsibility of platforms, and the protection of the youngest audiences. Prof. Klaudia Cymanow-Sosin, PhD, DLitt, from the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków, asked the speakers whether they would support the introduction of age limits for social media users, justified by the need to protect children online.

This question fitted well with the main concerns of the session. In response, Prof. Jerzy Gołuchowski emphasized that he particularly values his role as a grandfather, and therefore the issue of protecting children in the digital environment is important to him also from a personal perspective. He noted that although there may still be no guarantee that particular solutions will be fully effective, this does not mean that they should not be implemented. On the contrary, he argued, the issue should be viewed in ethical terms, as part of adults’ responsibility for the safety of the youngest users of social media.

Thematic and student sessions

The thematic sessions demonstrated the multidimensional nature of the issue of values in the media. The discussions addressed, among other topics, the relationship between history, propaganda, and memory; truth, manipulation, and crisis; image, authenticity, and value; faith, media, and community; credibility, conflict, and hierarchies of values; algorithms, ethics, and responsibility; the boundaries of communication, trauma, and responsibility; reputation, responsibility, and values; media literacy; influence, choice, and manipulation; politics, values, and image; as well as image, narrative, and value.

Such a broad thematic scope confirmed that the question of media axiology is not limited to journalistic ethics in the classical sense, but also encompasses digital technologies, political communication, visual culture, media education, artificial intelligence, religion, collective memory, and audience practices.

The second plenary session, entitled *Dilemmas of the value of the media*, further developed reflection on journalistic responsibility, media humanism, technopoly, the values of cultural heritage, business ethics, regional media, and responsibility for communication.

Student sessions also formed an important part of the conference. They were devoted to the ethics of artificial intelligence and digital media, social media as a space for shaping values, media systems and political communication, as well as technology design and the social consequences of the media. The presence of young researchers gave the conference a formative dimension, showing that reflection on media ethics is not only a subject of academic debate, but also an important element in educating the next generation of media scholars, journalists, and social communication specialists.

Conclusions

The program as a whole confirmed the interdisciplinary character of the Media Ethics Conference. The presentations combined perspectives from media studies, communication studies, philosophy, pedagogy, theology, political science, history, law, and technology. As a result, the conference became a space for discussion not only about the values communicated by the media, but also about the value of the media themselves for social life, democracy, culture, education, and community-building.

The 20th anniversary edition of the Media Ethics Conference, devoted to the highly significant theme *The value of the media. Values in the media*, confirmed that questions concerning values in media communication remain an important subject of scholarly inquiry. At the same time, the participation of media practitioners in the inaugural debate showed that these issues also resonate beyond academia and remain relevant to professional media practice.