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Emotional intelligence factor in creation of the polemics in printed media: An analysis over the master and doctorate students

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Abstract

Loaned from Greek to French as *polemique*, the term of polemic denotes a literary controversy or disputation. Polemic, which can also be defined as way of expressing ideas, is rather seen in newspapers and magazines. Today, the debates that have begun with the competition among newspapers may sometimes easily turn to polemics. Polemic is created not only as a method of increasing the circulation rate in printed media, but also as an intention of journalists to become well-known or popular.

Journalists are resolved to present the information to individuals for the purpose of enabling them to free and govern themselves. At this point, emotional intelligence factor that depends on positive socialization and solidarity arises and the polemic that is done correctly can even be useful for the readers. Emotional intelligence that comprises the concepts of emotion and intelligence, aims at combining cognitive skills and emotions. The purpose of this study is to assert how the media, the main purpose of which is to create a public society by maintaining the benefit of the public, gets dysfunctional because of polemic as well as the repercussions of it by presenting the role of the components of emotional intelligence in printed media. These texts will be analyzed with regard to emotional intelligence, emotional perfection and professional ethics. Thus, a situational analysis has been administered to master and doctorate students in communication faculties.

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1. Introduction

Today the polemic among the authors who provide the continuity of the circus culture manipulating the masses is one of the most important indicators of whether or not those who write and edit texts have emotional competence.

The media, the main responsibility of which is to control the government and be the voice of society, cannot perform this function effectively. The polemic created among authors causes the issues to get devoid of the real content and to be mediatized; as a result, the masses can easily be directed and readers are simply objectified. Therefore, news or the important issues in the agenda are degraded as commodities. The media functions to inform the public neutrally, clarify the social values and objectives as well as educate and socialize.

Emotional intelligence is both the reason and the result of the polemics committed consciously or unconsciously by authors. It is the reason because it is created by the authors having no emotional intelligence; it is the result because communication unavoidably undergoes to the process of the corrosion of personal values after polemic is raised. Thus, showing empathy and evaluating only the messages just disappear, and consequently, lack of communication and unethical actions emerge. "If somebody does not head for production and activity and avoid getting into contact with the others, it is quite clear that her or she cannot develop the abilities intrinsic to human beings" (Horney, 1996: 11). Thus, individuals can develop themselves only when they really perform their responsibilities. Aspects and communication culture of a country changes with the influence of the media; however, political culture and institutions continue their functions as the conditions and skeleton of a political system (Meyer, 2004: 91).

Columnists have also assumed important responsibilities as they set role models for society. The individuals in a society emulate the people they like and identify themselves with those people. Columnists are to some extent opinion leaders and sources of reference. Therefore, they should be aware of the distresses and inflictions of their periods. They should turn their hands to the deprived and aggrieved segments of society and put them on the agenda. Moreover, columnists should feel themselves responsible towards not only all human beings, but also the nature. As a result of all these responsibilities, columnists should have a developed social consciousness and ability to think emphatically (Örs, 2007: 772).

Being beneficial to social life is one of the fundamental stands of professional ethics. Journalists have certain responsibilities towards their societies with respect to professional ethics and they should act in accordance with this consciousness. First and foremost, journalists should try to make public understand the facts. It should be noted that while conveying the facts, they have to use the mass media properly; otherwise, society will be not only misinformed, but also misdirected. The relationship of the journalists who deviate from professional ethics with their readers will unavoidably create a confidence crisis.

Thus, in this study, some prominent polemics that arose recently have primarily been taken into consideration and analyzed with respect to language, symbol and behavior. Then, these polemics have been shared with master and doctorate students majoring in journalism and public relations without any subjective comments and in-depth interviews have been held with them for their evaluations related to the respective issue. During these interviews, the students were asked to assess the polemics in printed media as well as on TV with regard to emotional competence, professional ethics and emotional intelligence.

2. Emotional Intelligence Concept

Recent studies indicate that apart from cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence plays a significant role in the achievements of individuals throughout their lives. "Salovey and Mayer define Emotional intelligence as a sub-form of social intelligence as a sub-form of social intelligence related to the ability of individuals to understand the feelings of themselves as well as the others, differentiate between these feelings and use the information obtained from this process in their thoughts and behaviors" (qtd. in Doğan & Şahin, 2007: 232). On the other hand, Daniel Goleman defined emotional intelligence as "the ability to motivate oneself, keep on going despite mishaps, delay satisfaction by controlling the stimuli, regulate the mood, blocking the problems preventing thinking soundly and put oneself in somebody's shoes" (1998: 51). The nervous centers of our brain are not totally pushed to secondary place in our thoughts and logic. These centers are indispensable parts of our thoughts, logic and intellect.

Emotions are very essential and necessary to be able to make the best decisions against problems and keep up with changes without wavering. The four emotional aptitudes constituting the building blocks of the Emotional Intelligence manager are as follows:

1) Establishing proper communication with people, recognizing feelings, defining the feeling of the others clearly and conveying our feelings to the others with the same clarity. 2) Assuming the appropriate mood. Emotions direct our attention to important points, prepare us for particular situations and help us determine the direction of our thoughts while solving problems. 3) Predicting the future of emotions or understanding emotions. 4) Behaving as one feels and managing emotions. Emotions carry information and influence our thoughts. Therefore, we have to know how to blend our emotions reasonably with our logic, our approach to problems, judgments and behaviors (Caruso & Salovey, 2007: 61).

Generally, we behave as we think. Thus, our thoughts affect our emotions and in turn, our emotions influence our behaviors. The meanings that individuals attribute to the events, people or discourses they encounter or their thoughts and interpretations about them lead to the demonstration of certain emotions and actions. Needless to say, particularly during the periods of fury and anger, it is wrong to pass the responsibility of our actions to the others and allege their actions as a reason for a wrongdoing. This situation also indicates that such individuals do not possess the constituents of emotional intelligence. Emotions can be regarded as follows: they are formed depending on the changes around us. They emerge instinctively by themselves. They create changes in the mood. They change our point of attention and way of thinking. They prepare individuals to get ready to act. They evoke personal feelings. They may disperse quickly. They help us survive the life and stand as well as improve ourselves (Caruso & Salovey, 2007: 40).

Polemic in Printed Media and Emotional Competency

Functioning as a means of the dominant discourse, the media leads to the formation of the value judgments about ‘the other’ in society apart from the creation of ‘the other.’ By realizing this formation covertly or overtly, it structures the public opinion as desired. Eight functions of mass communication are mentioned in The MacBride Report, prepared by UNESCO Commission:

1) Providing news and information. 2) Socialization 3) Motivation 4) Creating discussion platforms 5) Education 6) Contribution to the development of culture. 7) Entertainment. 8) Unification. As a result, the unifying function of the media is fulfilled accordingly (Yüksel, 2001:7-8).

According to Hakkı Devrim (2008), a well-known Turkish journalist, polemic is a form of discourse having traditions. However, when polemic is mentioned, only the texts in which opposite ideas and views are expressed should not be thought. In correspondence, the context is also very important. Considering the issue with respect to the Declaration of the Rights and Responsibilities of Turkish Journalists as well as the regulations, there should not be any violation of personal rights. Particularly encouraging and defending violence indicates an approach totally contradictory to professional ethics. Therefore, correspondences have to be evaluated correctly. It is a must to be respectful to personal rights.

The concept, “*polemic is derived from a Greek word ‘polemo’ meaning to combat, surround, blockade and siege. Loaned from Greek to French as polemique, this concept refers to war of words, arguments, bitter discussions and also aggressive, belligerent and quarrelsome people (Aydoğan, 2001, s.98).* As the media companies are established by big capital structures, political and economic interests forestall the intentions to inform public. Hence, those who have the power in newspaper companies can easily exert pressure on the editors and authors and even interfere in their activities. In the triangle of the media, commerce and politics, the media seems to have forgotten its real responsibility along with its responsibilities towards society. “The main objective of journalism is to provide the information that is needed by people to become free and also to govern themselves” (Kovach & Rosensteil, 2007: 20).

“Although news discourse is not particularly designed with an assertive style, it may have a persuasive dimension as well. Even though it does not seem to be defending an idea, a journalist, above all, wants to ‘convince’ and feel that he or she is ‘conveying the truth’ through a text” (Özerkan, 2002: 69). Being one of the elements of emotional intelligence, self-consciousness necessitates individuals to realize their strong and weak points, be aware of the dynamics influencing their performances and also know themselves in all aspects. Therefore, it would be appropriate for an author to answer the question about the dynamics affecting work performance. As another constituent of emotional intelligence, self-governance is related to controlling one’s feelings, knowing what to do

and why and tip the scales in one's favor (Weisinger, 1998: 47). In this regard, authors should know that they are writing not only in behalf of themselves, but also society.

One of the most important principles of journalism is the desire to draw the interest of people. "Along with the principle of appealing to people, journalism has gained a new dimension and turning to the emotions of individuals have come into prominence in breaking news as well as relating the events, views and ideas" (Tokgöz, 1994:28). While news is structured with 'language,' the practices and ideologies of social structure are re-produced. "Media texts function as a sensitive barometer indicating socio-cultural changes and thus, create a very valuable source for the studies on change. Social and cultural changes demonstrate themselves in the heterogeneous and continuously differentiating discursive practices" (Fairclough, 1995: 52).

According to Fuller (1996: 101), the task of columnists is to change the minds from the level of indifference to the level of knowledge, which refers to the acquisition of the art of conveying messages to people, namely rhetoric. Evaluation of events shows difference according to countries. This situation is related to cultural values. The power-status relations in a society, the structure of that society as well as language are the main factors determining culture. "As a means utilized by political and local authorities as well as pressure groups, the media influences the public opinion molded throughout a country and also in small groups. In other words, the media can be a determining factor for the public opinion formed around both special and general issues" (Atabek & Dağtaş, 1998: 202-203). Therefore, the language used by journalists while writing news is very important. Columnists too have to be aware of the features for the formation of public opinion while writing their texts.

Purpose and Method

In this study, prominent polemics between the columnists in printed as well as visual media and the participants of TV programs particularly in recent in history and today were chosen and analyzed with respect to language, symbols and behaviors. Then, the respective polemics were shared with the master's and doctorate students and without any subjective comments, in-depth interviews were held with them to determine their views and evaluations about those polemics and they were also asked to fill in questionnaires. During the in-depth interviews, the postgraduate students were required to evaluate the polemics in printed media and on TV with regard to emotional competence, professional ethics and emotional intelligence. Meanwhile, the questionnaire; was formulated according to the Likert scale. The starting point in this study is based on the following questions:

1. Do the columnists provide clarification for the social values and objectives and contribute to the developments through a platform of discussion or display an approach which is inappropriate to professional customs and practices?
2. How much responsibility do the columnists assume with respect to their being role models for society?
3. How do the postgraduate students in journalism relate the polemics of today with emotional intelligence?

Findings and Evaluation

75 % of the respondents have stated that the sides in polemics cannot control their feelings. Likewise, 51.7 % of those postgraduate students have mentioned that they disagree with the expression; "authors write and discourse upon not only themselves, but also the public opinion" and 52.6 % of them are strongly disagree with this idea. Moreover, 53.5 % of the respondents are disagree with the situation indicating that "authors grasp the viewpoints and needs of the opposite parties and act accordingly," and 24.1 % of them are strongly disagree with it.

Furthermore, 39.2 % of the participants disagree that the sides in polemics try to change the views of the opposite parties through persuasion instead of totally rejecting or blackening them, and % 32.1 of the respondents are strongly disagree with it. Emotional literacy is the ability of an individual to perceive the feelings of the others, lend an ear to their requirements as well as fulfill them. The level of emotional literacy leads to the perception and making sense of the world and the conveyed messages pragmatically. Thus, 59.2 % of the respondents think that the sides of the polemics today are not emotionally literate.

Next, 53.3 % of the postgraduate students have indicated that the sides of polemics do not have the due

abilities for constructive solutions. While the ratio of those who disagree with the idea that the parties of polemics perform the function of providing news and information is 42.8 %, the ratio of those who agree is only 28.5 %. It is a fact that as an important function of journalists, socialization is a crucial factor for enabling individuals to continue their existence in society. Interestingly enough, 62.9 % of the respondents have stated that the sides of polemics do not fulfill this function. In addition, 25.9 % of them have checked ‘indecisive’ about the respective issue. In the discussions held without taking the emotional intelligence factor into consideration, the audience get confused as they are pacified instead of enabled to comprehend the given information correctly and interpret it.

Meanwhile, the ratio of agreement with the expression; “the polemics today contribute to the clarification and development of the social values and objectives conveyed to individuals is only 3.5 %. On the contrary, 57.1 % of the respondents have expressed their disagreement. Moreover, 50 % of the postgraduate students disagree with the idea that the polemics today help improve the knowledge level and abilities of individuals in society; likewise, 39.2 % of them strongly disagree with it.

Today the polemics play an important role for the development of culture along with the protection of cultural heritage. In this regard, the ratio of the respondents who disagree with the view that “today the polemics develop the relations among individuals and groups in societies and provide an atmosphere enabling them to know and understand not only each other, but also their societies” is 50 % while the ratio of strong disagreement is 46.4%. In terms of Habermas, this ‘compassion ethics’ arises from the mutual recognition processes that are clearly seen in personal relations and in preliminary socialization processes (Benjamin qtd. in Stevenson, 2006: 118,119).

Hochschild’s concept of “emotional labor” concept can easily be observed as a part of work role and it constitutes the desirable face and body signs (the effort as well as the ability of planning and controlling in order to display the emotions required in professional relations). Most of the respondents in this study have pointed out that the sides in polemics today do not perform the labor role; probably as they are not equipped well enough or do not intend to show any efforts for that. Furthermore, they have remarked insincere, preemptory and aggressive manners. Generally speaking, the sides in a discussion tend to outmaneuver each other with a defensive instinct instead of promoting understanding. Therefore, the process of mutual dialogue process is stagnated.

Conclusion

Responsibility towards society cannot be mentioned if there is no ethical responsibility. Thus, authors should lead their discussions by being conscious of their responsibilities; in addition, express the facts neutrally and clearly without agitating the public opinion and be respectful towards themselves, their interlocutors as well as public within the framework of ethical principles. Otherwise, informing can easily be substituted by tabloidism and vulgarity. Sometimes columnists assume a surly attitude of **discussing the topics negatively, diverting them or simply getting involved in polemics. “Emotional intelligence, social consciousness and empathy are also quite significant in journalism as a profession necessitating close relations with individuals and society. In other words, journalism is one of the professions which is closets to and intertwined with individuals and society as a whole, so it is rather important for journalists to feel the emotions, sorrows, anxieties and problems of a society and be able to think through their perspectives”** (Örs, 2007: 769). Thus, by putting themselves in the position of their audience, journalists should try to prepare enlightening texts reflecting social problems and avoid personal conflicts as well as the attitudes devoid of professional ethics. In this respect, defining the social dimension of emotional intelligence, the concepts of social consciousness and social awareness are of vital importance. Thanks to social consciousness and social awareness, journalists can assess their societies better and in return convey their emotions and thoughts with the same sensitivity.

“In order to get a beneficial result, the discussions should be on intellectual level, views and suggestions should be expressed over different dimensions of issues and above all, mutual understanding and respect should attentively be observed. Nevertheless, what is experienced here (in Turkey) is to believe the correctness of our thoughts firmly and surmise that different views are certainly wrong...mostly opposite parties do it to excess of accusing each other” (Gürel, 2004: 94).

There seems to be an intention in the media to exert control over people by using the entertainment factor. In this sense, creating polemics can be regarded as one of the auxiliary factors to exercise control over people. Such a control is seen as a part of the circus culture in the structuring of media in modern world. Like the fights between gladiators in ancient Rome, the columnists use their writings to create polemics, which is a noticeable burden for democracy. “Democratic governing process is egalitarian. Each individual who can make sense of the events and

phenomena correctly by getting involved in them directly with his or her emotions do not experience alienation” (Witt, 1980: 144-145). While creating polemics, the media members neither bring social values and objectives into open with the discussion atmospheres they create through polemics not they contribute to the development of individuals at all. The texts in which the columnists continuously accuse each other and express their personal problems emerge, in a way, as elements of vulgarization.

The media members of today shoulder heavy responsibilities as the role models for the students majoring in journalism theoretically and practically as the independent representatives of public opinion in the future. These students adopt the views of the journalists they like, emulate their practices and even associate themselves with those journalists. Therefore, being opinion leaders, media members will manage to address greater audience as long as they act with social consciousness and awareness. The postgraduate students who took part in this study have pointed out that the media members certainly do not have emotional intelligence and also highlighted it as a negative point for communication and professional ethics. It is quite important that the media students consider the current polemics with a critical approach. The media members who handle polemics wrongly get discredited after a while and also get away from being role models. Emotional competence is the ability to recognize feelings as well as to control and direct them. Emotional intelligence indicates how all these feelings should be controlled and also enables individuals to realize their feelings and manage them. It is possible to say that an author may become obliged to resort to polemics in the media at times; however, as long as he or she has emotional intelligence involving being conscious of the responsibilities all the time and making no concessions from ethical principles, he or she will do it intellectually and discreetly

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