

## Chapter 3

# Popular Culture and Communication Ethics: An Assessment on Umberto Eco's *Numero Zero*

**Ozlen Ozgen**

*Atilim University, Turkey*

**Emir Turkoglu**

*Ankara Haci Bayram Veli University, Turkey*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Ethics that is possible to be considered as an element which would contribute to media in terms of quality signifies the core values in sense of journalism, and hence, it can represent the bond established with reality and truth. It has been an issue how much the individuals whose perception of reality is built through the media get close to and far away from the truth, and this reflects the difference or the relation between absolute fact and what is presented in the media. Umberto Eco, in his novel titled *Numero Zero*, focused on how patrons, using power of media with the aim of making profits by assuming transformative power of newspapers, have twisted the truth in the news. And in this chapter, the authors deal with *Numero Zero* written by Eco and make a discussion on communication ethics through the book, which is analyzed descriptively.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In today's world where the media-oriented reliability discussions are intense, one of the most discussed issues is media ethics. Communication - holding which down to certain communication tools is infeasible - is exposed to criticism that it carries out an ideological function by spreading some value and belief systems with its mass feature, thus the activities carried out in the field of communication become an important element of ethical discussions. Ethics, seen as an important element that can add value to the media qualitatively, is a sign and symbol of the basic values in the activities carried out in the field

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of communication and represents the connection established with reality or truth. Today, when there is a loss of credibility in many activities carried out in the field of communication with mass media and various ways of communication, a way out in the axis of ethical discussions is being sought and communication ethics is being brought to the foreground for a reassurance. In addition to being presented as a requirement to save the image of work and employees in the sector, ethics is kept on the agenda as well as in the academic circles. In this context, it is discussed what kind of problems the proximity and distance of the relationship between the media acquired and the truth provide for the individuals and the society in a wide network of communication with the means of communication. The phenomenon of truth, which is considered to exist in a concrete form from what is thought and conceived in the discussions of reality, sits at the centre of the ethics of communication and ontologically characterises the situation independent from the subject. Righteousness is based on theory, expression, and proposition in philosophical discussions and in this respect it distinguishes from the concept of truth and characterises the state of the object which is in close relation with the subject. Thus, it gets more difficult to make definitive assessments in the ethical discussions. As a matter of fact, the ethics of communication and its validity cannot be separated from the social context and constructed meaning processes, and it is understood that there is a difference considering the historical transformation in the economic and cultural context. When discussions on concept are evaluated with the characteristics of the postmodern age, it is understood that the situation of relativity has emerged and it can be concluded that the ethics of communication is hard to be realised through fixed definitions in a place where the righteousness is discussed on the basis of subjects and where millions of people are present.

The culture of consumption, which is the basic value of the postmodern age, the communication tools that systematically disseminate the consumer culture and the popular cultural discussions that erects their (culture of consumption and media) cultural form constitutes an intersection point. The fact that the capitalist production and consumption relations are building a purely success-oriented understanding of social conception and capital, and traces of selfishness distort mass communication as it happens in interpersonal communication. As a matter of fact, the activities carried out in the field of communication and media with a profit-oriented approach are transformed into the means of gain of interest groups only. This situation causes the ethical values to be put aside in the profit-oriented organisations whose principles and rules are determined by the market economy and transforms the media into the means of interest of those holding this power. From this point of view, it can be stated that the distance between the realities and the individuals - whose reality-related perceptions are constructed with the means of communication - has become a problem. The distinction between what is presented to individuals and the absolute reality refers to the two ends of the conflict of interests, and in this respect there rises a tension between the media and those who hold the power of the economy and of society. Beyond public interests, manipulation of the content to the benefit of interest groups necessitates the concealment of the truth between the information pile, the trivialisation, the agenda-building and framing, and the ethical discussion of the communication activities. Collapse of popular culture into mass culture and definition through the connection with folk culture at the beginning, necessitates evaluation of communication and media ethics including popular culture discussions.

In this study, it is aimed to make an evaluation about communication ethics. From this point of view, the current structure of the media and power relations will be evaluated. And in this regard, we will discuss about how ethical practices are possible. Within this frame, in this study where Umberto Eco's novel "Numero Zero" is analysed, firstly the concept of ethics and ethics of communication was emphasised, and the relation between truth and ethics (in terms of journalism) was evaluated in terms

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