

1 **Media Ethics in the Context of Religious Coverage:**
2 **A Comparative Study of Western and Georgian Media**
3 **Organizations’ Guidelines**
4

5 *This paper examines the professional and ethical standards governing the*
6 *coverage of religious issues in Western media and explores their potential*
7 *adaptation within the Georgian media context. The analysis is based on a*
8 *comparative and content-oriented examination of ethical guidelines, editorial*
9 *policies, and professional codes of leading Western media organizations. Its*
10 *theoretical foundation is informed by normative and sociological approaches*
11 *to media studies, within which media ethics is understood not merely as a*
12 *regulatory instrument, but as a fundamental component of journalistic*
13 *practice and its societal role. Particular attention is paid to the core principles*
14 *that define responsible reporting on religious matters, including accuracy and*
15 *reliability, pluralism, the clear distinction between fact and opinion, the*
16 *avoidance of hate speech, and the contextualized presentation of sensitive*
17 *issues. The findings indicate that within Western ethical frameworks, editorial*
18 *independence, accountability, and the prioritization of the public interest*
19 *remain central guiding values. In contrast, the Georgian media landscape*
20 *continues to exhibit tendencies toward sensationalism, the reproduction of*
21 *stereotypical narratives, and the inconsistent application of ethical standards.*
22 *To illustrate these disparities, the paper analyzes the media coverage of the*
23 *events of May 17, 2013, which revealed the significant impact of professional*
24 *shortcomings on public attitudes and social perceptions. The study concludes*
25 *that the meaningful integration of Western ethical practices into the Georgian*
26 *media environment requires not only their conceptual adoption but also the*
27 *strengthening of journalistic education and the institutional consolidation of*
28 *self-regulatory mechanisms.*

29
30 **Keywords:** *Media Ethics; Religious Reporting; Journalism Standards;*
31 *Framing; Hate Speech; Media Discourse; Western Media; Georgian Media*
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34 **Introduction**
35

36 The discussion of the spiritual and moral values underlying mass media
37 activity has a long intellectual tradition. The establishment of ethical norms has
38 become an essential requirement of professional practice. Any form of
39 journalistic education should be grounded in three fundamental principles. First,
40 it requires skills and talent; second, an understanding that “investigative
41 journalism” is not a distinct or exceptional genre, since all forms of journalistic
42 work inherently involve elements of inquiry; and third, a recognition that ethics
43 is not merely a supplementary condition of professional mastery, but an integral
44 component of it.

45 In the contemporary world, media constitutes one of the key defining
46 features that shapes and reflects the level of democratic development and societal
47 openness within a state. On the one hand, the independence of the media, and on
48 the other, its accountability to citizens and society as a whole, represent

1 fundamental challenges faced by modern democratic systems. The fulfillment of
2 these responsibilities largely depends on the functioning of the media itself. For
3 this reason, modern journalism has developed a set of professional standards and
4 ethical norms, formally articulated through codes of conduct and internal
5 regulatory frameworks.

6 The significance of this study is determined by both theoretical and practical
7 considerations. From a theoretical perspective, the paper contributes to the
8 broader discourse on media ethics by examining the coverage of religious issues
9 as a complex social process situated at the intersection of media, religion, and
10 democratic society. It conceptualizes media ethics not only as a normative
11 framework but also as a substantive foundation of journalistic practice.

12 From a practical standpoint, the study acquires particular relevance within
13 the Georgian media context, where the coverage of religious issues is frequently
14 associated with sensationalism, the reproduction of stereotypes, and the
15 inconsistent application of ethical standards. The research aims to identify these
16 challenges and offers concrete recommendations for improving professional
17 practice. Furthermore, it systematizes Western media-ethical standards and
18 explores the possibilities for their adaptation within the Georgian context, which
19 is essential for strengthening journalistic education, enhancing self-regulatory
20 mechanisms, and increasing public trust in the media. Thus, the study establishes
21 both a theoretical and practical foundation for further research in the field of
22 media ethics and contributes to the development of professional standards within
23 the Georgian media landscape. The object of the research comprises the ethical
24 codes, editorial guidelines, and professional regulatory documents of Western
25 and Georgian media organizations that define the norms and standards of
26 journalistic activity.

27 The subject of the research is the set of journalistic ethical principles
28 governing the coverage of religious issues, their interpretation, and their
29 practical implementation in both Western and Georgian media systems. It also
30 encompasses the specific features of media representations of religion, including
31 the discursive strategies employed in the coverage of sensitive topics, the forms
32 of professional responsibility, and the degree to which ethical standards are
33 upheld.

34 35 36 **Research Objectives**

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38 The primary objective of this study is to conduct a systematic analysis and
39 identification of the fundamental principles of media ethics that define the
40 responsible and professional coverage of religious issues in Western media. In
41 addition, the study aims to assess the potential for adapting these principles
42 within the Georgian media context. Particular attention is devoted to the
43 interrelationship between media freedom, editorial independence, and
44 journalistic accountability, understood as the foundation of ethical self-
45 regulation and the functioning of democratic media systems.

1 Furthermore, the study seeks to systematize the ethical guidelines of
2 Western media organizations and enhance their accessibility in the Georgian
3 language. This process is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of
4 professional standards and to facilitate their practical implementation within the
5 Georgian media landscape.

6 7 8 **Scope of the Study**

9
10 The scope of the study encompasses the normative and theoretical discourse
11 of media ethics within both Western and Georgian media systems. The research
12 focuses on the ethical codes, editorial policies, and professional guideline
13 documents of international and national media organizations that regulate
14 standards for the coverage of religious issues.

15 Within this framework, the study examines media as a social institution that
16 actively participates in shaping public discourse, articulating value systems, and
17 consolidating democratic culture. Accordingly, the scope extends beyond formal
18 normative documents to include the practical functioning of media, discursive
19 frameworks, and the processes through which ethical standards are implemented
20 within the Georgian media environment.

21 22 23 **Research Questions**

24
25 The study is guided by the following research questions:

- 26
27 • How do Western media-ethical guidelines define professional standards
28 for the coverage of religious issues?
- 29 • To what extent is the effective adaptation and practical implementation
30 of these standards possible within the Georgian media landscape?
- 31 • Which ethical principles dominate Western media guidelines in the
32 context of religious coverage, and how are these principles interpreted
33 within Georgian media?
- 34 • What types of challenges hinder the full implementation of ethical
35 standards in the Georgian media environment?
- 36 • What impact does media coverage have on public discourse and the
37 perception of religious groups?

38 39 40 **Structure of the Article**

41
42 The article is structurally organized into several interrelated sections that
43 collectively present the theoretical, methodological, and empirical dimensions
44 of the study. The introductory section outlines the relevance of the research and
45 defines its objectives, scope, and key research questions, thereby establishing the
46 conceptual framework of the paper.

1 The subsequent section is devoted to a review of the literature, analyzing
2 contemporary theoretical and empirical studies on media ethics and the coverage
3 of religious issues, thus providing the study’s theoretical foundation.

4 The third section presents the methodological framework and research
5 design, including the methods employed—comparative analysis, content
6 analysis, and case study approach. This is followed by an examination of the
7 ethical guidelines of Western media organizations and their analytical
8 interpretation, enabling the identification of key professional standards
9 governing the coverage of religious issues.

10 The next section focuses on the analysis of ethical frameworks and practices
11 within the Georgian media context, with particular attention to structural
12 challenges, narrative polarization, and the practical implementation of ethical
13 norms.

14 Subsequently, the study presents a case study—a data-driven analysis of the
15 media coverage of the events of May 17, 2013—which allows for an assessment
16 of how ethical standards are applied in practice in both Georgian and Western
17 media contexts. Based on these findings, a comparative analysis is conducted,
18 highlighting the similarities and differences between Western and Georgian
19 media-ethical systems, particularly in terms of their practical application.

20 The concluding section summarizes the main findings of the study, while
21 the recommendations are directed toward improving professional standards and
22 strengthening ethical practices within the Georgian media landscape.

23 24 25 **Literature Review**

26
27 The issue of media ethics and the coverage of religious topics constitutes a
28 dynamic and interdisciplinary field within contemporary communication
29 research, integrating normative theory, media sociology, cultural studies, and
30 discourse analysis. In the twenty-first century—particularly in the era of digital
31 media—the role of the media has expanded significantly, resulting in an
32 increased influence on the formation of public perceptions, value systems, and
33 collective identities (Couldry, 2012; Hjarvard, 2013; Hepp, 2020).

34 The theoretical foundations of media ethics are widely regarded as an
35 essential component of democratic society. Clifford Christians and Denis
36 McQuail associate media’s ethical responsibility with the protection of the
37 public interest, the promotion of pluralism, and the development of civic
38 discourse (Christians, 2009; McQuail, 2010). These classical approaches have
39 been further developed by contemporary scholars, particularly within the context
40 of digital media. Ward (2018), for instance, argues that media ethics should
41 evolve into a form of “global ethics” that takes into account online environments,
42 hybrid media ecosystems, and transnational communication processes.

43 Contemporary theoretical frameworks conceptualize media not merely as a
44 transmitter of information, but as an active social agent. Nick Couldry (2012)
45 links media power to the control of symbolic resources, while Stig Hjarvard
46 (2013), through the theory of mediatization, argues that religious practices are

1 increasingly shaped by media logic. This perspective is further elaborated by
2 Andreas Hepp (2020), who demonstrates how social reality becomes deeply
3 integrated within media systems.

4 Studies on the media representation of religion pay particular attention to
5 ethical issues, including stereotyping, discursive framing, and conflict-oriented
6 narratives. Stewart Hoover (2016) observes that media often portrays religious
7 groups through conflict-centered lenses. In a similar vein, Eide and Kunelius
8 (2008) argue that journalism should develop as a practice of “global
9 responsibility,” especially in the coverage of culturally sensitive topics.

10 The ethical guidelines of Western media organizations represent an
11 institutionalized form of media ethics. Editorial frameworks such as those of the
12 BBC (2019), Reuters (2020), and the Associated Press (2022) emphasize
13 principles including accuracy, impartiality, contextualization, and the avoidance
14 of hate speech. Contemporary research suggests that these guidelines are not
15 merely formal documents but exert a tangible influence on journalistic practice
16 (Phillips, 2015).

17 In the digital media era, particular importance is attached to the application
18 of ethical standards in online environments. Chadwick (2017), through the
19 concept of the hybrid media system, demonstrates that traditional and digital
20 media interact in ways that accelerate the dissemination of information while
21 simultaneously increasing the likelihood of ethical risks. Carlson (2017) further
22 argues that journalistic authority in the contemporary media ecosystem is
23 increasingly constructed discursively, which heightens the importance of
24 maintaining ethical standards.

25 Research on the Georgian media landscape points to inconsistencies in the
26 application of ethical standards and challenges related to professional culture.
27 Although the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics plays a significant role in
28 the process of self-regulation, issues such as sensationalism, stereotyping, and
29 insufficient contextualization remain prevalent in practice.

30 Media ethics and the coverage of religion are also frequently examined
31 through the lens of framing theory (Entman, 1993), which has evolved into a key
32 analytical tool for studying media narratives. Benson (2013), for example,
33 demonstrates that the frames employed by media organizations shape public
34 perceptions and influence the formation of political and cultural discourses.

35 Furthermore, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) argues that emotional narratives play
36 a significant role in audience engagement; however, they also generate ethical
37 risks, particularly in the coverage of sensitive issues such as religion.

38 Overall, contemporary literature indicates that media ethics in the context
39 of religious coverage constitutes a complex and multi-layered process,
40 encompassing both normative principles and the social and institutional
41 conditions of their practical implementation. Despite this growing body of
42 research, a significant gap remains within the Georgian context, particularly in
43 terms of comparative analyses between Western and local media practices. This
44 gap underscores the relevance and scholarly significance of the present study.

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1 **Research Methodology**

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3 The methodological foundation of the present study is grounded in
4 sociological and normative theories of media, which conceptualize media ethics
5 both as a mechanism for regulating journalistic practice and as a key instrument
6 in the construction of social reality. This approach enables media ethics to be
7 understood not merely as a set of rules and norms, but as a discursive and
8 institutional practice that shapes the role of media within public life. The study
9 adopts a normative perspective, according to which media operates within the
10 framework of safeguarding the public interest, ensuring pluralism, and
11 reinforcing democratic values. At the same time, a sociological perspective is
12 employed, viewing media activity as an integral part of social relations, power
13 structures, and discursive frameworks. The theoretical framework integrates
14 core concepts of media ethics related to editorial independence, accountability,
15 professional responsibility, and ethical self-regulation. Within this context,
16 particular importance is assigned to the coverage of religious issues as a highly
17 sensitive domain, where journalistic decisions have a direct impact on public
18 discourse and social relations. The research is based on a qualitative research
19 design that combines comparative, content analysis, and case study methods.
20 This approach allows for an in-depth and multidimensional analysis of both
21 normative documents and media practices, which is particularly relevant for
22 assessing ethical standards in the coverage of religious issues.

23 The empirical basis of the study consists of ethical codes, editorial
24 guidelines, and professional standards documents of Western and Georgian
25 media organizations, as well as media texts reflecting the practice of reporting
26 on religious issues. Data selection was conducted using a purposive sampling
27 strategy, focusing on sources of high relevance and analytical
28 significance. Content analysis was conducted based on a predefined coding
29 scheme derived from the operationalization of key principles of media ethics.
30 The analytical categories include: the distinction between fact and opinion,
31 pluralism, accuracy and reliability, the avoidance of hate speech, the
32 contextualization of sensitive topics, and journalistic responsibility. These
33 categories function as analytical units, ensuring the systematic classification and
34 comparative interpretation of the data. A central component of the research is
35 the case study method, applied to the analysis of media coverage of the events
36 of May 17, 2013. This case was selected due to its high level of social, political,
37 and religious sensitivity, making it a relevant empirical example for evaluating
38 ethical standards in the reporting of religious issues. Within the case study
39 framework, media texts produced by both Georgian and international media
40 outlets are analyzed, enabling the assessment of discursive strategies, narrative
41 constructions, and the practical implementation of ethical norms.

42 The case analysis is conducted using the same coding scheme, ensuring
43 methodological consistency between the theoretical framework and empirical
44 data. Particular attention is paid to how religious groups are represented, how
45 sensitive issues are contextualized, and to what extent the principles of
46 journalistic neutrality and balance are upheld. The study is limited by the scope

1 of selected documents and the case under examination, which constrains the
2 generalizability of the findings. However, it allows for an in-depth and context-
3 oriented interpretation of mediaethics in practice.
4

6 **Discussion of Findings and Arguments**

7

8 The findings of the present study demonstrate that the media coverage of
9 religious issues cannot be understood merely as a technical process of
10 information transmission. Rather, it constitutes a discursive practice that actively
11 participates in the construction of social reality and shapes public perceptions of
12 religious groups and processes (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Accordingly, media
13 ethics in the context of religious reporting should be conceptualized as a
14 foundational element of professional legitimacy and a determining factor in the
15 quality of democratic discourse.

16 One of the central findings of the study concerns the problem of generalizing
17 individual behavior to collective religious identity. Such practices discursively
18 generate mechanisms of stigmatization, whereby isolated incidents are
19 transformed into defining characteristics of entire groups. From the perspective
20 of critical discourse analysis, this form of generalization represents a symbolic
21 exercise of power that influences the representation of social groups and
22 reinforces inequality (Wodak, 2015). In this sense, media functions not only as
23 a transmitter of information but also as a constructor of social categories.

24 The analysis of Western media-ethical frameworks indicates that the clear
25 distinction between fact and opinion constitutes a cornerstone of journalistic
26 accuracy, particularly in the coverage of religious issues. In the context of digital
27 media, where the dissemination of information is rapid and often difficult to
28 regulate, the violation of this principle can lead to the manipulation of narratives
29 and undermine media credibility (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). Furthermore, ethical
30 journalism requires contextualization, as the fragmented presentation of
31 information increases the risk of misinformation and discursive polarization
32 (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

33 Within this framework, particular importance is attached to the practice of
34 referencing religious identity. Contemporary research in media ethics suggests
35 that the mention of religious affiliation is justified only when it is directly
36 relevant to the essence of the story; otherwise, it may function as an instrument
37 of stigmatization (Silverstone, 2007). This issue is especially salient in societies
38 where religion plays a significant social and political role, as media narratives
39 directly influence intergroup relations.

40 The empirical analysis, including the case of the events of May 17, 2013,
41 confirms that in crisis situations media tends to gravitate toward sensationalism
42 and selective framing. This tendency is closely linked to the logic of
43 contemporary media systems, where the economy of attention prioritizes
44 conflict-driven and emotionally charged content (Chadwick, 2017). As a result,
45 media may act not as a mechanism for de-escalation, but rather as a factor
46 contributing to the intensification of conflict.

1 A further significant challenge concerns the presence of hate speech and
2 indirect forms of discrimination. Contemporary studies indicate that
3 discriminatory narratives are often manifested not through explicit aggression,
4 but through structural bias embedded in context, terminology, and
5 representational practices (Farkas & Schou, 2018). Therefore, ethical journalism
6 requires not only the avoidance of overt violations but also a critical reflection
7 on discursive practices.

8 Equally important is the principle of pluralism, which ensures the balanced
9 representation of diverse perspectives and reduces the risk of informational
10 manipulation. According to democratic media theory, the promotion of
11 pluralism constitutes one of the core functions of the media (Couldry, 2012). In
12 the absence of pluralism, journalism risks losing public trust and may become
13 an instrument of asymmetrical representation.

14 In conclusion, the study demonstrates that the coverage of religious issues
15 represents one of the most complex ethical challenges for contemporary media.
16 Ensuring accuracy, balance, contextualization, and non-discriminatory
17 representation is essential not only for maintaining professional standards but
18 also for safeguarding social stability.

21 **Analytical Review of Western Media Organizations' Guidelines**

22
23 The contemporary media environment, characterized by digital transformation,
24 the rapid circulation of information, and the proliferation of platforms, has
25 significantly increased the importance of journalistic ethics. The intensity of
26 information dissemination simultaneously enhances public awareness while also
27 amplifying the risks of misinformation, thereby reinforcing the necessity of
28 adhering to media-ethical standards (Chadwick, 2017; Ward, 2018).

29 Journalistic ethics constitutes a normative system that defines the responsibility
30 of the media toward society and is grounded in the principle of the free yet
31 responsible exchange of information (Christians, 2009), which represents a
32 fundamental prerequisite for the functioning of democratic societies. A comparative
33 analysis of the editorial guidelines of Western media organizations demonstrates
34 that accuracy, impartiality, diversity, and accountability form a universal normative
35 framework institutionalized both within editorial processes and professional culture
36 (Phillips, 2015; McQuail, 2010).

37 Contemporary media-ethical initiatives, such as the Journalism Trust Initiative
38 (Ethical Journalism Network, 2020), indicate a growing emphasis on
39 strengthening ethical self-regulation and highlight the importance of editorial
40 transparency, accountability, and a commitment to the public interest (Reporters
41 Without Borders, 2019). This approach confirms that media ethics is no longer
42 merely a declarative norm, but rather a practical mechanism that defines the
43 standards of credible journalism.

44 The practices of Western media organizations further demonstrate that
45 editorial independence constitutes a fundamental principle of professional
46 ethics. Journalistic activity must be protected from political, religious, and other

1 forms of external influence in order to ensure objective and fair reporting (Hallin
2 & Mancini, 2004).

3 The declaration of principles adopted by the International Federation of
4 Journalists—which represents over 600,000 journalists worldwide—explicitly
5 rejects the authority of the state in editorial matters (International Federation of
6 Journalists, 2019): “Within the framework of each country’s general law, the
7 journalist shall recognize only the jurisdiction of colleagues in professional
8 matters, excluding any interference by governments or others.”

9 The European Broadcasting Union, representing public service broadcasters
10 from 56 countries, requires its members to ensure impartial and fair reporting.
11 The organization defines six core values that are shared across its member
12 institutions and that underpin its editorial principles: universality, independence,
13 excellence, accountability, diversity, and innovation (European Broadcasting
14 Union, n.d.). These values guide editorial decision-making and reinforce a
15 commitment to serving the public interest.

16 The European Broadcasting Union emphasizes editorial freedom, allowing
17 media organizations to report on any issue or content without political, religious,
18 or commercial interference, provided that such coverage is justified by the public
19 interest.

20 At the same time, ethical standards clearly require a distinction between fact
21 and opinion, which constitutes one of the central criteria of credible journalism
22 (Entman, 1993). Audiences must be able to clearly identify the type of content
23 they are consuming—whether it is news, analysis, or opinion. This distinction
24 protects readers from interpreting subjective judgments as objective facts (The
25 Washington Post, n.d.).

26 Media credibility is fundamentally grounded in the accuracy and objectivity
27 of information. In the contemporary media environment, one of the most
28 significant challenges remains the dissemination of unverified and manipulative
29 information, which undermines both public trust and democratic processes.
30 Journalistic ethics therefore requires rigorous multi-source verification of
31 information, a clear distinction between facts and opinions, and the prompt
32 correction of errors (International Federation of Journalists, 2019).

33 The analysis of editorial practices further demonstrates that media
34 credibility is closely linked to multi-source verification, the prompt correction
35 of errors, and accountability to audiences (Carlson, 2017). These principles
36 establish the institutional foundation of trust and shape the reputation of media
37 organizations.

38 Journalists must ensure that their work serves the public interest. The
39 commitment to public interest forms a central pillar of the editorial philosophy
40 of The Guardian (The Guardian, 2023). Journalists are expected to take
41 responsibility for the accuracy of their work and to verify information prior to
42 publication. Wherever possible, they should rely on primary and original
43 sources. It is essential to recognize that neither speed nor format justifies
44 inaccuracy (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014).

45 Diversity and inclusion constitute key priorities for the BBC, underpinning
46 its mission from representing the full spectrum of the United Kingdom to

1 engaging new generations and fostering one of the world's most creative media
2 environments. The BBC respects individuals with diverse perspectives,
3 experiences, and backgrounds, regardless of age, ability, gender, beliefs,
4 physical condition, religion, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or social origin
5 (BBC, 2019; The Washington Post, n.d.).

6 In the context of reporting on religious issues, Western ethical guidelines
7 place particular emphasis on sensitivity, contextualization, and pluralism. Media
8 organizations are obliged to ensure fair and balanced representation of different
9 religious groups, to avoid the reproduction of stereotypes, and to prevent the
10 dissemination of discriminatory or hate-based narratives (Hjarvard, 2013;
11 Hoover, 2006). Information disseminated by journalists should not contribute to
12 hatred, stereotyping, or the formation of prejudice. Media content must not
13 encourage discrimination on the basis of social or ethnic origin, race, gender,
14 sexual orientation, language, religion, political beliefs, or any other
15 characteristic (International Federation of Journalists, 2019; BBC, 2019).

16 Guideline documents on ethical reporting emphasize that the identification
17 of an individual's religious affiliation is permissible only when it is directly
18 relevant to the subject being covered. Otherwise, such references are considered
19 unprofessional and carry a significant risk of stigmatization (Associated Press,
20 2022; BBC, 2019).

21 Western media-ethical standards also provide clear regulations regarding
22 methods of information gathering (The Washington Post, n.d.). The use of covert
23 methods is permitted only in cases where there is a strong public interest and
24 where the information cannot be obtained by other means (Independent Press
25 Standards Organisation, n.d.; Reuters, 2020). At the same time, journalists are
26 prohibited from violating personal privacy, engaging in harassment, or exerting
27 undue pressure, which further underscores the importance of ethical
28 responsibility in journalistic practice (Associated Press, 2022).

29 Particular attention is also given to the prevention of conflicts of interest.
30 Journalists are prohibited from engaging in activities that may compromise the
31 objectivity of their reporting, including financial, political, or religious
32 involvement (Ward, 2018). This principle serves to safeguard editorial
33 independence and maintain public trust in the media.

34 The analysis of ethical guidelines of Western media organizations
35 demonstrates that contemporary journalism is grounded not only in the
36 dissemination of information, but also in its critical interpretation and
37 contextualization. The coverage of religious issues, as a highly sensitive domain,
38 requires a heightened adherence to professional standards, as media-generated
39 discourse directly influences public perceptions and social relations (Couldry,
40 2012; Hepp, 2020).

41 Thus, Western media-ethical frameworks constitute an institutionalized
42 system that integrates normative principles with practical mechanisms, ensuring
43 the credibility, accountability, and democratic function of journalistic practice.

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1 **Media Ethics and Professional Standards in Georgia**

2
3 The coverage of religious issues within the Georgian media landscape is
4 particularly significant given the country's historical, cultural, and social
5 context. In Georgia, religion—especially Orthodox Christianity—plays a central
6 role in shaping national identity and cultural heritage (Adamashvili, 2021). At
7 the same time, the presence of diverse religious groups and denominations
8 necessitates a high level of sensitivity and responsibility on the part of the media.
9 Consequently, the professional and ethical coverage of religious issues
10 constitutes a key factor in ensuring media credibility and maintaining public trust
11 (Adamashvili, 2021).

12 The relationship between media and religion in Georgia has become
13 increasingly salient over the past two decades, as the development of the media
14 sector has been accompanied by a growing intensity in the coverage of religious
15 topics. Media platforms frequently serve as arenas for discussing issues such as
16 the role of the Church in public life, religious freedom, the rights of religious
17 minorities, and the relationship between the Church and the state (Lynch, 2011).

18 Research on the Georgian media often highlights that the coverage of
19 religious issues is closely intertwined with broader cultural and political contexts
20 (Adamashvili, 2021). The media frequently functions as a space in which
21 competing narratives—such as conservative, liberal, and ethno-religious
22 discourses—interact and contest one another (Schudson, 2003). Within this
23 context, the importance of media ethics becomes particularly pronounced, as
24 journalists are required to ensure pluralism, accuracy, and contextualized
25 analysis.

26 The adherence to ethical standards in the reporting of religious issues is
27 especially crucial in multi-religious and culturally diverse societies. In Georgia,
28 where the Orthodox Church holds a significant cultural and symbolic position,
29 media coverage of religious matters often becomes an integral part of broader
30 public debates.

31 Ethical reporting on religious issues is a necessary precondition for both
32 journalistic professionalism and the consolidation of democratic culture. The
33 analysis of international standards demonstrates that ethical norms should not be
34 perceived as constraints, but rather as the foundation of high-quality journalism.
35 Their implementation within the Georgian context would contribute to
36 strengthening media credibility and fostering a more tolerant social environment.
37 Ethical journalism represents the only viable pathway for the media to function
38 as an objective narrator rather than as an instrument of manipulative narratives.

39 It can therefore be argued that Western media guidelines should not be
40 understood merely as a set of restrictions, but as a framework that protects
41 journalists from professional errors while safeguarding society from
42 misinformation and manipulation. The implementation of these standards within
43 the Georgian media environment is critically important for establishing a high
44 level of professional ethics.

45 In the process of consolidating democratic values, the existence of an
46 informed public is of paramount importance. However, public awareness cannot

1 be achieved without high-quality and professional media broadcasting. Freedom
2 of speech and expression constitutes one of the primary guarantees for improving
3 the level of public information. Nevertheless, the protection of the public’s right
4 to receive high-quality information cannot be ensured solely through legal
5 regulations safeguarding freedom of expression. It also requires a strong and
6 trust-based relationship between journalists and their audiences.

7 To achieve this, it is essential for journalists to recognize that their primary
8 responsibility lies not with their sources, but with the public. Journalists must
9 assume accountability for the information they disseminate. At the same time,
10 for society to be well and effectively informed, it is equally important that the
11 public understands the roles and responsibilities of journalists. The Code of
12 Conduct of the Georgian Public Broadcaster represents one of the key
13 instruments for establishing this mutual relationship—on the one hand, ensuring
14 journalistic accountability, and on the other, enabling public oversight of that
15 responsibility (Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2006).

16 Within the Georgian broadcasting landscape, the Code of Conduct of the
17 Georgian Public Broadcaster represents the first significant attempt to establish
18 such a regulatory framework. This code safeguards the rights of individuals in
19 general, as well as those of broadcasters and journalists. It is neither a rigid set
20 of rules nor a mandatory ethical manual; rather, it constitutes a collection of core
21 professional standards and principles of journalistic ethics, adherence to which
22 is specifically required of employees of the Georgian Public Broadcaster.

23 The coverage of religious issues in the Georgian media environment is
24 characterized by a high degree of sensitivity, shaped by the country’s historical,
25 cultural, and social context. The dominant role of Orthodox Christianity in
26 national identity, combined with the presence of religious diversity, creates a
27 discursive environment in which media simultaneously reflects and shapes
28 public attitudes. Consequently, the coverage of religious issues should be
29 understood not only as an informational process but also as a social and political
30 one.

31 Analysis of the Georgian media indicates that the coverage of religious
32 topics frequently occurs within competing narrative frameworks, including
33 conservative, liberal, and ethno-religious discourses. While this diversity creates
34 opportunities for pluralism, it also increases the risk of polarization, particularly
35 when media fails to ensure balance and contextualization. Under such
36 conditions, the role of media ethics becomes increasingly significant, as it
37 functions as a mechanism for regulating discursive practices and reducing the
38 spread of manipulative narratives.

39 The Code of Conduct of the Georgian Public Broadcaster and the Georgian
40 Charter of Journalistic Ethics formally reflect international media-ethical
41 standards and incorporate fundamental principles such as accuracy, impartiality,
42 pluralism, and accountability. This normative framework indicates that the
43 Georgian media possesses an institutional foundation for ensuring professional
44 ethics. However, research-based analysis demonstrates that the practical
45 implementation of these principles remains inconsistent and is largely dependent

1 on the editorial policies and professional cultures of individual media
2 organizations.

3 Particularly problematic is the issue of contextualization and balanced
4 narrative construction (GPB, 2023). Although ethical codes clearly require the
5 inclusion of diverse perspectives, in practice there is often a dominance of certain
6 discourses, which limits the representation of alternative viewpoints. This
7 tendency is especially evident in the coverage of religious issues, where media
8 may contribute to the reproduction of stereotypes and the intensification of social
9 tensions.

10 The issue of religious sensitivity remains one of the central challenges in
11 Georgian media ethics. Existing normative frameworks emphasize the
12 importance of respecting religious groups and prohibit the dissemination of
13 discriminatory or hate-based narratives. Nevertheless, in practice, instances of
14 indirect stigmatization and the inappropriate use of religious identity are
15 frequently observed, indicating the incomplete integration of ethical standards
16 into journalistic practice.

17 Concerns related to conflicts of interest and editorial independence also
18 remain significant challenges. Formally, Georgian media-ethical documents
19 clearly stipulate that journalistic activity should be protected from political and
20 other forms of external influence. However, structural characteristics of the
21 media system often constrain the full implementation of these principles, which
22 in turn affects both the tone and thematic priorities of media coverage.

23 Importantly, Georgian media-ethical frameworks largely align with Western
24 standards at the normative level. However, a key divergence lies in the degree
25 of their practical implementation. In Western media systems, ethical principles
26 are more fully institutionalized and constitute an integral part of professional
27 culture, whereas in the Georgian context they often remain at a declarative level.

28 Thus, the analysis of Georgian media suggests that the challenge of media
29 ethics is not merely a matter of insufficient normative regulation, but is closely
30 linked to issues of practical implementation, professional culture, and the
31 broader institutional environment. The coverage of religious issues, as a highly
32 sensitive domain, particularly highlights these contradictions and underscores
33 the need for systemic improvement.

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36 **The Events of May 17, 2013, and Their Media Representation: A** 37 **Comparative Analysis of Georgian and Western Media**

38

39 One of the primary functions of contemporary media is not only to inform
40 the public but also to provide an interpretative organization of social reality.
41 Media does not simply deliver information; rather, it offers frameworks through
42 which information becomes comprehensible, meaningful, or emotionally
43 charged. For this reason, the influence of media is particularly strong in crisis
44 and conflict environments, where public opinion forms rapidly and is often
45 shaped not by in-depth analysis, but by repeatedly circulated narratives.

1 The role of media becomes even more complex in the coverage of religious
2 issues. Religion is not merely a matter of private belief; it is a social institution,
3 a source of symbolic authority, a carrier of historical memory, and, in many
4 societies, a key component of national identity. Consequently, when media
5 covers religious actors, it engages with deeply sensitive societal issues. Under
6 such conditions, journalistic errors extend beyond technical inaccuracies; they
7 may become sources of stigma, polarization, and social distrust.

8 This problem was particularly evident in the Georgian media coverage of
9 the events of May 17, 2013. A significant portion of the media framed these
10 events primarily as a conflict, emphasizing episodes of violence, visual symbols
11 of confrontation, and the demonstrative role of religious affiliation. Such
12 framing had a substantial impact on audience perceptions, contributing not only
13 to the interpretation of the specific event but also to the formation of broader
14 generalized representations of clergy and the Church.

15 The coverage of religious issues represents one of the most complex and
16 sensitive domains for media, as it concerns not only specific events but also
17 societal value systems, cultural memory, collective identity, and patterns of
18 social coexistence. For this reason, when media addresses religion-related topics,
19 it cannot be limited to the mere transmission of factual information. Such
20 coverage inevitably participates in the construction of social meanings, symbolic
21 boundaries, and public perceptions. Accordingly, journalistic ethics in this
22 context should be regarded not as a secondary professional regulation, but as a
23 fundamental condition for the functioning of democratic media.

24 The events of May 17, 2013, in Georgia constitute a particularly significant
25 case study in this regard. This episode brought together religious, political, legal,
26 and cultural factors, placing media in the role not only of observer but also of
27 interpreter and co-producer of discourse. The coverage of these events
28 demonstrated that the frames selected by media, as well as the terminology,
29 emphases, and visual narratives employed, play a decisive role in shaping how
30 society perceives both the event itself and the groups involved.

31 The aim of this section is, on the one hand, to analyze the characteristics of
32 Georgian media coverage of the events of May 17, 2013, and, on the other hand,
33 to compare these practices with the representations found in Western media. The
34 analysis focuses on three main dimensions: first, how media narratives were
35 constructed within the Georgian context; second, what types of professional and
36 ethical shortcomings were identified; and third, how Western media frameworks
37 differed from those employed in Georgian media.

38 May 17, 2013, has become one of the most tense and symbolically charged
39 dates in the Georgian public sphere. The events of that day were associated with
40 the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia; however, within
41 the Georgian context, the issue quickly transcended the framework of human
42 rights advocacy. It evolved into a symbol of broader value-based and identity-
43 driven conflicts within society. This confrontation involved a wide range of
44 social actors, including civil society activists, clergy, political and administrative
45 institutions, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations, and,

1 ultimately, the media, which transformed the entire process into both a public
2 spectacle and a discursive event.

3 The specificity of this event lies in the fact that it was perceived from the
4 outset not merely as a discrete protest or counter-protest, but as a cultural and
5 political clash between competing value systems. For this reason, media
6 coverage extended beyond the boundaries of straightforward reporting.
7 Journalistic narratives did not simply describe events; they constructed
8 interpretative frameworks that shaped public understanding. These frameworks
9 addressed key questions such as: who was responsible for the violence, who
10 constituted the victims, how the involvement of clergy should be interpreted,
11 what significance should be attributed to religious identity, and how these
12 dynamics should be situated within the broader process of democratic
13 development.

14 In order to adequately analyze the media context, it is important to note that
15 by 2013 the Georgian media environment had already become highly polarized.
16 Television broadcasters and online media outlets differed not only in their
17 editorial approaches but also in their political and ideological orientations. In
18 such a context, events characterized by high sensitivity were particularly
19 vulnerable to emotional, conflict-driven, and biased coverage. Consequently, the
20 analysis of the events of May 17 provides an opportunity to assess not only
21 specific media practices, but also the broader professional culture of journalism
22 in Georgia.

23 24 25 **Trends in the Coverage of Religious Issues and Violations of Professional** 26 **Standards in Georgian Media**

27
28 The coverage of the events of May 17 by Georgian media cannot be assessed
29 in unequivocally negative terms. It should be acknowledged that the
30 dissemination of information was generally prompt, and audiences were
31 provided with live broadcasts, visual materials, commentary, and subsequent
32 reactions. In this respect, Georgian media succeeded in informing the public
33 about the ongoing developments. However, for academic analysis, it is more
34 important to examine not only whether information was disseminated, but how
35 it was presented, what types of frames were employed, and what discursive
36 outcomes resulted from this coverage. The first notable trend was fragmentary
37 reporting. A significant portion of media coverage focused on specific
38 episodes—clashes, tensions, physical confrontations, images of clergy, and
39 emotionally charged scenes from counter-demonstrations. As a result, audiences
40 were exposed to an intense yet incomplete portrayal of events. Broader social
41 context was largely absent: there was limited discussion of why this particular
42 date carried such symbolic weight, how the conflict had evolved in previous
43 years, and what legal, cultural, and political factors shaped the background of
44 these developments.

45 The second trend was narrative polarization. In parts of the media, events
46 were framed as a confrontation between two clearly divided and irreconcilable

1 camps. Such framing simplifies reality and presents audiences with a
2 dichotomous perspective, in which complex social processes are reduced to
3 opposing “sides” or “groups.” Polarized narratives hinder the audience’s ability
4 to recognize the diversity of actors involved, the multiplicity of motivations, and
5 the structural causes underlying the events. The third trend was the excessive
6 emphasis on religious identity. When the actions of specific individuals or
7 groups were almost automatically equated with their religious affiliation, it
8 created the impression that religious identity itself was the determining cause of
9 their behavior. Under such conditions, religion is no longer understood as a
10 complex social and cultural system; instead, it is reduced to an immediate
11 explanatory category directly linked to violent or problematic events.

12 In the coverage of the events of May 17, several violations of journalistic
13 standards became particularly evident—standards that are of critical importance
14 when reporting on religious issues.

15

16

17 **Impartiality and Balance**

18

19 Impartiality does not imply the mechanical equalization of all sides; rather,
20 it requires the fair representation of relevant perspectives and the avoidance of
21 biased impressions resulting from selective coverage. During the coverage of the
22 May 17 events, certain media outputs clearly demonstrated that the selection of
23 respondents and the distribution of emphasis created a unidirectional
24 interpretation of the events. In some cases, the narrative conveyed the impression
25 that a particular group was solely responsible for the problem, while its internal
26 diversity, differing viewpoints, and contextual explanations remained
27 underrepresented.

28 The issue of balance becomes particularly evident when the violent or
29 radical actions of individuals are generalized to an entire group. If media fails to
30 present the diversity of perspectives within that group, audiences are left with a
31 one-dimensional portrayal. This does not contribute to informed understanding;
32 rather, it reinforces stereotypical knowledge.

33

34

35 **Accuracy and Verification**

36

37 During the coverage of the events of May 17, 2013, a number of professional
38 standards were violated. In particular, the principle of accuracy was not
39 adequately upheld. This principle obliges media organizations to take all
40 reasonable steps to verify the reliability of sources and the factual correctness of
41 information. Proper attribution of sources is also an essential requirement for
42 ensuring accuracy. Furthermore, broadcasters are expected to provide impartial
43 coverage of events, which entails presenting all relevant perspectives, avoiding
44 the misleading of audiences through incomplete information, and maintaining
45 balance in the selection of respondents. It is equally important that media do not
46 rely solely on one-sided viewpoints as instruments against other groups,

1 especially when those groups are not represented within the coverage.
2 Additionally, presenting unscientific opinions or theories as established facts
3 constitutes a serious breach of professional standards.

4 Accuracy is one of the fundamental pillars of journalistic practice. However,
5 in crisis situations—where information circulates rapidly and media outlets
6 compete to report first—the risk of disseminating inaccurate or insufficiently
7 verified information increases significantly. The coverage of the May 17 events
8 demonstrated that, in certain instances, media failed to clearly distinguish
9 verified facts from assumptions, commentary, or interpretation. This lack of
10 distinction created informational ambiguity and contributed to heightened
11 emotional responses within the public. The issue extended beyond technical
12 inaccuracies. When accuracy is compromised in the context of religious issues,
13 the consequences are often more severe, as imprecise formulations may become
14 sources of stigmatization. For example, if media coverage creates the impression
15 that a particular protest or violent incident was entirely “organized by clergy,”
16 when in reality the situation is far more complex and multifaceted, this leads to
17 the construction of a distorted public memory. Such distortions may later serve
18 as the basis for broader and misleading generalizations.

19 20 21 **Hate Speech, Indirect Stigmatization, and Discriminatory Framing: The** 22 **“Stool-Wielding Priest” as a Media Symbol**

23
24 One of the most significant discursive outcomes of the media coverage of
25 May 17, 2013, was the emergence of the narrative of the “stool-wielding priest.”
26 This episode evolved beyond a reference to a specific act of violence and became
27 a broader symbolic construct through which a particular negative image of clergy
28 was condensed within the public imagination. From an academic perspective,
29 this represents an important example of how media can transform a single visual
30 incident into a central element of collective perception. The critical issue here is
31 that media symbols often displace context. When the figure of the “stool-
32 wielding priest” becomes the dominant representation of the event, the
33 distinction between individual actions and the broader clerical community is
34 obscured. This is precisely how stereotyping operates: a specific incident
35 gradually solidifies into a generalized “truth.”

36 The “stool” and the “stool-wielding priest” became emblematic of the
37 events of May 17, 2013, when a member of the clergy attempted to stop a bus
38 transporting activists away from the demonstration site by striking it with a stool.
39 While violence is unequivocally unacceptable regardless of the actor’s status,
40 and such actions cannot be justified, it is equally important to emphasize that the
41 violent conduct of a single individual must not be generalized to an entire group
42 or attributed to all members of the clergy. Media coverage of such incidents
43 should be conducted in a manner that does not contribute to the formation of new
44 stereotypes or the reinforcement of negative attitudes. Similarly, the
45 dissemination of expressions that incite hatred or mock individuals of different
46 religious affiliations is ethically unacceptable.

1 The ethical responsibility of the media in covering religious issues extends
 2 beyond the avoidance of overtly offensive language. More complex—and often
 3 more dangerous—is the phenomenon of indirect stigmatization, where media
 4 employs formally neutral language while the overall narrative structure produces
 5 discriminatory effects (Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, Article 31). Such
 6 stigmatization may manifest in several ways. First, through the repeated
 7 association of specific religious groups with problematic contexts. Second,
 8 through the emphasis on details that are not essential for understanding the story
 9 but create associative impressions for the audience. Third, through unequal
 10 editorial treatment of different groups, whereby certain communities are more
 11 frequently portrayed as sources of threat, radicalism, or conflict.

12 These elements were evident in various forms in the media coverage of the
 13 events of May 17, 2013. Particularly problematic was the tendency, in describing
 14 violent episodes, to implicitly link religious status with violence, without
 15 sufficiently emphasizing individual responsibility and the internal diversity of
 16 the group in question.

17
 18

19 **Western Media Coverage: Contextualization, Limitations, and Deviations**

20

21 The coverage of the events of May 17 by Western media differed in several
 22 respects from that of Georgian media. International media outlets more
 23 consistently incorporated a broader political and international context, including
 24 Georgia’s democratic development, prospects for European integration, the
 25 protection of LGBTQ rights, the state’s responsibility for ensuring public safety,
 26 and the societal influence of the Orthodox Church.

27 This contextualization represents a significant advantage, as it enables
 28 audiences to interpret events within a broader analytical framework. However,
 29 Western media coverage was not entirely free from limitations. In several
 30 instances, a tendency toward conflict-oriented framing was observed, with
 31 particular emphasis placed on violent, dramatic, and visually compelling
 32 episodes. Such selection, even when factually accurate, can nonetheless result in
 33 a partial representation of events.

34 Moreover, in some cases, Western media also exhibited an overemphasis on
 35 the religious dimension. When the participation of clergy in the events is
 36 automatically transformed into a broader narrative of “religious violence,” there
 37 is a risk that the actions of specific individuals may be interpreted by audiences
 38 as representative of an entire religious institution or tradition.

39
 40

41 **Human Rights, Freedom of Expression, and Religious Sensitivity**

42

43 The media coverage of the events of May 17, 2013, is particularly
 44 significant as it reflects one of the most complex balances within democratic
 45 societies: the relationship between freedom of expression and social
 46 responsibility. On the one hand, individuals have the right to express their views

1 (Council of Europe, 1950; United Nations, 1966), including members of the
2 clergy as citizens. On the other hand, media carries the responsibility to ensure
3 that the coverage of such expressions does not amplify hatred, violence, or
4 discrimination.

5 Accordingly, it is essential in journalistic analysis that media neither
6 demonizes any actor nor trivializes their actions. The status of a clergy member
7 neither justifies acts of violence nor automatically transforms the individual into
8 a symbolic representative of an entire religious group. Maintaining this
9 distinction constitutes one of the core challenges of professional and ethical
10 journalism.

11 The events of May 17, 2013, may be considered a form of analytical
12 “laboratory” for Georgian media, revealing both the strengths and weaknesses
13 of journalistic culture. These events demonstrated that while Georgian media is
14 capable of providing timely coverage of significant developments, it often
15 struggles, particularly in crisis situations, to simultaneously maintain in-depth
16 analysis, contextualization, and high ethical standards.

17 It also became evident that media encounters difficulty in clearly
18 distinguishing between individual responsibility and collective identity. This
19 represents one of the key reasons why stereotypes find fertile ground within the
20 Georgian public sphere. When media fails to preserve this distinction, it
21 contributes not only to the deepening of negative attitudes toward specific groups
22 but also, more broadly, to the erosion of democratic culture.

23 The analysis of the coverage of the May 17 events indicates that media
24 exerts a particularly strong influence on the formation of public opinion during
25 crisis situations. In the Georgian case, the presence of fragmentary reporting,
26 narrative polarization, the excessive emphasis on religious identity, and the
27 inconsistent application of professional standards created a discursive
28 environment that reinforced stereotypes and limited the potential for nuanced
29 understanding.

30 In the case of Western media, it became evident that, despite generally
31 higher professional standards, the coverage of conflict-related events inherently
32 carries risks associated with framing and selective emphasis. However, a key
33 difference lies in the tendency of Western media to situate events within a
34 broader context and to present the perspectives of multiple actors.

35 Thus, this section demonstrates that the coverage of religious issues requires
36 not only technical journalistic skills but also a high degree of ethical sensitivity,
37 analytical precision, and discursive responsibility. Media that succeeds in
38 maintaining accuracy, balance, contextualization, and non-discriminatory
39 representation under such conditions not only fulfills its professional function
40 more effectively but also contributes to the development of democratic society.

41 42 43 **Recommendations for Georgian Media**

44
45 The coverage of religious issues within the Georgian media environment
46 constitutes a domain of heightened professional responsibility, as such topics are

1 closely linked to societal identity, cultural traditions, and value systems. The
2 representation of religious matters by the media significantly influences public
3 discourse, intergroup relations, and the development of democratic culture. For
4 this reason, it is essential that journalistic practice be grounded in clear
5 professional and ethical standards that ensure accuracy, impartiality, and the
6 protection of the public interest (Ward, 2010; Christians, 2015).

7 In the coverage of religious issues, the clear distinction between fact and
8 opinion is of particular importance. One of the fundamental principles of
9 journalism is the objective and balanced presentation of information, which
10 requires the accurate reporting of facts and their clear separation from
11 commentary or evaluation. Professional journalism should rely on multi-source
12 verification and proper contextualization. These practices contribute to
13 increasing public trust in media and reducing the risk of misinformation
14 (Plaisance, 2009).

15 Another critical task for the development of Georgian media is the reduction
16 of sensationalism in reporting on religious topics. In the contemporary media
17 environment, competition for audience attention often leads to the presentation
18 of information in sensational formats, which can negatively affect public
19 discourse. Sensational headlines, emotionally charged language, and the
20 amplification of conflict-oriented narratives are particularly problematic in the
21 coverage of religious issues, as they may contribute to heightened social
22 tensions. Professional journalism must therefore prioritize responsible and
23 balanced reporting, placing the public interest above the mere attraction of
24 audience attention (Ward, 2010; Christians, 2015).

25 The strengthening of professional education and training for journalists
26 remains a key direction for media development. Contemporary journalism
27 requires not only technical skills but also a deep understanding of ethical
28 standards and the ability to apply them in practice. Specialized training programs
29 addressing media ethics, the specifics of religious reporting, and cultural
30 diversity can significantly enhance professional competence. International
31 experience demonstrates that such educational initiatives contribute to
32 improving the quality of journalism and increasing media credibility (Christians,
33 2015). In this context, cooperation between universities and media organizations
34 is of particular importance, as it enables the integration of academic knowledge
35 with professional practice. Incorporating media ethics and religious reporting
36 into journalism curricula can further support the development of professional
37 culture and ethical awareness among future journalists.

38 In conclusion, the development of Georgian media requires the
39 strengthening of professional standards in the coverage of religious issues, the
40 reduction of sensationalism, the support of journalistic education and training,
41 and the institutional reinforcement of ethical self-regulatory mechanisms. These
42 directions will contribute to the advancement of professional culture within the
43 media sector and create the conditions necessary for responsible and ethical
44 journalism, which constitutes a fundamental pillar of democratic society.

45
46

1 **Conclusion**

2
3 The findings of the present study demonstrate that the media coverage of
4 religious issues constitutes one of the most complex and sensitive domains of
5 contemporary journalism, directly linked to both the formation of public
6 discourse and the dynamics of social relations. The empirical and comparative
7 analysis conducted within this research indicates that media is not merely a
8 neutral transmitter of information; rather, it actively participates in the
9 construction of social reality—a process that becomes particularly evident in the
10 coverage of religious topics.

11 The analysis of the events of May 17, 2013, revealed that the role of media
12 becomes significantly amplified in crisis and conflict environments. This case
13 represents a highly sensitive empirical example that integrates religious,
14 political, and social dimensions. The study demonstrates that, in covering such
15 events, media does not simply describe reality but also shapes its interpretation,
16 thereby influencing public perceptions, narrative constructions, and collective
17 memory.

18 The analysis of Georgian media identified a pronounced tendency toward
19 narrative polarization, manifested through fragmentary reporting, insufficient
20 contextualization, and the blurring of distinctions between fact and opinion.
21 Such practices create conditions for the amplification of subjective
22 interpretations and undermine the credibility of information. Particularly
23 problematic is the generalization of individual actions to collective religious
24 identities, which leads to stigmatization and reinforces stereotypical narratives.
25 This process highlights the discursive power of media, as it plays a decisive role
26 in shaping how specific social groups are perceived within society.

27 The study further demonstrates that religious identity is frequently
28 employed as a narrative frame even in cases where it is not substantively relevant
29 to the event itself. Such practices generate associative links between religion and
30 negative occurrences, thereby increasing the risk of generalized collective
31 responsibility. As a result, media contributes to the formation of a discursive
32 environment that intensifies social tensions and fosters deeper polarization.

33 The comparative analysis indicates that Western media, despite the
34 existence of higher ethical standards, is not entirely immune to discursive bias.
35 In certain instances, a tendency toward selective framing can be observed,
36 particularly in the prioritization of conflictual and dramatic elements. However,
37 in the Western context, such deviations are partially mitigated by multi-source
38 reporting, contextual depth, and institutionalized mechanisms of editorial self-
39 regulation. This suggests that the existence of ethical standards, along with their
40 institutional support, plays a crucial role in maintaining media credibility.

41 The study also identified the problem of hate speech and indirect
42 discrimination. It revealed that within Georgian media, structural and contextual
43 bias appears more frequently than overtly aggressive forms of expression. Such
44 bias manifests through narrative construction, the selection of terminology, and
45 the manipulation of context. This type of practice is particularly problematic

1 because it subtly generates discriminatory representations and contributes to the
2 formation of stereotypical perceptions among audiences.

3 Another significant finding of the research is that the influence of media
4 extends beyond the transmission of information and encompasses the formation
5 of public opinion and social norms. The coverage of the events of May 17
6 demonstrated that media narratives play a crucial role in reinforcing stereotypes
7 and intensifying social divisions. Particularly in cases where media fails to
8 ensure contextualization, balance, and plurality, it becomes not a tool of
9 information, but a factor that amplifies polarization.

10 In this context, adherence to the principles of journalistic ethics becomes
11 especially important. The findings of the study indicate that accuracy,
12 impartiality, contextualization, and plurality are not merely professional
13 requirements but essential conditions for the functioning of democratic
14 discourse. The violation of these principles leads to the distortion of information
15 and undermines public trust in media.

16 The research further demonstrates that the effective implementation of
17 media-ethical standards cannot be ensured solely through the existence of formal
18 codes. Their integration into journalistic practice is essential, which requires the
19 development of editorial culture, the strengthening of professional education,
20 and the improvement of self-regulatory mechanisms. International experience
21 suggests that the advancement of ethical journalism depends not only on
22 normative frameworks but also on institutional and professional environments.

23 The role of journalistic education is particularly significant in this regard.
24 The integration of media ethics and the coverage of religious issues into
25 educational programs can contribute to the development of professional culture
26 and a deeper understanding of ethical standards. At the same time, professional
27 training and continuous education represent key instruments for improving the
28 quality of journalistic practice.

29 The findings also indicate that the coverage of religious issues requires a
30 careful balance between freedom of expression and social responsibility. While
31 media must ensure the free flow of information, it must also recognize that its
32 narratives influence the perception of social groups and may contribute to
33 discrimination or social conflict.

34 Thus, it can be concluded that the responsible coverage of religious issues
35 constitutes one of the fundamental prerequisites for the functioning of a
36 democratic society. Media that ensures accuracy, contextualization, plurality,
37 and non-discriminatory representation contributes to the development of social
38 stability and a pluralistic environment.

39 Finally, the present study confirms that media ethics should be understood
40 not merely as a set of professional norms, but as a system of social responsibility
41 that defines the role of media within a democratic society. The adherence to
42 ethical standards in the coverage of religious issues is critically important, as it
43 directly influences public discourse, social relations, and the quality of
44 democratic processes.

45 At the same time, this study provides a foundation for further research aimed
46 at a deeper analysis of the relationship between media and religion. In particular,

1 empirical studies focusing on specific media practices and evaluating the
 2 practical implementation of ethical standards are of great importance. Such
 3 research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of
 4 media and to the identification of factors that determine the ethical quality of
 5 journalistic practice.

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