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# The Future of Journalism: Ethics in the Digital Landscape

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#### **ABSTRACT**

As journalism undergoes rapid digital transformation, the ethical landscape of the profession is also evolving in complex ways. This paper examines the historical roots and philosophical foundations of journalism ethics, examining how cultural, political, and technological shifts have redefined ethical norms globally. The study reviews journalism's evolution, especially in Western contexts, and investigates how the digital era, characterized by mobile platforms, social media, and artificial intelligence, is disrupting traditional journalistic practices. Key ethical challenges in the digital age include misinformation, declining public trust, blurred lines between reporting and content creation, and the commodification of news for profit-driven agendas. Through detailed analysis of regulatory frameworks, journalistic education, and relevant case studies, this paper underscores the need for renewed ethical standards that prioritize accuracy, accountability, and inclusivity. The findings point toward a future where journalism must reconcile technological innovation with its enduring mission to inform, critique, and serve a democratic society.

**Keywords:** Journalism ethics, digital media, misinformation, public trust, AI in journalism, media regulation, journalism education.

## INTRODUCTION

Journalism ethics fundamentally concern the intricate landscape of rights and wrongs associated with the practice. This includes vital aspects such as news selection, the treatment of sources, the reliability of information provided, and core principles of fairness and accuracy. A suite of recent publications on the subject, predominantly hailing from Anglo-American viewpoints, might be perceived as somewhat narrow and potentially ideologically biased by international audiences. It is essential to recognize that the ethics of journalism are always deeply intertwined with the cultural, political, and economic contexts in which they operate. In the current global media environment, there is a pressing demand for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to journalism ethics that is not only grounded in local realities but also informed by a broader, global perspective. Historically, the field of journalism ethics has placed a significant emphasis on practical advancements, with an overarching aim to cultivate a relevant and inclusive global ethical framework. The rapid changes we see today in media production and dissemination make these discussions and reassessments all the more timely and necessary. A critical perspective that prioritizes accessibility is particularly essential, especially from the vantage point of educators and media critics, as the international community's focus on the media's influence in fostering political change and understanding cultural dynamics continues to grow. Given that the ethics governing journalism often mirror substantial national tensions, a more extensive critique rooted in a solid ethical foundation is viewed as indispensable. This survey aims to significantly contribute to the ongoing development of a more expansive global journalism ethics by meticulously mapping out current thoughts and discussions in this evolving field [1, 2].

#### The Evolution of Journalism

This paper proposes a wide view of journalism's historical development and its impact on ethics. It reviews the various stages of journalism before the 21st century and discusses how journalism is practiced. Journalism has evolved in response to political, social, and technological changes, affecting its ethical norms. Its long history encompasses several roles: disseminating information, interpreting events for audiences, facilitating public discussion, allowing citizens to express grievances, tracking elite activities, mobilizing political support, and educating the public. In contemporary society, journalism also

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plays a role in political and corporate public relations. The focus here is primarily on the evolution of journalism in North America and Europe, as these regions have clearly articulated and disseminated journalism's principles and ethical norms in professional training and public discourse. While journalistic principles exist worldwide, they often evolve and clash with local practices, political expectations, and the interests of powerful media companies. Moreover, forms and norms of journalism can shift depending on the publication venue, yet these changes have not been thoroughly documented [3, 4].

# **Digital Transformation in Journalism**

The internet and mobile technology have transformed journalism since the late 20th century. News access has shifted from traditional morning papers and hourly broadcasts to continuous 24/7 coverage, creating new platforms such as online newspapers, news portals, and blogs. The rise of citizen journalism and formats like podcasts has added to the media landscape. By the mid-2000s, newspapers began focusing on mobile journalism with applications for reading on-the-move. This led to readealism, merging print with digital. Digital tools enhanced journalistic investigation through data scraping and visualization, allowing for stories based on Big Data. Journalists embraced social media as editorial tools, fostering direct engagement with their audience. This dual-edged sword facilitated public reporting of corruption but also led to hasty reporting and misleading conclusions in the rush for breaking news. The audience began shaping news agendas, moving from passive consumers to active participants in discussions around news topics. The journalistic process evolved; stories were no longer the end, as feedback online led to further inputs and potential shifts in focus, increasing media accountability. However, this also risked audience manipulation, creating niche media environments and epistemic bubbles while eroding democratic discourse. Concerns also arose over the spread of misinformation, with postmodernism and anti-intellectualism being exploited by those seeking power through fake news. While digital tools have revolutionized journalism's creation, interpretation, and discussion, they have also disrupted traditional journalist-audience dynamics, leading to a chaotic, noisy media environment. Journalism remains an unstable entity, continually affected by technological changes. Historically, it has undergone numerous paradigm shifts, and the rise of digital media could signal the decline of printed news as a primary revenue source for the industry  $\lceil 5, 6 \rceil$ .

# Ethical Challenges in the Digital Age

Journalism today relies heavily on digital technology, requiring specialization in information technology, a significant change from the past when dictionaries and almanacs sufficed. Journalists now depend on search engines for quick answers, leading to a knowledge vacuum where they believe they know everything, ignoring gaps in their understanding. This ignorance can make discussions on certain topics seem irrelevant. In matters of national security, search engines may provide no answers at all, highlighting a shift to digital journalism that lacks ethical consideration. Ethics classes focus on quick decision-making rather than teaching philosophy, raising concerns about whether bloggers and social networks should be viewed as legitimate journalism. However, the ethical implications of these technologies in reshaping journalism are largely overlooked. Instances of incompetence are rampant, and while competitors excitedly report such mistakes, they often fail to recognize their shortcomings. A notable example of effective incompetence emerged during a press conference involving the Chinese and Korean leaders, who agreed to reopen borders closed for decades. This accord represented a significant positive development for both nations and the world, but required cultural insight and inductive reasoning, skills journalists often lack. A report on the matter was drafted by an author known for malice, leading to his reassignment. Nonetheless, he quickly recognized the report's significance and its positive long-term consequences [7, 8].

#### The Role of Social Media

The Relationship between Journalists and Social Media regarding Ethical Standards. For journalists, maintaining ethical standards is undeniably seen as an essential job requirement deeply influenced by public perception. The journalism industry often positions itself as morally superior to various other professions, although it is important to note that not all reporters strictly embody this ideal of ethical conduct. As news outlets face significantly increasing financial pressures and constraints, the temptation for clickbait headlines and selective storytelling intensifies considerably. Journalists in today's fast-paced digital landscape usually avoid participating actively in the news stories they cover, opting instead to remain detached observers. However, broadcasters may subtly emphasize their content while also ensuring they do not appear linked to public relations releases, which can inadvertently make events appear staged and overly polished for television audiences. Nevertheless, the rapid rise of social media is complicating this dynamic in ways that were previously unforeseen. Many journalists have taken on new and diverse roles as "digital reporters," particularly in smaller local newsrooms, where they increasingly publish their stories online with bylines, thereby blurring the line that traditionally separated reporting

and actual news creation. Ethical standards regarding this kind of participation in real-time events lack the clear guidelines that have been established for other aspects of journalism. According to respected organizations like the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA), and the Associated Press (AP), journalists are generally advised to report only observable or verifiable information. They are encouraged to maintain neutrality, to add relevant context without bias, and to refrain from any involvement in the events they report on. Thus, these modern challenges are pushing ethical boundaries further in the digital age, demanding greater scrutiny and adaptation from journalists who must navigate this evolving media landscape [9, 10].

### **Regulatory Frameworks and Guidelines**

Introduction: While journalism ethics are established in countries like Great Britain, India, and Canada, they have only recently gained traction in the United States. Regulatory Frameworks and Guidelines: This discussion covers the definition of ethics, the three types of rules governing journalistic ethics, professional guidelines, tips for identifying revelations, the link between ethics and credibility, and the existing regulatory frameworks. Journalistic ethics, defined by codes of conduct, guide journalists' actions and are referred to as guidelines. Media ethics emphasize truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and editorial independence, alongside topics like news manipulation, privacy, and legal conflicts. Through comparison of various guidelines, the practices in established democracies become clearer. The principle "where equities are equal, the law prevails" suggests that when media ethics conflict with the law, the law is prioritized. Entertainment media ethics focus on the portrayal of violence, language, and stereotypes, highlighting the tension between values and artistic expression. Media laws, created outside the media sphere, differ from ethics, which serve as moral principles governing journalists. Analyzing the influence of these laws and ethics on journalism practice in Nigeria is crucial. Journalism relies on a fiduciary relationship with society, requiring adherence to legal and ethical standards. Journalists must uphold the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of expression while fostering a united and thriving nation. It's important that journalists do not publish false news; if they do, they must prove the absence of malicious intent. Moreover, radio personnel are responsible for providing balanced coverage for all political parties. Ultimately, journalists are expected to align their work with societal improvement [11, 12].

#### **Case Studies in Ethical Journalism**

Broad priorities and specific issues: a programme. Case study: When your 'main source' says it's 38 hours, and the official line is 54 hours. The critical reader. Learning science. Case study: Plagiarism at The Times. Case study: Faculty shortages in public universities. Case study: Coping with the risks backlash. Case study: Using elliptical descriptions. Journalism has ethical dimensions; journalists face moral questions as part of their work. Journalism varies in commitment to social and political purposes, trustworthiness, accuracy, and fairness. Most cultures expect journalism to be effective: informative, interpretative, representative, and commentative. Knowing how to fulfill this expectation is an ethical skill that is crucial in journalism. This overview aims to facilitate skilled journalism practice. In a world where journalism often lacks visibility, particularly beyond business news, the debates it generates are often filled with cynicism. However, journalism remains a significant tool for social control. There's a collective understanding of what dominant media serve well and poorly, prompting ongoing discussions about 'bias' and 'objectivity.' Calls for transparency in news organizations persist despite risks of intertwining editorial processes with public relations. Such demands stem from a belief in journalism's role in democracy, where diverse journalistic perspectives are vital to democratic vitality, and where bias and dishonesty hinder this vitality. Despite being poorly constituted, accountability demands can motivate change in political and journalistic expectations. Therefore, understanding news practices and their products is crucial, requiring an examination of the contemporary news landscape, pressures on journalists, and the constraints facing the public. Such critical analysis holds the potential for influence over entrenched practices, which may be achieved through a framework of critical theory [13, 14].

#### The Future of Newsrooms

Journalism is evolving as the news industry adopts advanced artificial intelligence (AI), leading to emerging negative practices like precision propaganda, espionage journalism, deepfakes, and diminishing local journalism. In the 1980s, two U.S. newspapers closed weekly due to a hostile business climate, contrasting with today's media landscape. The rise of targeted AI-generated fake texts complicates the roles of news consumers and journalists. This surge of information has shifted focus towards local community news, challenging the seemingly global narrative. Increasingly, the sheer volume of data hampers critical evaluation, with counter-narratives catering to algorithms, often neglecting complex realities. This trend threatens the traditional press's role as a critical check on power and undermines local community decency and respect. Yet, the field is growing, presenting opportunities for technology that benefits audiences and journalists. AI holds promise for enhancing productivity and audience

engagement. While acknowledging AI's challenges, there is potential for innovative solutions that highlight journalism's enduring value. Nonetheless, concerns persist about AI-generated texts being indistinguishable from genuine ones. Critical professionals are actively countering these trends by investing resources in in-depth investigative journalism, emphasizing the importance of meticulously created narratives [15, 16].

#### Journalism Education and Ethics

Ethical guidelines usually top the list of attributes aspiring journalists say they most respect about the news media. Such guidelines have been adopted at news organizations around the world, and they are part of the core knowledge that students of journalism must master. Nevertheless, despite an emphasis on ethical education in journalism programs, the line between character education and the development of a public code of conduct is not always clear. The emphasis on ethical behavior in organizations has highlighted the gap that may exist between understanding the ethical course of action and taking it, not always easily explained by an ignorance of the facts of the situation or the relevant ethical principles or rules. Journalism training programs, such as those in college curricula or in-house ethics training sessions, typically incorporate ethical principles as a standalone module or series of lectures. In the former, journalism ethics is reportedly often taught in theory rather than in experiential learning or case studies. The latter, although emphasizing real-world application of ethical conduct, may be too specific to a particular industry or tailored to a particular set of circumstances of an incident. A baseline study of future journalists to learn the challenges they face when an ethical dilemma arises in reporting practices indicates a notable gap between the ideal and the practice of ethical guidelines, suggesting a need for structural changes in how future journalists are taught the ethical principles of the trade. Besides, journalism education is invited to foster integrity and a commitment to basic principles of journalism, among the attributes that should be nurtured in future media professionals, advocating for a consideration of doing journalism as a moral practice. Journalism education is responsible for preparing those who will later join the profession, and the way journalism is taught and practiced needs to respect fundamental ethical principles. Journalistic practice should strike a balance between market and political influences and flexibility to accept the myriad ethical norms and expectations existing in society. A culture of skepticism, accountability, and the assumption of the public's right to know should be created among future journalists. Journalism educators are urged to develop a more comprehensive approach which comprises ethical guidelines; programs to help news professionals raise awareness and develop a common language to discuss and solve ethical (and deontological) issues; and design training sessions, workshops, seminars, and conferences, providing mentors for individual media practitioners to help them reflect on their working methods and ethics, and offering a growing array of materials. Moreover, journalism schools can play a crucial role in that by developing new curricula and educating students about the importance of public trust. The future of the profession is with them, and without acknowledgment of the ethical problems of contemporary media, they will be, as rookies, more vulnerable to their potentially negative effects and manipulations, gladly or because of other reasons [18, 19].

## **Public Trust in Journalism**

In an authoritarian society dominated by surveillance, the idea of "manufacture of consent" suppresses debate. A persona non grata emerges in a culture that promotes the illusion of unity. The focus on a uniformly conservative narrative damages sensitivity to nuanced ideas. Media often represent polarities in simplistic black-and-white terms, reducing complexity. Dissenters are marginalized, labeled as fringe actors alongside recognized adversaries. The limited allocation of opposing views serves state interests rather than fostering a marketplace for ideas. Critics argue that unwavering beliefs persist despite contradictions, as alternative viewpoints are disregarded, distorting the notion of the Golden Balance. The Honey Trap metaphor illustrates how individuals become entranced by dominant narratives, leading to decreased self-awareness and censorship. The facade of a "reality studio" distorts appearances, suggesting legitimacy through quality and satisfaction of desires. A truly democratic environment allows for dissenters to exist far from power's gaze, fostering new ideas outside traditional confines. The expression "Tell me what you read, and I'll tell you who you are" reflects a loss of privacy, transitioning performances into public spectacles, revealing deeper existential themes. The overwhelming flow of information leads to confusion, and authority focuses on maintaining appearances rather than fostering genuine discourse, impacting educational systems. The figurative guard dog symbolizes the selective control of information, enforcing an unconscious dominance over public narrative [20, 21].

#### The Role of Fact-Checking

The rise of misinformation has created an increased need for fact-checking within the news industry as a way to verify claims made before publication. Public trust in journalism remains low, and journalists must work to regain this trust by adhering to higher standards for reporting on claims that matter. Journalists

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must also remember their role in providing context and understanding to help make sense of a complex and interrelated world. Whether fact-checking in a traditional role as part of an independent organization or collaborating to increase the overall accuracy of news reporting, journalists are asked to do several tasks that are not traditionally part of reporting. No matter how the professional landscape evolves, the ability to report accurately will continue to be an essential goal for maintaining credibility in the news. Journalists are paid to be right, and it's in their best interest to take the extra time and effort to make sure before publication. When deciding whether a piece of information published in a news story is accurate, evidence-based procedures are conducted to determine its veracity. This is distinguished from traditional news verification used to ensure accuracy in reporting. In news production, verification is the process employed to establish the veracity of information before publication. Verification practices may include talking to sources, confirming data with reliable references or experts, as well as ensuring that company policies and legal obligations are met. Although both fact-checking and news verification serve the same epistemological function of ensuring source reliability for a news report, they are different procedures that set different standards and face different challenges. Fact-checking is more similar to the investigative reporting aspect of news verification, in which journalists test the accuracy of statements found in public discourse. Ballot design and fact-checking outcomes could impact voting behavior, candidates, and issues, gaining or losing favor with voters. Fact-checking organizations have proved useful in holding politicians accountable for their public statements. Post-election and retrospective analyses of fact-checking were conducted, but there were fewer opportunities during the 2016 election cycle to evaluate the real-time impacts of fact-checking [22, 23].

# Ethics and Artificial Intelligence

Journalism ethics and artificial intelligence (AI) are inextricably intertwined as newsrooms incorporate AI tools for news production. The use of AI in journalism implicates both the potential gains in efficiency from its applications in news coverage and the ethical dilemmas it raises. Machine-driven decisions breed questions about responsibility, which exacerbates existing problems of and suspicions about transparency in the production and dissemination of news content generated by algorithms. As journalists increasingly work alongside AI systems, it is important to consider how they can use them ethically to maintain moral imperatives such as truth, fairness, and minimizing harm. AI-powered fact-checking processes, however, have raised concerns over verification and standardization. This text introduces the broader place of machine learning in journalistic practices before offering both positive and challenging responses to ethical usage. It also proposes strategies to generate thoughtful discussions on ethical models for AI in journalism. Finally, AI's potential implications for journalistic practices, particularly the benefits and challenges it has engendered, are examined. The potential advantages of using AI tools in the newsroom are manifold, often related to efficiency, from reporting and news coverage to distribution and audience engagement. This can mean everything from mining social datasets and analyzing patterns for personalized reader content to automating routine tasks such as summarizing press releases, factchecking, or transcribing interviews. AI-powered tools are increasingly being used to identify patterns and trends more quickly in large datasets, leading to the semi-automated generation of stories concerning areas such as financial data or sports results. In fulfilling charter obligations, such AI-powered tools can enable newsrooms to take on investigative stories they might not otherwise be able to cover [24, 25].

# Global Perspectives on Journalism Ethics

Press criticism depends on context, and the case studies here reflect very different sets of ethical challenges facing journalists at various times and places. For the most part, they do not describe widely observed behavior, and practitioners need to understand how they dovetail with local industry norms. Ethical standards are in part shaped by political, economic, social, and historical circumstances, and vary from place to place. It is hoped that in comparing them, journalists might better understand how such norms are constructed and think about the role of the journalist in unique circumstances. As the World Trade Organization prepares for its first ministerial to be held on the American continent, this is a good time to examine case studies of various Latin American countries with a view toward their impact on global trade. Press freedom and media globalization were the topics of the recent gathering of journalists, academicians, NGO representatives, and researchers from various Latin American countries. Recognizing that the issues of freedom and trade affect all actors in the communication and information sectors, the discussion brought together a number of diverse perspectives to promote understanding among the different parties involved in media production and regulation. The question of whether ethical norms and if so, whose ethical norms—should be enforced through international structures raises complex issues. Certainly, it is important for journalists to raise these sorts of questions and to engage the public in dialogue about adopting best practices from around the world. As the World Trade Organization struggles to balance demands for trade liberalization with those for cultural preservation, care must be

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taken that the principles of a free press and of ethical journalism—already suffering in many quarters—do not become further eroded [26, 27].

#### CONCLUSION

The digital transformation of journalism has brought with it both unprecedented opportunities and profound ethical challenges. As traditional newsroom practices give way to algorithm-driven news cycles and participatory media environments, the foundational principles of journalism — fairness, accuracy, and responsibility — face increasing strain. This paper has demonstrated that the evolving media landscape requires journalists to not only adapt technologically but also engage critically with the ethical implications of their work. The integration of artificial intelligence, the rise of citizen journalism, and the influence of social media have blurred long-standing professional boundaries, demanding a reassessment of ethical norms. Moreover, journalism education must evolve to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and real-world application of ethics. Ultimately, journalism's future depends on the profession's ability to reestablish public trust, uphold its social responsibilities, and develop resilient ethical frameworks that are inclusive, adaptable, and globally informed. Only through this critical ethical engagement can journalism remain a vital pillar of democratic societies.

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