

Exploring the Ethical Implications of Professional Practice Via New Media: Between Ethical controls and Freedom of the Media

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Abstract:

The present research paper aims to shed light on work ethics through the new media between ethical controls and media freedom which is considered one of the most important topics raised in the field of media and communication. Since this topic has attracted the attention of everyone, including journalists, editors, and academics, seeking to define as well as preserve the rights and duties of each of the parties to the communication process. On this basis, the article at hand deals with three main stations, beginning with the conceptual definition of the ethics of media practice in light of new media, then the theoretical rooting of new media, and finally the practical application of new media. Finally, the nature of media practice in light of new media is addressed, as well as the essential prerequisites for the ethics of media practice via new media.

key words: ethics - professional practice - new media..

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Introduction:

Several researchers and academics had different standpoints regarding the methods of regulating media ethics within the new electronic environment and the resulting media (social media platforms, blogs, phone services such as live broadcasts, etc). Some of them stressed the necessity of setting limits for the unlimited freedoms, imposing a kind of censorship, and enacting laws that limit those freedom exploited by the new social media users. Others believe that those who want to impose a kind of censorship are those who belong to traditional media, fear the disappearance of the institutions to which they belong, and thus fear losing their jobs due to the massive spread of this media and the increasing numbers of its users.

Between freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the media, there are some irresponsible behaviors against many and some serious transgressions that have violated the privacy of individuals, societies and institutions, such as trespassing privacy, violating honor, and spreading scandals... This, therefore, requires a well-structured legal framework to correct the course of media practice without restricting professional freedoms through the new media platforms. Accordingly, the problem that this research paper seeks to answer is: How can professional practices be ethically framed within the context of new media?

Subsequently, this article aims to pinpoint the ethics of professional practices through new media, starting with the first part, which begins by defining some concepts required by research necessity, such as ethics, professional ethics, and media ethics. Later on, it addresses the role of ethics in media practices, regulatory laws for media ethics, and journalists' legal and ethical obligations. As for the second part, it talks about the theoretical grounding of the new media. In the third part, it addresses the ethics of media practice through new media, starting with the nature of media practice in light of these media, going through the rights and duties of journalists, and finally the article concludes with the ethical control of new media.

1-Define terms:

-1-1- Definition of ethics:

Ethics are defined as a science demonstrating the meanings of good and evil, showing how people should treat each other, explaining the aims that people should intend in their behaviors, and illuminating the way to do what should be done. (Amine, 2012, p. 09) It can be noted that most definitions emphasize the fact that ethics are a set of principles and standards by which people abide voluntarily to make their decisions about their behaviors, and these principles determine the validity of human behavior (Salah, 2005, p. 58)

Building on the previous definitions, ethics is that moral thing and living conscience within the human self, which imposes a system of self-control on its owner, making him/her behave in a certain way or refrain from certain behaviors. The reason behind that is often religion, culture, and the living environment.

1-2- Professional ethics :

are defined as a set of rules and principles agreed upon by the practitioners of the same profession, given that abiding by them preserves the profession and its integrity. Professional ethics literally indicate the instructions and practices that are perceived in the form of laws or regulations set by the profession itself. They are morally binding but do not have an administrative or legal apparatus, and are rarely accompanied by penalties (Ben Zaidoun Ibrahim, 2021, p. 637)

Professional ethics can be perceived as a set of regulations that clarify to the practitioners of a particular profession what they can and cannot do, in order to facilitate the process of professional practice in various sectors. Although they are often not mandatory and coercive, abiding by them will make professional practices highly professional.

1-3-media ethics :

are concerned, a person without principles is not fit to be a journalist, and a person without morals is corrupted. The journalist must be trained in the work he/she does, and be well-informed and aware of everything that is going on around him/her. The young beginners must bear in mind that journalism is a difficult profession, a profession that does not know rest and does not acknowledge it. Hence, a certificate is not enough to be a successful journalist because journalism is readiness before anything else (Mohamed Abboud, 2006, p. 200). Accordingly, media ethics are viewed as those ethics related to the media profession, and they are a set of rules and duties that govern the journalism profession, or they are the various principles by which the journalist must abide while performing his/her duties. These standards are related to writing, the rules of general events, and the journalist's relationship with sources, institutions and others.

Ethics are articulated by journalists themselves within the framework of professional unions (self-regulation) or are set by media institutions. They are different from the laws set by parliament and can be implemented to certain journalistic issues and practices through courts. Media ethics have been defined by rules of professional conduct that clarify the journalist's rights and duties, including ensuring freedom of the media and the press, freedom of access to objective sources of information, accuracy, honesty, objectivity, responsibility towards public opinion, maintaining peace, integrity, independence, the obligation to refrain from defamation, the right to reply and correction, and respecting professional confidentiality. (Benyahya Allal, 2018, p. 15)

Based on the above, the ethics of media practice are those regulations specific to the practice of journalism, which often defines the journalist's rights and duties so that journalistic practice becomes more organized. They also make the journalist practice this profession with a greater understanding of what he/she must do or refrain from doing while performing his/her job.

Journalists must be of high morals and noble principles, respected and have a good reputation, not only within their institution but also within their society in general, and wherever they go, they must behave according to their morals. Regarding performing their duties, their morals must be always present during obtaining news and information, editing them in writing or photographing, and publishing them, in addition to their dealings with colleagues in the press profession.

1-4-The concept of media ethics via new media:

There are ethics for the Internet represented in not making conversations about each other via social media platforms, for the purposes of disguise, concealment, the integrity of search and browsing engines, scientific honesty, intellectual property, threatening human freedom and individual privacy, linguistic Darwinism, exploiting the Internet to attract high-end labor from developing countries, and the necessity for technology to be safe, secure and domesticated (Houcine Amer, 2019 p. 43) Accordingly, new media ethics in general are concerned with the rights and duties of practitioners of the media profession, whether among themselves as a media family or between the media family and other parties. They are a set of organizational values and behaviors that determine the course of work in this Web or Internet sector, whether through electronic journalism, media sites, blogs, social network platforms, etc., and they are a set of rules that the electronic journalist adheres to in order to present a noble, honest, authentic, and objective message in the new media environment.

The difference between ethics and practice is that ethics are established rules that express the professional behavior imposed on those in charge of the mass media. These ethics remain useless unless they are practically implemented during the professional practice of journalists or the performance of their duties; such as conducting press interviews or delegates covering press conferences and preparing newsletters. (Mohamed Abboud, 2006, p. 196)

The new media ethics is no different from the ethics of journalistic practice, except in some details related to the differences between new media and traditional media, especially regarding censorship, self-censorship, and between the content of personal

pages and accounts and the content published by the media outlets in which the journalist works. Accordingly, the new media ethics are the ethics of traditional media taking into account the privacy of the digital environment.

2- The importance of ethics in media practice:

The main purpose of professional ethics in journalism is to ensure that the journalists exercise their basic rights without deviating from the goals of their profession (Bouchoucha, 2021, p.156). Journalists must have sound ethics through two major categories, the first of which is ethical and the second is practical, which will be mentioned below: (Foriman, translated by Mohamed Safwat, 2012, pp. 31-32)

Moral Motivation: journalists should be ethical because, like the rest of us, they want to see themselves as decent and honest people. It is normal to aspire to improve one's self-esteem, and to acquire the respect of others. There is positive reinforcement in knowing how to do the right thing. As much as they like to get good news, journalists do not want to be known for exploiting someone's presence in the process.

Practical Motivation: on the long-term, ethical journalism enhances the credibility of news organization, and therefore its acceptance by the public, which translates into commercial success. Journalists have to sell the news, and if the public does not believe their reporting of the news, then they would have nothing to sell. News consumers are more likely to believe journalists' media coverage if they see that journalists are ethical in the way they treat the public and the subjects of their news coverage, just as a consumer would choose a product from a trusted brand name rather than any alternative name for quality. Hopefully, news consumers would choose an ethical news organization because it acts responsibly. Therefore, ethical journalism can also be profitable journalism that provides a livelihood for journalists and their families, in addition to the financial profit for investors in the newspaper, radio station, or electronic press.

3- Regulatory laws for media ethics:

With the development of the media and communication methods in the fields of print media, radio, and television, and with the emergence of modern applications in the field of media and communication, several ethical charters have emerged that aimed to control the media field from an ethical standpoint. Among the most prominent charters we mention, for instance: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is one of the most important charters on media ethics at the international level. Article 19 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations General Assembly, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights approved by the United Nations General Assembly issued in 1966. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 is one of the most significant legislations related to media ethics, especially in relation to media freedom and responsibility, and they were followed by several other laws.

Accordingly, although the documentation of media work ethics, codes of honor, and rules of professional conduct started in the early 1920s, there are now less than 50 countries out of 200 in the world that have advanced systems in mass media communication with codes of professional ethics that have an effective impact on those in charge of communication or protect the free flow of media. (Houcine Amer, 2019, p. 31)

4- Journalists' legal and ethical obligations

On the one hand, journalists are compelled, while practicing their profession, to abide by and adhere to all laws, legislations and constitutions in general, just like any other citizen. On the other hand, as journalists, they must abide by international and local media ethics and media codes of honor. They are also obliged to abide by the editorial policy followed in the media institution to which they belong, even though the editorial policy is often unwritten rules imposed by the institution on all its employees, failure to comply with them exposes the journalist to penalties by the institution's management.

5- Theoretical grounding of new media:

5.1. The concept of new media:

New media can be defined as the use of Internet technology to disseminate and exchange news, information, and communication through electronic devices connected to the Internet for the purpose of social, cultural, political, and media communication. Synonyms of new media include: alternative media, social media, interactive media, digital media, electronic media, automated media, network media, popular media, community media, citizen journalism, and many others. (Al-Chamailia, Al-Lahham, Kafi, 2015, p. 20)

Some scholars define new media as the modern means of communication represented by social networks, which can complement traditional media, producing media that combines between professionalism with its strictness of traditions on which the

authority was founded, and modern technology that gives traditional media the opportunity to be closer not only to the event, but also to individuals, which is the essence of the subject (Chamseddine, Akila, 2022, p. 32)

5.2. New media forms:

According to pc mag, new media refers to all forms of communication in the digital world, which are primarily done over the Internet, and whatever is considered new today will continue to change and evolve. In a certain period, for example, DVDs and CDs were the newest method of watching movies and listening to music; however, nowadays streaming services such as Netflix and Spotify are the latest and most widely used. Among the forms of new media, for example, there are blogs, mobile phone applications, social networks, streaming services, augmented virtual reality, and websites. (www.snhu.edu/about-us)

6- The nature of media practice in light of new media:

Traditional media have long dominated the media and communication scene in contemporary human societies. However, this dominance has declined significantly in recent years due to the emergence of the 2G Internet service. This resulted in what is known as the new media, which has reshaped the map of communication and media work with its characteristics and features such as global spread, quick access, interaction, and low cost. It is unlimited and multi-media pluralistic mass media, and does not rely on gatekeeping and the institutional atmosphere that sets rules for publication. Hence, it is an interactive society in which members limitlessly exchange opinions, ideas and values. (Bin Abbou, p. 28)

Accordingly, nowadays we witness the emergence of mixed media that include the journalist citizen and the professional journalist across several media platforms. Thus, these mixed media require new and mixed media ethics as guidelines that apply to amateurs and professionals alike, whether they blog, tweet, broadcast, or write for newspapers. ([ethics.journalism, wisc.edu](http://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu))

7- Basic requirements for the ethics of media practice through new media:

Discussing the ethics of media practice leads to the theory of moral duty presented by Abderrahmane Azzi, which states that “the responsibility of the media professional and the media institution is predominantly ethical, while other considerations such as rational, societal, and profitable are considered ‘complementary’ at different levels when they do not contradict with ethical responsibility.” (Azzi 2018, p. 35)

According to scholar Abderrahmane Azzi, ethics are the first level and the most important consideration that determines the responsibility of the media professional and the media institution, given that it represents the center around which the rest of the other considerations revolve, which he labeled: rational, societal, and profitable. Although material profit is an endeavor and a reason for the survival of the media institution, he placed moral considerations before it. This clearly confirms that the moral element, in light of the privacy of the media, whether in the traditional or modern setting, is an important element that cannot be dispensed with under any circumstances.

In order to avoid causing harm or abuse to innocent people as a result of the high speed of rumor dissemination through new media and its media arsenal, it is necessary here to define a set of basic requirements for the ethics of media practice, which can be summarized in the following points:

- **Confirming the accuracy of information:** journalists must confirm the accuracy of what they publish on any website on the Internet. This requires establishing codes of honor for the journalist citizen. What is considered one of the strengths of digital media, represented by the slogan “Everyone can be heard,” can also be a weakness. Therefore, an educational concept such as ‘digital literacy’ should not only be linked to Internet skills, but also include the ability to evaluate moral value for what the Internet offers, (Keriket Bouziane, 2021, p. 681)

- **The media professional’s respect towards his sources:** one of the most prominent challenges facing journalists through new media is their relationship with the source of the news, especially due to the features provided by electronic journalism such as news updating and the speed of publishing it at the moment of its occurrence, which raise suspicion and doubt about the extent of the electronic journalists’ commitment to the most important principles of journalism ethics. (Ayadi, Mehdamoui, 2021)

Based on the above, new media journalists must deal with sources in the same way they deal with sources in the traditional setting, such as: anonymity if they refuse to disclose them, giving gifts to sources, or paying money or bribes in exchange for information, avoiding nepotism, etc.

- **Do not spread scandals:** nowadays’ events through social media platforms in particular, and digital spaces in general are an example of this, and even the headlines and news that carry scandals and violation of people’s integrities have become the most read, viewed, and the most used means for many to expand their fan base, which

is not only inconsistent with journalistic ethics but also with all the principles, ethics and values that exist in the whole world.

- **Respecting individual privacy:** privacy is defined as the use or misuse of individuals' personal information, whether it is facts, communications, or opinions that some may consider private and sensitive... Privacy means protection from unwanted access by others to private information. There are types of privacy, some of which, for example, are:

- **Physical privacy:** it includes the right of every person to a space in which he/she can physically exist, work, and move without any restrictions, or material violations into this space, such as others being too close to him/her, touching him/her, not being monitored by human eyes or cameras.

- **Mental or communication privacy:** it means leaving a person alone regarding his/her thoughts, feelings, desires and wishes, keeping them written or recorded electronically, and his/her freedom to exchange them through communication with whomever he/she wants.

- **Information privacy:** it means providing protection for legitimately stored personal information. This information includes bank accounts, tax records, credit financial status, and social, educational, employment and medical records. (Mohamed Naser 2010, pp. 258-259)

- **Commitment to objectivity:** this is a principle agreed upon by media ethics charters. It is a synonym for neutrality and impartiality. Objectivity in digital media is more complex than it is in traditional media due to the nonexistence of impartial individuals. Also, the digital world provides a broader control and prevention authority via algorithms, which is not a technical issue free from human bias. In addition to a number of other challenges, such as: the openness of news sources and their varying degrees of reliability. Therefore, there is no ideal objectivity in digital media, and the journalist must be characterized by disciplined objectivity governed by transparent standards. (www.aljazeera.net)

The American Association of News Publishers and Editors has tried to achieve what can be called “integrated ethics” according to the concept established by Stephen Ward, through setting principles that aim to establish a field for the media ethics through new media spaces, even if only by borrowing and integrating the traditional space into the new one. That could be done by setting ten basic rules that establish an

ethical space for media professionals within the online space of new media, which are as follows:

- Traditional ethical principles must be applied in cyberspace (the first rule) so that journalists should not publish anything they would not want to publish in the newspaper, nor should they publish on social media anything that would offend them personally or professionally or that would offend their institution. Accordingly, there is no justification for not applying traditional ethical rules to the cyberspace.
- Journalists must be responsible for everything they write, because whatever they write becomes public in an era when it is difficult to differentiate between private and public spaces.
- The media person must interact with the readers in a professional manner.
- Exclusive information should not be published on Facebook or Twitter, but on specialized media websites.
- The media person/journalist must be aware of how others view him/her.
- Journalists must ensure the authenticity and accuracy of what they read on social media, as not everything that is published is true.
- Journalists or media professionals always present themselves as journalists, as they cannot hide their identity, whether it is in traditional journalistic events and when practicing their profession in the field or on the Internet.
- Social media platforms are tools, not a game. Journalists represent their institutions and cannot act in an unacceptable manner on the Internet.
- Electronic journalism has imposed a professional reality as far as journalists are concerned, their capabilities, and their working conditions. Contemporary journalists are now required to have the technical skills and Internet writing conditions (Ziati, Debarnaoui, 2018, p. 2018)

Conclusion :

Based on the above, we can conclude that the ethics of media practice through new media has become an urgent and pressing necessity imposed by several factors, the most important of which are: the changes on the Internet, and the ensuing modern media and problems. This leads to new behaviors and practices, some of which are completely contradictory with professional ethics.

Therefore, it can be said that this article has provided some information, though little, about the new media ethics and the methods of ethical control. This leads to conclude two major points about the ethics of professional practice in this field. The first point is the necessity to increase the efforts, starting with self-regulation, since ethics stem from the individual himself. Self-regulation or control is an important means of enhancing professional and media performance. The second point is related to strengthening the legal and legislative system that governs the ethics of professional practice. This issue is the preoccupation of media and communication law scholars, in order to design professional rules that guarantee everyone's rights without preventing them from their right of speech.

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