

New Media, New Ethics Confronting Ethical Issues in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The current study has offered pertinent insights into a variety of ethical issues inevitably imposed by the emerging digital technologies on journalistic ethics. At the start, the study has engaged in the definitional delimitation of our key concept trying to form valid conceptual abstractions and exploring new meanings. Following that, the study shed light on intricately turbulent ethical paradoxes and dilemma that the digital media landscape is going through currently. In parallel, the study proposed Value Determinism Theory of media as a normative alternative that provides an eclectic epistemological framework to ethically unsettle traditional and digital media practices and outputs.

Keywords: New Media, New Ethics, Ethical Issues, the Digital Era, Value Determinism Theory of Media.

المستخلص

طُرحت الدراسة الحالية جُملة من الاستبصارات الدالة حول بعض الاستشكالات الأخلاقية التي فرضتها التكنولوجيات الرقمية بشكل إكراهي على أخلاقيات الممارسة الصحفية. في المُستهل، انخرطت الدراسة في دينامية تحديد المفاهيم المركزية قصد مُحاولَة صياغة تجريدات مفاهيمية مُؤاممة و استجلاء معانيها و دلالاتها الجديدة. كما سَلطت الدراسة الضوء على طبيولوجيا و مستويات أهم المعضلات الأخلاقية و التناقضات المعيارية التي تُميز مشهد الميديا الرقمية في راهنيتها الحالية. بالتوازي مع ذلك، اقترحت الدراسة نظرية الحتمية القيمية كبديل معيار يوفّر مَسلكا إبستمولوجيا اصطفايّا من شأنه تأطير و أخْلَقَة ممارسات و مُخرجات الوسائط الاعلامية الكلاسيكية و الرقمية على حد السواء.

الكلمات الدالة: الميديا الجديدة، الأخلاقيات الجديدة، الاستشكالات الأخلاقية، العصر الرقمي، نظرية الحتمية القيمية.

Introduction

It is equally clear that the swift technological transition to the digital media has generated new interconnected open platforms, conditioned by unconventional socio-technical configurations and, empowered by never-ending interaction possibilities and easily accessible content creation tools, which are used collectively by a richly varied number of users and content producers in a fashion that also, and probably more so, imposes itself today as a parallel new form of online-based journalism.

In the midst of these digital setting, one could say that the current media revolution provides citizens with the publishing and communication technology to engage in journalism and the discussion of journalism on a global scale¹.

Accordingly, the journalistic practice is no more defined by the journalistic know-how and the foundational skills, or devices of content creation and diffusion since they are accessible to anyone with Internet connection, rather the current trends of the communication ecology push us to accord utmost importance to the deontological ethics as a last resort for the journalistic profession definition. This requires that academic attention should be significantly placed upon the normative dimensions of new digital technologies and their impacts on media outputs².

By implication, ethical considerations have become a major preoccupation, especially in the light of the ethical and normative vacuum provoked fundamentally by the technicization of journalistic practices and the emergence of non-professional actors that have the full operational capability to engage in journalism and the publication of varied contents and news, benefiting from technological affordances and dynamics at their hands, without taking in consideration the normative dimensions of the journalistic culture, thus surpassing the conventional ethical frontiers which used to regulate and guarantee responsible media performance.

Faced with these new normative challenges, extensive discussion has been dedicated recently to the unsettling normative question of whether the ethical

¹Ward, Stephen JA, and Herman Wasserman. **Towards an open ethics: Implications of new media platforms for global ethics discourse**. Journal of Mass Media Ethics 25.4.2010.p. 275.

² Duff, Alistair. **The Normative Crisis of the Information Society**. Cyberpsychology. Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 2008, vol. 2, no 1.

framework constructed previously by media professional practitioners to regulate traditional media forms can be applicable for regularizing and ethicalizing new media outputs, and to adequately address the new involvement of non-professional actors in the dynamics of content generation. Significant academic efforts were made to provide a normative analysis of the core dimensions of intersections between new media and ethics, focusing on key challenges that digital media present today to the established pre-new media ethical and normative frameworks. In the context of the present study, we will rely, to a notable extent, on Value Determinism Theory of Media which proposes a variety of relevant theoretical premises that place deterministic emphasis on ethical values in both its axiological and normative level, and at the concrete level of practice. Thus, our purpose is to mobilize its epistemological components to respond to the exigencies of generating a participatory and inclusive approach to media ethics within the emerging digital ecologies where professional journalists share the journalistic practice with non-professionals and social media ordinary users.

I - New media and ethics, definitional and conceptual delimitation

is in "new media" It may well be the case that the connotation of the term constant change, since the novelty of a medium differs variably according to time and its diffusion³. In that sense, new media are often contrasted to "old media" such as television and print media, although it is not commonly agreed upon within the field of communication studies, since distinctions based on the criterion of oldness and novelty are insufficient to comprehend the particularity of the technological phenomena related to the media, however adopting the line of distinction that attributes the digital generative and interactive capacities to new media is more sound⁴.

the "New media" as an emerging concept is used fundamentally to refer to content made available using different forms of electronic communication made possible through the use of computer technology, therefore the phrase new media In actual terms, new " describes content available on-demand through the Internet⁵ media is a catch-all term used for various kinds of electronic communications that are conceivable due to innovation in computer technology, it comprised of websites, online video/audio streams, email, online social platforms, online

³Debatin, Bernhard. **New Media Ethics**. In: Schicha C., Brosda C. (eds) Handbuch Medienethik. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. 2010. pp 318-327.

⁴Manovich, Lev. **New Media From Borges to HTML**. The New Media Reader. Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin & Nick Montfort. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003. Pp. 13-25.

⁵Webopedia. **What is New Media?** Retrieved February 18, 2018 from https://www.webopedia.com/TERM/N/new_media.html

.In a similar fashion, High-Tech Dictionary, "communities, online forums...etc."⁶ defines new media as "the electronic mass media combined with computers; also, ⁷"this combination as a profession covers the communication "new media" Rice has pointed out that concept of technologies that facilitate interactivity between users and the interactivity between user and information⁸. For Pierre Lévy new media have produced a new kind of that is different from previous knowledge spheres and "knowledge space" dynamics, he maintains that new media constitutes a break from previous forms of knowledge that were linear and hierarchical⁹.

In approaching new media, Bill Melody adopts an economically deterministic perspective by subscribing the new media to the dynamics of the new information economy and to distinguish between the traditional media and new media in the light of the economic logic behind them¹⁰.

Lievrouw and Livingston propose a three-dimensional conceptual framework which consists of technology, human action and social structure; in their perception new media are the information and communication technologies and their associated social contexts, incorporating the following elements¹¹:- The artifacts or devices that enable and extend our abilities to communicate;
- The communication activities or practices we engage in to develop and use these devices; and
- The social arrangements or organizations that form around the devices and practices.

It seems clear that new media represent all types of media that are communicated through digital and interactive forms. What really distinguishes the new media from the traditional media is the manner in which the content is published or broadcast as well as the manner of accessing and receiving that content.

In actual fact, the new media dynamics are based primarily on the process of integration of the various media forms in one medium, in one arena or platform which is the computer and its networks, and it is the resultant outcome of this

⁶ Techopedia. **What does New Media mean?**. Retrieved March 2, 2018 from <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/416/new-media>

⁷New media.(n.d.). **Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon**. Retrieved March 1, 2018 from Dictionary.com website <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/new-media>

⁸ Rice, R. E., & Associates. **The new media: Communication, research and technology**. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. 1984.

⁹ Pierre Lévy. **L'intelligence collective: pour une anthropologie du cyberspace**. Paris: La découverte, 1997.

¹⁰ Collins, Richard, and Cristina Murroni. **New media, new policies: Media and communications strategy for the future**. Institute for Public Policy Research, 1996.

¹¹ Lievrouw, L. A., & Livingstone, S. **Introduction to the first edition: The social shaping and consequences of ICTs**. Handbook of new media: social shaping and social consequences of ICTs, 2006, p.23.

integration that stimulates the establishment of new communicative paradigm which permits the average individual to become an active participant in the creation of wide-ranging content and to vertically and horizontally. On the other hand, regarding media ethics, it is certainly true that the concept of ethics began to enjoy a central recurrence and visibility within humanities and social sciences research agenda, culminating recently in what has been known as "*the turn to ethics*". In fact, ethics have been and continuing to be a relevant formal part of journalistic training and academic curriculum within the field of communication and media studies in most countries.

At the conceptual level, there is a plethora of varied definitions and conceptual notions which share substantially the similar premise of standardized professional rules of conduct concerning the practice of a given profession and, more specifically, the set of directives and norms that professionals apply to themselves and perform their activities in complete accord with it. In this respect, ethics reflect, to a significant extent, the assumed sense of responsibility, the sincere concern to ensure the quality of service and, the balancing of public interest considerations. Ethics are also the expression of the sense of engagement with the duties that professionals impose on the performance of their occupational activities.

Broadly speaking, media ethics aim at safeguarding professional credibility, protecting the symbolic image of journalism, valuing the professional character defining and objectives and values of a profession and establishing the resulting rules of professional conduct.

Media ethics encompasses many aspects that run through a broad spectrum from the collection of information to its processing, integration of information source, verification, cross-checking and managing information content, taking in consideration questions related to the reception of information by the audience.

It is commonly accepted that any form of mediatic or journalistic practice should be furnished with certain ethical duties and moral obligations. In this regard a fundamentally ethical approach into the media should occupy a central place. However, one note that media are raising constantly ethical questions that need to be addressed adequately.

It should be noticed that codes of ethics are the best incarnation of media self-regulation philosophy, and opposed to other professions where the code may be elaborated or created by a government or official sectors, the code of ethics is drafted mainly by journalists and editors. Yavuz Baydar maintains that codes of ethics are vital referential landmarks that guide journalists through their work, delineating their obligations and their duties.¹²

Besides that, unlike many other professions, the ethical and professional journalistic normative framework should be elaborated exclusively by media

¹²OSCE.Ibid.The Media Self-regulation Guidebook.2008.p.21.

practitioner and professionals themselves, under their terms and according to their perspective, rather than being imposing on them in the form of specific normative standards by a governing body or official institutions. In this regard, self-regulation significantly preserves the complete freedom and autonomy of journalist, and maintains the minimum standards on accuracy, professional ethics and protection of privacy and diversity of opinions¹³.

In a similar vein, Miklós Haraszti points out that self-regulation and quality of journalistic work should not be asked by governments as precondition for the freedom of expression, since ethical journalism can only survive in an atmosphere of guaranteed freedom.¹⁴

Journalists need to assess normatively professional practices and behaviors, and to determine which are necessary, admissible and justified and to reject those practices that don't meet the normative requirements. Theoretically speaking, establishing the ethics does not risk bringing additional limits to the freedom of journalists, on the contrary, ethics enable a better adaptation of these freedoms, in their pattern of layout, reinforcement and strengthening.

The application of the ethical rules is above all a guarantee of autonomy and freedom for professionals. The ethics are the parameters that permit the journalists to be acquainted what realities that they face and what constraints that regularize their activities and what the needs to be addressed.

Sawant pointed out that the bodies of code of ethics at the international level have in common the following points: (1) Honesty and fairness, (2) reply to critical opinions, (3) objectivity in reporting, (4) prohibition to receive gifts, (5) respect for privacy, (6) distinction between fact and opinion, (7) not to inflame hatred, (8) not to use dishonest means to obtain information, and (9) general standards of decency and taste¹⁵.

The Society of Professional Journalist (SPJ) categories media ethics in four main elements: Seeking the Truth and reporting It, Minimizing harm, Acting independently, Being accountable and transparent¹⁶.

In parallel, Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) summarizes the core principles of ethical journalism in five elements: Truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity and accountability.¹⁷

¹³ Zlatev, Ognian; Lani, Remzi; Baydar, Yavuz; Mollerup, Jacob; Vilović, Gordana; Turtia, Tarja; Hulin, Adeline. **Professional journalism and self-regulation: new media, old dilemmas in South East Europe and Turkey**. Unesco. 2011.p.18.

¹⁴ OSCE.Op. cit. p.19.

¹⁵ Sawant, P. B. **Accountability in journalism**. Journal of Mass Media Ethics 18.1.2003.pp.16-28.

¹⁶ The Society of Professional Journalist (SPJ). **SPJ Code of Ethics**. Retrieved March 1,2018 from <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

Richard Keeble has identified an assortment of commonplace journalistic values such as : the separation of fact and opinion, the need for accuracy linked with the responsibility to correct errors; the deliberate distortion and suppression of information are condemned; maintaining confidentiality of sources; upholding journalists' responsibility to guard citizens' right to freedom of expression; recognizing a duty to defend the dignity and independence of the profession; protecting people's right to privacy; respecting and seeking after truth and; avoiding discrimination¹⁸.

In the context of traditional media, the complexified ethical dilemmas stem basically from the double nature of media institutions, hence they are indispensable tools for any healthy functioning democracy and at the same time they are economic actors in the market. From the first perspective they are expected to provide impartial objective information, and from the second perspective as economic institutions they tend to competitively look for profitability through the commercialization of information which appears strikingly contradictory.

Consistent with this view, it is obvious that journalists work in a competitive environment governed by the logic of market; hence they are employed by profit-oriented enterprises that are in constant competition with each other in order to achieve maximum profit. In this case, it should be made clear that the competition dynamics don't justify all forms of competitive practices, since the domain of human communication require specific normative treatment. Consequently this competition does not facilitate the adoption and implementation of ethical principles in the context of traditional media entities.

II- Digital Itineraries and Ethical Paradoxes

The wide adoption of emerging digital platforms by the ordinary users had culminated in the alteration of processes of production, distribution and reception in ways that were technically impossible (and often unthinkable) in an era dominated by traditional mass media¹⁹. In such context, it is certainly true that the current reshaping of the nature of communication, we are witnessing is due to the fact that the open digital media platforms are genuinely transforming the process of collection as well as the treatment of information and news and its dissemination and circulation.

Based on that assumption, those very interactive platforms provide incredibly dramatic new opportunities to democratize the publication and dissemination of

¹⁷Ethical Journalism Network (EJN). **The 5 Principles of Ethical Journalism**. Retrieved March 2, 2018 from <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/who-we-are/5-principles-of-journalism>

¹⁸Keeble, Richard. **Ethics for journalists**. Routledge, 2008.p.14.

¹⁹Latonero, Mark, and Aram Sinnreich. **The hidden demography of new media ethics**. Information, Communication & Society. 2014, vol. 17, no 5, p. 572.

news and information²⁰. Any individual with the appropriate technology can now produce his online media and include images, text, and sound about whatever he wishes ²¹. Moreover, those interactive web-based technologies set in motion interconnected spaces of cohabitation and intersection between diverse practices, know-how, techniques and contents (texts, hypertexts, sounds, images, multimedia...etc.).

It seems more likely then, that the digital spaces have provided a new environment where different genres of journalism are practiced. This strongly suggests that the new media has paved the way for the emergence of a new equation in which the profession interferes with the amateurism, the industry with entertainment and the professional journalist with citizen journalist, since practically everyone with Internet access has the opportunity to infinitely write or tweet or publish news, ideas, opinions and even reports, thus the highly computerized systems of communication expand the number and diversity of mediatic actors beyond professional media producers.

What's more, the ordinary citizens, who can now publish, re-publish, disseminate and comment on what they want, they mostly do so without any minimum of normative regulation or journalistic culture, which lend weight to the argument that the new media have already reduced the barriers between professional journalist and, those every new open platforms are giving rise to the mixture of fixed and rigid journalistic forms with diversified and complexified information practices, but ethically problematic.

Additionally, the digital spaces associated with new media are frequently perceived as a realm of unrestrained, uncontrolled and uncontrollable freedom. Since to the present moment, they dispose of no efficient internal mechanisms that favour any normative regulation and even more no regulatory measure seems to be of practical usefulness so far, such situation could persist for a longer time.

In parallel, the audience, which role under the traditional communicative processes, was receiving the content and judging its quality, assuring its deontological compatibility, now the audience is dispersed in the atomized space and captured by the logic of decentralized systems which converted it from a simple receiver into an active partner in media practices who disposes of publishing technology.

A plausible point is that the former classical gatekeepers become now what, hence they exercise a little effect on the content "gate watchers"²² Axel Bruns calls published by the audience, confronting the new the paradoxes greatly sharpened by

²⁰Thorburn, David, & Henry Jenkins. **Rethinking media change: the aesthetics of transition**. Mit Press, 2004.

²¹Croteau, David, & William Hoynes. **Media and ideology**. Media/society: Industries, images and audiences. 2003. pp.159-185.

²² Bruns, Axel. **Gatewatching: Collaborative online news production**. Peter Lang. 2005.

the advent of new media. Indeed, social media technologies are sidelining classical intermediators of news making and undermining the gatekeeping function of journalists.²³

Moreover, we can easily identify that anyone with Internet access by de-"definition can launch his own self-media which risk leading to a of the journalism profession and industry"²⁴. "professionalization

Another element to be added to the enormously intricate situation is that the ecology of new media has enabled the audience to enrich the published information with vivid commentaries and heated debates giving rise to what is , which is based primarily on the dynamic "annotative journalism "known as feedback of the audience, and which differs from the pre-new media age in which traditional media permitted a limited or non-existent feedback. However, this dimension may require extra attention and consideration to regularize the outputs of feedback and to adopt extended mechanisms that address the controversial content like racism, discrimination or hate-based commentaries.

As a response to the challenges presented by the new media, journalists , which is accessible for "publishing'now insist on the difference between ' , a profession grounded by a firm commitment to a set "journalism"everybody, and of established norms and practices and the means of legitimation and scrutiny²⁵. Other professional journalists and media practitioners are convinced that technological convergences make it imperative to re-consider the old definitions of journalists and journalism that were prevalent in the pre-new media era, but the most challenging stake in their consideration is whether users will accept to follow the ethical guidelines that regulate the journalistic profession or not, especially in view of the increasing distrust in the mainstream media.

In a similar vein, Hayes and others evoked three ethical values attached to credibility which are: authenticity, accountability, and autonomy, emphasizing the urgency to reinvigorate them in the online environment, where old assumptions about journalistic roles and values can no longer be accepted uncritically nor old approaches to them continued indefinitely.²⁶

Both Arant and Anderson have pointed out that traditional journalists are firmly convinced that ethics and normative standards should be the same whether

²³ Hermida, Alfred. **Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism.** Journalism practice, 2010, vol. 4, no 3, p. 297-308.

²⁴ Richstad, Jim. **Le Droit de Communiquer a l'Age de l'Internet, L'Arsenal de la Démocratie.** Médias. Deontologie et MARS, Bertrand, Claude-Jean (ed.) Paris, Economica. 1999 pp. 31–41.

²⁵ Lowrey, Wilson. **Mapping the journalism–blogging relationship.** Journalism 7.4.2006. pp. 477-500.

²⁶ Singer, Jane B & Ian Ashman. **Comment is free, but facts are sacred: User-generated content and ethical constructs at the Guardian.** Journal of mass media ethics .24.1.2009. pp. 3-21.

publishing in print or online, although they worried that time and staffing pressures were eroding the ability to verify information before disseminating it²⁷.

Another major challenge is that new media produce an illusory sensation of impunity which encourages individuals to verbalize opinions and thoughts that they could not probably express in other real world contexts. Hence the anarchistic nature of the new media encourages people to feel exempt from moral obligations and ethical duties²⁸. On top of that, in contrast to traditional media, the digital spheres do not allow for easy identification of responsible and responsibilities or the establishment of simple control procedures, because the high-powered available individualized forms of anonymity means there are even fewer repercussions for unethical behavior.

New media poses also the problem of the application of another sort of authentication and verification procedures. Since that Internet-based environment facilitate anonymity, therefore individuals can spread intentionally rumors, fake news and false information that could circulate with unprecedented speed and scope of diffusion, without being accountable to the general audience or to the ethical and professional standards that architect journalism and media industry offline.

In other words, within the new digital spheres it is not easy to identify the precise definition of responsibilities, neither traceable proofs of any faults or offenses committed online, as they are not subjected to the code of journalistic ethics or public or international law.

Another concerning point to be taken in account is that ethics of journalism main ingredient rests on what Kovach and Rosenstiel call the “discipline of verification” since the journalist’s job is to provide the right facts, and to not mix them with entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art²⁹. However, since the massive conversion into mobile-based devices like smartphones and tablets, as the new dominant tools to connect ubiquitously to social networks, which has had dramatic effects on the concept of immediacy of receiving media content and the fast consumption of news, hence it is longer necessary for social media users to sit in front of a computer desk in order to read messages and follow pages or watch news to stay up-to-date with what's happening , they can do all that now on public transport or while walking in the streets, which may further their acute social anxiety resulting from the fear of missing out, and which may double the pressure

²⁷ Arant, M. David, and Janna Quitney Anderson. **Newspaper online editors support traditional standards.** Newspaper Research Journal 22.4.2001. pp.57-69.

²⁸ Plaisance, Patrick Lee, and Joan A. Deppa. **Perceptions and manifestations of autonomy, transparency and harm among US newspaper journalists.** Journalism & Communication Monographs 10.4.2009. pp. 327-386.

²⁹ Kovach, Bill, & Tom Rosenstiel. **The elements of journalism. What Newspeople Should know and the Public Should Expect.** New York: Crown.2001. p.79.

on the professional journalists to operate more efficiently and to produce as much and as fast as newsworthy stories and contents, which destabilizes the entire news-gathering and filtration process and provokes numerous new ethical problems. Therefore we can assume that the new rhythm imposed by social media has confined journalists to new imperatives.

In point of fact, at the level of established journalistic culture, journalists working in traditional media carry out routinely an operation of verification of information before publishing or broadcasting it, but within the online arena the process of verification is above all a post-publication activity³⁰. Since unlike the traditional context, verification in online contexts is much more complex, since it takes longer time in the Internet-based platforms, which are governed primarily by immediacy and on-the-spot logic, and journalists are constantly challenged by the two seemingly irreconcilable elements of speed and accuracy.

It is now beyond doubt that the digital media are passing through an embryonic phase that is culminating in a paradigm-shifting change from the normative pattern of "verifying before publishing" to the pattern of "publishing then verifying later or updating or correcting"³¹. Thus, the new tools of news production and presentation afforded by the new media inevitably bring along new processes of habituation and negotiations of journalism rules.³² This tendency is accompanied with emerging and new reading habits; since the current audience favours speed and hot information rather than more in-depth and time-consuming reading.

Social media is now occupying a legitimate status within the journalistic sphere, since many media enterprises encourage their members to open permanent and official accounts with their real name and professional affiliation, in order to get in touch with their target audience, or to get more feedback, or even to attract new readers and viewers, and to benefit from the hyper-textual element that redirects the potential consumers to their websites, consulting the complete information to get the full story. In this regard, a solid fifth study conducted by Cision and Canterbury Christ Church University in 2016 about the impact of social media on journalism with data gathered from the United States, Canada, Finland, Germany, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom, indicated that 78% of

³⁰ Ward, Stephen JA, & Herman Wasserman. **Towards an open ethics: Implications of new media platforms for global ethics discourse.** Journal of Mass Media Ethics 25.4.2010.pp. 275-292.

³¹ Singer, Jane B. **Norms and the network: Journalistic ethics in a shared media space.** Journalism ethics: A philosophical approach. 2010, pp.117-129.

³² SONG, Yang et LIN, Angel. **A genre-aware approach to online journalism education.** Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2012, vol. 51, p. 400-404.

journalists are more engaged with their audience due to their online presence in social media platforms³³.

However, this step has posed a new set of ethical challenges, since some journalists do engage in expressing offensive discourse or inappropriate comments or publishing misplaced posts, failing to maintain a reasonable deal of professionalism, especially that online content stays longer without possibility of limiting the scope of exposure. An emerging problem also is that a significant portion of journalists failed to make the difference between journalists and editorialists which created already a massive process of editorialization of the content they publish and destabilized balance between the professional task of informing the audience carefully and professionally and taking part in public issues by expressing subjective and personal opinions³⁴.

In response to this situation, many media institutions stressed out explicitly to their members not to post or to share on social networks what they would not like to write in newspapers or to broadcast on TV screens. Since it is obvious that the audience does not distinguish usually between personal opinions that a journalist posts on social media and the information that he publishes on the media institution that employs them.

Consistent with this tendency, a multiplicity of professional journalism organizations and media enterprises spared no effort to set guidelines on social media use for journalists, that preconize best practices. Since social media sites become already an essential part of the newsgathering process and an established space where the news is shared and consumed³⁵.

In 2017 the **New York Times** specified a set of guidelines for its journalists for engaging responsibly on social media, those guidelines emphasized ethical features that guarantee transparency, neutrality and fairness and preserve the online journalistic reputation of the newspaper³⁶.

³³ Cision, **2016 Global Social Journalism Study**. Retrieved March 8, 2018 from <https://www.cision.com/us/resources/research-reports/2016-social-journalism-study/>

³⁴ BOUSQUET, F.; MARTY, E.; SMYRNAIOS, N. **Les nouveaux acteurs en ligne de l'information locale: vers une relation aux publics renouvelée?** Colloque Le journalisme en ligne et ses publics. Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 4-6 décembre, 2013.

³⁵ World Bank Group. **Guidelines for using social media**. Retrieved March 23, 2018 from: <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/d87dde804bea509fa542e71be6561834/eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

³⁶ The New York Times. **The Times Issues Social Media Guidelines for the Newsroom**. October 13, 2017 Retrieved March 23, 2018 from:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/reader-center/social-media-guidelines.html>



(Photo courtesy of *The New York Times*)

We have seen also that the International French news agency **AFP** has given the ethical issues of social media special attention in its new published guide on how its journalists should use social networks and how they should maintain the **AFP**'s online presence³⁷. In fact, the **AFP** updates and expands its set of guidelines regularly, in which the content encourages the journalists to stick to accuracy and precision within the digital platforms and to be properly aware of security issues and hacking attacks.

In a similar vein, the Swedish **RadioSverige** published the first edition of Social Media Handbook for Journalists in 2013³⁸, which is regarded as one of the most comprehensive and systematic manuals written upon the social media as a new element in the journalistic practice and the professionalization of social digital spaces as new territories in journalism.

³⁷Agence France-Presse. **AFP updates guidelines on using Social media**. 17 July 2013 Retrieved March 11, 2018 From: <https://www.afp.com/en/agency/press-releases-newsletter/afp-updates-guidelines-using-social-media>

³⁸Sverige Radio. **A Guide for Journalists by Swedish Radio**. Retrieved March 19, 2018 from: <https://www.srsocialamedier.se/home.html>



(Book cover page of *Social Media Handbook for Journalists* published by Swedish Radio Sverige, 2013)

However, we should admit that it is difficult to implement a new well-adapted ethical paradigm, hence the varied forms of online communication are significantly renewing the conditions of ethics, and the construction of a tailored set of norms and standards will require longer time and complex efforts. The difficulty lies not only in the absence of common and widely-accepted deontological standards that architect the journalistic practices within the digital spaces, but also in the potential contradictions between the technological logic, the professional logic, and legal logic. Faced with these new difficulties, a new deontology is to be built to cope with these various elements is specifically urgent. From the preceding discussion it is clear at least that one can consider that the solution of the ethical problems imposed by the new media is less today in the multiplication of systems of prohibition, control and surveillance, since such an imposition would invariably ignore the very structural texture of the digital platforms as an open and accessible territory. But certainly the ethicalization of new media practices and web-based journalistic rituals requires pedagogical efforts that will reinstate the normative engagement to an acceptable minimum of standards in some new ways.

III- Value Determinism Theory of Media, Towards a New Normative Reflection

One could state that media ethics issues cannot be approached simply by recouring to the taken-for-granted ethical and normative framework emerged originally in the context of western societies, since it does not

stand for the complex typology of cultural differences and particularities. Along the same vein, the field of journalism ethics is relatively vague and subject to different cultural interpretations partly because of the exclusion of a discussion about morality which puts ethics at a higher context of meanings³⁹.

Encouraging new analytical horizons beyond the western tradition will have to be made with special urgency today, since claiming a universally accepted collective understanding of ethics is not incongruous with the complexified reality of societies.

Since it is a valid point that each society defines what is in accord with its normative standards to be appropriate/desirable/valuable...etc., and each society has a source of normative and evaluative standards that dictate how things should or ought to be. Accordingly, ethics should not be ontologically grounded in a one single cultural and civilizational locus. Since any sort of ethics or normative values that smacks of cultural imperialism, such as a top-down attempt to impose the values of one culture on another, or to impose the values of one media culture upon another, is bound to fail⁴⁰.

In this context, the theoretical and epistemological contribution of the Algerian scholar Abderrahmane Azzi, known as *value determinism theory of media*, does not reflect a categorical rejection of Western theories in the field of communication studies but rather, his approach is a much-needed meta-reflexive commitment to engage in a process of conceptual revision of the Western academia, reinforcing a nuanced critical posture and, prioritizing the inclusion of different cross-cultural theoretical and epistemological traditions.

In its entirety, value determinism theory of media (VDTM) is a normative approach which adopts an ethico-deontological perspective that assesses the quality of the communicative action and media performance normatively basing on the action's and the content adherence to the ethical standards, common-sense morality, and the accordance with the societal and cultural value system including religious standards. Moreover, value determinism theory of media (VDTM) addresses a basic challenge in the classical media ethics, which is the lack of sensitivity to the plurality of cultures and values systems, and the ungrounded claims of western values universality⁴¹.

Although value determinism theory of media stems primarily from the cultural particularities of the Arab-Islamic region, however it carries universal

³⁹ AZZI, Abderrahmane. **The Morality of Journalism Ethics: Readings of Al Nursi's theory of God's attributes**. Journalism Studies, 2011, vol. 12, no 6, p.785.

⁴⁰ Ward, Stephen JA, & Herman Wasserman. Op. cit. p.836

⁴¹ Belkacem Amin Benamra (2015). **De-westernizing Media Studies: Value Determinism Theory as a Paradigm-Shifting Approach**. Paper presented at the second international conference about the value determinism theory of media, Department of Information and Communication Sciences, Mostaganem University, Algeria, March 2015.

dimensions that transcend the boundaries of geography and culture, since Azzi has constructed his theoretical framework eclectically, basing on wide-range, broad-based theories and approaches that are conceptualized by both Arab-Muslims and western scholars, embracing pluralist modes of epistemological engagement and theorizing⁴².

Azzi's theoretical corpus is tightly bound to the Kantian Deontology, duty-based ethics moral philosophies and social responsibility theory of media. His efforts are not simply a retheorization of the existing theories; rather it is an innovative process of epistemological appropriation of the western canon, imposed by the intensified necessity to address the sense of the normative dissensus within the field of media ethics.

The line of normativity adopted by the value determinism theory of media and its diversified analytical framework permit it to be a well-suited approach that can be applied into the context of both traditional and digital communication ecologies, especially that it becomes imperative, when we evoke the actual context of media landscape, to raise the question of emerging reality of professional boundaries' fuzziness as a result of tensions between traditional and online journalists, since social media has been able to dictate its own rules on the profession of journalism and trouble its very identity by including new actors significantly empowered by the new communicative environment and its affordances. In point of fact, the technological dynamics of new media are helping to blur the lines between producers and consumers of media content, leading to the emergence of what Rosen calls *"the people formerly known as the audience"*⁴³.

This very emergency trigger the surged quest for an inclusive and participatory approach that stands for the implication of non-professional actors in the news producing process and the other elements of journalism. Hence it is required to formulate an inclusive framework of media ethics that can address the ethical concerns and ambitions of anyone involved in, or affected by, the media process⁴⁴.

Consistent with this agreement, Ward and Wasserman renounce firmly the current closed nature of the professional journalistic ethics, favouring an open normative approach, since new media technology is conceivably paving the way for open media ethics.⁴⁵

⁴² Nasir Bouali. **The Epistemological Complementarity in Value Determinism Theory of Media**. Arab Journal of Information and Communication, No. 18, November 2017.

⁴³ Rosen, Jay. **The people formerly known as the audience**. In : **The social media reader**. NYU Press, 2012. p. 13-16.

⁴⁴ Couldry, Nick. **Media ethics: Towards a framework for media producers and media consumers**. Media ethics beyond borders: A global perspective, 2010, p. 59.

⁴⁵ Ward, Stephen JA et Wasserman, Herman. **Towards an open ethics: Implications of new media platforms for global ethics discourse**. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 2010, vol. 25, no 4, p. 275-292.

Open ethics should not be exclusive to a determined group of professional journalists and media practitioners; rather it is open to any producer of media content. In this vein, Ward and Wasserman criticized the problematic professionalistic nature of media ethics and its tendency to exclude other non-professional practitioners, especially in light of the increasing impact of new media technologies upon media practices and content production.⁴⁶

Proposing the normative approach of open media ethics would require taking into full account various points. First of all, professional journalists should be aware of that fact that they are not the only ones producing news content, and should admit the arrival of new actors to the media field, which is no more a closed professional space, since everybody with the appropriate technology could express herself on current topics and produce content online. Following that, for the new actors the main issue is to what extent they are predisposed or ready to translate the journalistic ethical norms directly into everyday concrete practices and contextual situations when interacting with media. Since, as we have discussed previously, the relevant definition of journalists is no more limited to the ability of gathering and broadcasting information, hence in digital media anyone can be a producer of infinite amount of digital content. Rather, the appropriate definition of journalists should be placed on the ethical component. Accordingly, what distinguishes a journalist, in precise terms, is his sturdy attachment to the solidly shared set of normative values and ethical rules that govern the profession.

Media ethics contains various complex and complicated elements that ought to be given a full consideration; they essentially have to do with the collection of information and its processing, content and information management, verifying the source of information, fact-checking.

In accordance with this perspective, deontological self-regulation and commitment to normative ethics is the very element that distinguishes between the professional journalists and the "constellation of communicators", who are active in a "world of communication and mass circulation and instantaneous information"⁴⁷. However, the issue is not as simple as it may seem, since the classical ethical guidelines were originally designed for journalists in the context of traditional media and their application to the journalistic practice within the online spheres is under question.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ward, Stephen JA, and Herman Wasserman. **Open ethics: Towards a global media ethics of listening**. Journalism Studies, 2015, vol. 16, no 6, p. 834-849.

⁴⁷ Brin, Colette, Jean Charron & Jean de Bonville. **Nature et transformation du journalisme**. Théorie et recherches empiriques, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval. 2004. p.16.

⁴⁸ Deuze and Daphna Yeshua. **Online Journalists Face New Ethical Dilemmas: Lessons from The Netherlands**. Journal of Mass Media Ethics. 2001. 16, no. 4. 273–292.

This is largely due to the fact that the normative system which is contained in codes of ethics and the regulatory bodies that govern the profession, have been forged to respond to the exigencies of traditional media logic with its fully centralized one-way communication model, whereby the content production, distribution and consumption processes are supervised and directed by media institutions. However, unlike traditional media, the new media with its technologically digitized logic offer an entirely decentralized many-to-many model of communication in which users are continuously and parallelly receivers and also producers of digitized content (images, videos, text and audio).

To extend this notion more, the previously passive audiences of linear mass media have converted into omnipotent producers of content, empowered mainly by the accessible and democratizing emerging digital technologies, which have facilitated new patterns of content creation and sharing, sidelining the classical gatekeepers and without any prior intervention from media organizations or journalism associations.

In view of this, the core challenge to the open ethics approach would be how to convince the large numbers of bloggers, tweeters, online amateur journalists and facebookers to adopt the journalistic ethical principles such as truthfulness, fairness, objectivity and impartiality? But is it plausible in actual terms to expect them to comply with ethical codes and normative standards like those of traditional journalism? Certainly yes, since all forms of digital or traditional media, as any other human activity, should invariably conform to a formal framework of normative regulators that represent ethical values which a given society is based upon.

Therefore, understanding ethical requirements in combination with the deliberate predisposition to internalize regulative and normative perspectives, and the personal adherence to a set of operating values, should be a structuring element in the usage of digital media within the frame of everyday routines.

In keeping with this ethical perspective, it would be necessary to resort to a philosophically and axiologically well-grounded framework like Azzi's approach which advances valid ethical and normative imperatives that have the full capacity to regularize all communicative situations and circumstances, whether in the case of interpersonal communication, mass communication, or online communication, especially in such noxious context of ethical dilemmas.

Conclusively, Azzi's approach offers novel and significant contributions that combine eclectically epistemological, cultural and normative perspectives, with the intention of establishing an adequate deontological and ethical framework, and with a clear view to face the complexity of new blurring that perturbs the classical normative boundaries, as a result of the turbulent and delocating effects of new digital technologies on journalistic professional practices.

Conclusion

Concluding the present article, we may argue that new digital platforms are significantly transforming professional journalism and its normative ethics in many respects. Therefore media ethics today requires urgent conceptual and normative engagement, since old practices and pre-new media deontological regulators are under increased threat from the extremes of digital technologies digital technologies uses. It is beyond doubt that the appropriation of digital technologies by ordinary users' had a transformational effect on traditional approaches to ethical journalism, the thing that still requires systematic and adapted endeavour for a proper understanding of the complex digital/normative media-related phenomena.

On the other hand, Value Determinism theory of media, which argues more directly for a rejection of academic western parochialism, constitutes a diverse axiological and theoretical effort with the purpose of tailoring the necessary functioning regulatory and normative framework to ensure that the different outputs of media will stick at least to the acceptable ethical commitment limit. In a context of digital media, the approach of Azzi, in its various incarnations, sets out a self-regulation system that respond to pressing tensions between stable values and changing practices within the media landscape.

All in all, the ethical element is an important structural base for the journalistic practice in digital or pre-digital settings, thus media ethics presently need to be re-evaluated and re-adapted to suit all forms of journalism, whether amateur or professional journalism, whether for who is blogging or networking, or event tweeting or sharing posts, or working in newsrooms.

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