A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION ETHICS IN ONLINE JOURNALISM

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Abstract

This research explores the challenges faced by online journalism practices in managing communication ethics, particularly in the aspects of information accuracy and speed of news distribution. With the increasing influence of social media and digital platforms, online journalism faces growing pressure to publish news quickly, often at the expense of a thorough verification process. This research identifies that one of the main root causes of the problem is the lack of training and strict editorial standards, resulting in errors in reporting and declining public trust in the media. The study conducted in this research used the literature research method. The results found that the practice of communication ethics in online journalism is simply to maintain the integrity of the media and strengthen public trust in an ever-evolving information age.

Keywords: Communication Ethics, Online Journalism.

Introduction

In recent decades, journalism has undergone a significant metamorphosis, fuelled by the digital revolution and the rise of the internet. This phenomenon has changed the conventional mode of reporting and brought about dynamic changes thanks to the birth of online journalism. Digital platforms make information distribution easier and provide more space for interaction between media and audiences.

The development of online journalism has revolutionised the way information is disseminated to the public. With the advent of the internet, time and space constraints that used to be an obstacle in delivering news are no longer relevant (Arrey & Reynolds, 2023). Online media is able to update news at an almost instantaneous speed, allowing news consumers to gain access to the latest information from anywhere at any time. Digital platforms also provide greater room for content variability, ranging from text, video, to complex multimedia interactions. This not only enriches the user experience but also increases the reach and influence of journalism globally (Atala, 2021).

However, these technological advancements also bring impacts that need to be scrutinised. The rapid speed of news dissemination often makes the process of

verification and factuality of news neglected, making it prone to the spread of fake news or hoaxes (Auman et al., 2020). This can lead to confusion and misinformation among the public. In addition, online journalism is often faced with greater commercial pressures than traditional media, where income is often linked to the number of clicks that can attract advertisements. This situation can lead to journalism practices that are more orientated towards sensationalism than information substance (AY, 2022). These two impacts show that while online journalism expands access to information, it also poses new challenges in maintaining the integrity and quality of the information delivered.

On the one hand, communication ethics is key in maintaining the credibility and integrity of the media in presenting information. Journalism is responsible for presenting content that is not only informative and up-to-date, but also honest and fair (Baines, 2024). However, there is a concern that with characteristics that emphasise speed and amount of content, online journalism may sacrifice rigour and accuracy for the sake of achieving ephemeral fame or competitive advantage. Fake news, misinformation, and misleading content-the intensity and impact of which appear to be increasingly prominent in the public sphere-have become pressing global issues (Bajomi-Lázár, 2021).

The application of ethical principles in journalism communication not only serves as a bulwark against the degradation of journalism values but also attempts to maintain public trust in the media. In an era where information choices are almost unlimited, trust is the most valuable currency for media institutions (Baykaldi & Miller, 2020); (Blom, 2023). Therefore, the consequences of unethical journalism practices not only jeopardise the reputation of individual media but also create information chaos that threatens the foundations of democracy and good social governance.

This research aims to examine the challenges faced in the application of communication ethics in online journalism, identify relevant standard ethical principles, and analyse how these principles can be implemented in daily journalism practices amidst the onslaught of such online media challenges. Through this research, it is hoped to provide a critical look at the current state of communication ethics in online journalism and offer recommendations to strengthen ethical practices among media professionals and other stakeholders.

Research Methods

The study conducted in this research uses the literature research method. The literature research method is a technique used in many academic and non-academic

fields to collect information, understand and analyse pre-existing literature on a particular topic. This method is intensively carried out to build a thorough understanding or develop a theoretical framework for further research (Madekhan, 2019); (Moha & Sudrajat, 2019); (Moleong, 2019).

Results and Discussion
The concept of communication ethics

Communication ethics refers to the principles and norms that govern behaviour in the communication process to ensure honesty, fairness, transparency and respect for individual rights. This includes how messages are delivered, the tools and media used, and sensitivity to issues such as privacy, truthfulness, and responsibility in sharing information (Bobbitt, 2020). Ethics in communication requires individuals and organisations to interact with each other in ways that strengthen trust and build better understanding, avoiding misinformation, manipulation, and offensive or harmful communication. In essence, communication ethics aims to ensure responsible communication practices that are mindful of the impact they can have on both individuals and society at large (Brunner & Mutsvairo, 2021).

Principles of communication ethics are guidelines that determine how information should be transmitted and received in every type of communication, both in personal and professional contexts. Key aspects of these ethical principles include honesty, where communication actors are required to convey information accurately and truthfully without any intent to mislead (Chadha & Relly, 2024). Openness and transparency are also important factors, requiring engagement and openness in sharing information, thereby facilitating wider understanding and participation. This principle also prioritises responsibility, expecting individuals to consider the consequences of their communications and use discretion when handling sensitive information (Chao, 2023b).

Ethical values in communication are difficult to separate from the principles that have been implemented in society. Fairness is a fundamental value where each party in communication should be treated fairly and without bias (Chao, 2023a). Empathy and respect for cultural diversity are also values that underpin interactions that respect differences between individuals and groups. In a professional context, integrity is a key value to maintain, emphasising the importance of maintaining professional ethics and standards without being compromised by personal gain or external pressures. These values maintain a foundation of trust and mutual respect to create a healthy communication environment and promote the common good (Cingerová & Dulebová, 2021).

Communication Ethics in Journalism

Journalism ethical standards are a collection of moral guidelines and principles designed to ensure integrity, reliability and accuracy in news reporting. These include adherence to truth and objectivity, avoiding conflicts of interest, respecting individual privacy unless there is a clear public interest, and taking responsibility for the effects of reporting on individuals or society (Cohen, 2020). The standards also emphasise the importance of checking and verifying information before publication, providing the right of reply and correction where necessary, and strictly separating fact from opinion. Thus, journalism ethics aims to maintain public trust in the media and strengthen democracy through proper and responsible information delivery (Coleman & Alkhafaji, 2021).

News publication ethics demand high standards of journalism accuracy, integrity and responsibility. It emphasises the importance of in-depth validation and verification of data before presentation to the public, with the aim of maintaining the reliability and credibility of news outlets and their journalists (Craig, 2021). In news reports, all information should be obtained from credible sources, and treated with care to avoid spreading unfounded rumours or speculation. Anonymous news sources should be used wisely, based on strict editorial judgement and only when strictly necessary to protect the source from retaliation. Publication ethics also require journalists to clearly distinguish facts from opinions, and not manipulate photos, videos, or audio that could mislead the public (Craig et al., 2021).

News presentation holds the principles of honesty and fairness, ensuring that all parties involved in a news issue are given the opportunity to express their views. Journalists should endeavour to avoid bias, both in the selection of news and in the way it is presented. It is also important to recognise and quickly correct unintentional errors in reporting, so that journalists and the media can maintain public trust (Cummins et al., 2023). It also emphasises the need to show sensitivity in situations involving tragedy and victims, avoiding exploiting their circumstances or causing additional pain. The basic ethical principle of news publication and presentation is to ensure that the journalism process works as a responsible tool of enlightenment and information for a wide audience, integral to their commitment to the society they represent (Dasgupta & Sarkar, 2022).

Principles of Communication Ethics in Online Journalism

In the era of technology and rapid access to information due to the internet, communication ethics in online journalism has become increasingly important to maintain the integrity and public trust in the media. The main principles that must be adhered to are accuracy and verification of information (Delaney & Betts, 2021). The presence of fake news and misleading information is highly likely if online journalists do not take extra steps to check the veracity of the information they receive. Practices such

as choosing reliable sources and confirming facts from several sources are crucial (Dragomir, 2023). In addition, reporting must be objective, journalists must have an obligation to avoid prejudice and ensure that personal opinions or views of any party do not influence the way information is presented (Duskaeva, 2021).

Not only in the verification process, communication ethics in online journalism also apply in terms of responsibility in using digital media. Journalists should be aware that the content they publish online is accessible to a very wide audience and has a much bigger and faster impact. Therefore, they should avoid the impulse to publish incomplete or unverified news just because of the pressure to be the first to report. Speed should not come at the expense of accuracy (Eberwein, 2021).

In addition, individual privacy is also an important aspect in the ethical principles of online journalism. The presence of the internet and social media changes the view of what is considered private and public. Journalists should consider carefully before publishing information that might violate privacy or cause adverse effects to a person, group of people, or organisation in the absence of a strong public interest. The decision to publish should always use high ethical judgement and comply with rules on copyright and intellectual property (Fayne, 2020).

Finally, transparency is a key principle in online journalism, which requires journalists to clearly state if there is a conflict of interest or if there are errors to be corrected. They must be willing to provide proper context and explanations for the articles they produce. Inadvertent mistakes should be quickly recognised and openly corrected (Fourie, 2021). Two-way communication through online journalism allows for follow-up dialogue between journalists and readers, thus strengthening public engagement and trust in the news presented. Practising this ethical communication helps to ensure that journalism continues to be respected as an essential and trusted source of news in a changing society (García-Perdomo, 2021).

In conclusion, the principles of communication ethics in online journalism emphasise the importance of accuracy, objectivity and responsibility in publishing information. In an era where access to information is vast and fast, online journalists must prioritise verification of facts and credible sources to avoid the spread of fake news and misleading information. In addition, these ethical principles also demand careful consideration of individual privacy, the wise use of digital media, and the importance of transparency and accountability in all aspects of reporting. Conducting communications based on strong ethics not only strengthens public trust in the media, but also maintains the integrity and importance of journalism as a pillar of democracy that provides valuable information to the public. Therefore, upholding ethics in online journalism is key to enlightening the public with responsible and trustworthy news.

Challenges in Communication Ethics Practice

The practice of communication ethics, particularly in the digital and online realms, faces a number of significant challenges in this information age. One of the main challenges is the speed of information dissemination. In a world that demands fast news and updates, journalists and media professionals are often under pressure to publish content immediately (Greste, 2023). This speed sometimes comes at the expense of accuracy and validation of information. This challenge demands a balance between speed and accuracy, where journalists must develop the ability to verify and fact-check quickly without compromising the integrity of the information (Hanitzsch, 2021).

Furthermore, challenges arise from the large volume and variety of information, which creates a fertile terrain for misinformation and disinformation. In such a vast scope, sifting fact from fiction becomes more difficult (Harb, 2022). Social media, as a direct and unfiltered means of communication, is often a means of spreading fake news and conspiracy theories. Journalists and media institutions, in this case, are responsible not only for highlighting the truth but also for countering misleading narratives, a task that requires substantial resources and dedication to quality investigative journalism (Harcup, 2021).

Finally, the digital age demands complex ethical navigations related to privacy and data ethics. With such easy access to individuals' personal information, the boundaries between public and private spaces are blurred. Preserving one's privacy while providing in-depth and impactful reporting is often a dilemma. In addition, data ethics relating to how information is collected, used and shared demands transparency and consideration from the media in terms of data protection and information security. These challenges require deep ethical thinking and often legal approaches to ensure that ethical principles are met at every stage of communication.

Thus, amidst these challenges, the practice of communication ethics must continue to evolve and adapt, maintaining the integrity of professionalism amidst a rapidly changing and complex media landscape.

Strategies and Solutions for the practice of communication ethics in online journalism

To overcome the challenges in the practice of communication ethics in online journalism, comprehensive strategies and solutions are needed. First, the development and implementation of strict editorial standards within media organisations is key. This includes clear guidelines for fact verification, reliable sources, and handling sensitive information (Hayes, 2020). With these standards, journalists and editors can have a clear reference in their daily practices, minimising errors and improving the accuracy of reports. Media organisations should encourage a culture where accuracy takes precedence over speed in publishing news (James, 2020).

Second, investment in technology and verification tools can help journalists overcome the challenges of speed and volume of information. The use of tools such as

automated fact-checking software, databases for cross-referencing, and applications to track the source of news origin can speed up the verification process without sacrificing rigour. With technological support, journalists can be more efficient in sorting out accurate information from false or misleading ones, even under time pressure (Keeble, 2022).

Third, ethics education and training for journalists is essential. Ongoing training sessions on journalism ethics, media law, and how to handle ethical dilemmas in journalism practice can strengthen journalists' understanding and competence. This includes an introduction to online privacy rules and data ethics, which continue to evolve as technology advances. Media organisations should make this an important aspect of continuous professional development (Kirschner, 2021).

Fourth, the importance of transparency and accountability cannot be overstated. Media organisations must commit to providing information about their working methods, how news is produced, and open acknowledgement when mistakes are made. Policies that guide the correction process and instructions for audiences to provide feedback or challenge the accuracy of news can strengthen public trust (Klyueva, 2021). This transparency also includes disclosure of funding sources and potential conflicts of interest that could influence reporting (Koliska, 2021).

Finally, collaboration between media organisations, academic institutions and technology can create innovative solutions to ethical challenges in journalism. These partnerships can lead to research, development of new tools, and platforms to educate the public on critical appraisal of the news and information they consume. With a multi-stakeholder approach and a focus on innovation, the journalism industry can better address ethical challenges and maintain integrity and public trust in an evolving media landscape.

Conclusion

Online journalism faces increasing challenges related to the accuracy of information and the speed of news distribution. The results show that the pressure to publish quickly often results in a lack of fact verification, which can affect public trust in media organisations. In addition, the research identified that many journalists still require additional training in handling digital data and privacy ethics, highlighting the importance of more resources on professional development and technological infrastructure.

Proposed solutions include the implementation of stricter editorial standards and the use of advanced technology for quick verification of information. It was also suggested that transparency with the public regarding editorial processes and errors can increase credibility and deepen the relationship between media and news consumers. Cooperation between media organisations and academic institutions and technology developers is considered vital to develop new verification tools and

journalism education strategies that will equip professionals with the necessary skills to face the challenges of modern journalism.

Strengthening the practice of communication ethics in online journalism is important because the integrity of the information presented directly affects public trust in the media. With the increasing prevalence of false information and misleading news in this digital age, journalists must uphold ethical principles to ensure accuracy, transparency and fairness in their reporting. The reliability of these ethical practices not only safeguards the reputation of media organisations but also plays an important role in maintaining the foundations of democracy, by providing the public with verified and reliable information, which then enables citizens to make informed decisions based on the right facts.

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