

Chapter 9

ETHICS ONLINE: EXPANDING CODES OF JOURNALISM ETHICS

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Introduction

Journalism is in the midst of a huge change in which digital technologies have been transforming its norms and practices. The shift to a networked journalism providing a bidirectional process where message producers and message consumers are interchangeable presents a range of ethical dilemmas as well. In a networked media environment, any individual is a potential publisher. As people disseminate information they gather without the help of conventional media, journalism ethics has gained a more important role in modern era as well as extending to all forms of new media. Journalism depends on accuracy and credibility, however in an age when the lines between content producer and consumer are blurred, the issue regarding whether online journalism compromises the ethical practices set in print journalism has arisen. While some theorists have argued that existing codes still hold true, some debate how to adapt those codes to digital media and assert that the internet has transformed the existing ethical ideals and try to develop new ethical codes integrating traditional and online journalism practices. As the literature review showed, development of journalism ethics integrating print and online journalism and new ethical concerns within the context of online journalism still lack in research.

The digital age has radically changed the nature of journalism process and its ethics. Before the introduction of digital media, traditional media outlets such as TV, radio and newspapers were the only source of credible information and news gathering or sharing the information were carried out by the professional journalists. As we move from a journalistic tradition based on the delivery of information in a linear media system to a framework based on bidirectional process, journalists are not sole source of information for the public, citizen journalist are increasing that encourages new forms of interactive journalism. The growth of new communication technologies also means a difficult transition from traditional ethics to mixed media ethics as they make it more difficult to apply those existing values of accuracy, verification and objectivity to the online media environment. Journalists still have to seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable and transparent. Considering the variety of news sources online including dishonest and distorted information, readers need credible and accurate journalism more than

which has become another means of mass communication, journalists face new ethical considerations. As the literature review has demonstrated, new communication technologies challenge journalists when conducting news online and necessitate transforming some of the existing moral ideals. The practice of print journalism, with its ethical expectations of accuracy, impartiality, gate-keeping and pre-publication verification are in conflict with speed instead of accuracy, partiality, citizen journalism and post-publication editing. The majority of ethical guidelines can be applied to online journalism but if there are some gray areas which do not work with existing principles?

Blurring the line between advertising and editorial content, use of hyperlinks and increase of digital manipulation practises are some of the “new” ethical concerns we proposed here. All these three areas to be considered by journalists when conducting news online differ traditional attitude of journalism from online media in terms of leading the reader to information rather than selling them to advertising companies. However, independence is a critical component of traditional journalistic ethics or hyperlinks for example, if they lead readers to inaccurate and harmful content rather than additional information? Online journalist can still hold existent ethical principles but considering information role of professional journalism dissolves into public sphere as it is now in the form blogs or citizen journalism, we need to reconsider and adapt existing norms regarding the shift to a an interactive network rather than linear process of information delivery and blurred line between message producers and consumers.

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