Forum: Special Conference on Ethics (SPECON)

Issue: Establishing ethical standards in modern journalism

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INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapidly advancing technology, instantaneous information dissemination, and evolving media landscapes, the need for ethical standards in journalism has become more pressing than ever before. Journalism serves as a crucial pillar of democratic societies, holding power accountable, providing vital information, and facilitating public discourse. However, with the proliferation of misinformation, clickbait, and sensationalism, the credibility and integrity of journalism have come under scrutiny.

Establishing and upholding ethical standards is fundamental for modern journalism to regain and maintain public trust. These standards serve as a guiding compass, ensuring that journalists adhere to principles of accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and transparency. They provide a framework for responsible reporting, fact-checking, source verification, and respecting the privacy and dignity of individuals involved in news stories. Moreover, ethical standards safeguard against conflicts of interest, biases, and undue influence, allowing journalists to fulfil their role as impartial observers and truth-seekers.

The digital age has presented both opportunities and challenges for journalism. On the one hand, the internet has democratised access to information, enabling citizen journalism and diverse perspectives. On the other hand, it has also led to the spread of misinformation, the erosion of traditional news models, and the monetization of outrage-driven content. As journalists navigate this complex landscape, ethical standards provide a necessary anchor, reminding them of their responsibility to uphold truth, accuracy, and the public interest.

This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the importance of ethical standards in modern journalism. By examining the evolving media landscape, the challenges posed by the digital age, and the role of ethical guidelines in guiding journalists' conduct, we can better understand how these standards shape the quality, credibility, and societal impact of journalism. As we delve into the nuances of ethical dilemmas, technological advancements, and the changing nature of news consumption, it becomes evident that establishing and upholding ethical standards is essential for the continued vitality and relevance of journalism in the 21st century.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Codes of ethics

"A code of ethics sets forth values, ethical principles, and ethical standards to which professionals aspire and by which their actions can be judged."[1]

Human Rights

"Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more."[2]

European Convention on Human Rights

"Signed in 1950 by the Council of Europe, the ECHR is an international treaty to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe. All 47 countries forming the Council of Europe are party to the Convention, 27 of which are members of the EU.

The Convention established the European Court of Human Rights, intended to protect individuals from human rights violations. Any person whose rights have been violated under the Convention by a state party may take a case to the Court. This was an innovative feature, as it gave individuals rights in an international arena. Judgments finding violations are binding on the countries concerned. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe monitors the execution of judgments."[3]

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally

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[1] "Code of Ethics: English." *NASW Home*, www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English.

[2] Human Rights." *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights.

[3] "Eu_human_rights_convention." *EUR-Lex — Access to European Union Law — Choose Your Language*, eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/european-convention-on-human-rights-echr.html

protected, and it has been translated into over 500 languages. The UDHR is widely recognized as having inspired and paved the way for, the adoption of more than seventy human rights treaties, applied today permanently at global and regional levels."[4]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The importance of ethics in journalism

Truth and Accuracy

Journalism ethics prioritize the pursuit of truth and accuracy in reporting. Ethical journalists are committed to presenting information based on verified facts, multiple sources, and rigorous research. Upholding truth and accuracy is vital for maintaining the public's trust in the media and fostering an informed citizenry.

Public Trust and Credibility

Journalism ethics contribute to building and preserving public trust in the media. When journalists adhere to ethical principles, such as fairness, objectivity, and transparency, they demonstrate their commitment to providing reliable and unbiased information. Trust is the foundation of the journalist-audience relationship, and ethical journalism is essential for its sustenance.

Protection against Misinformation

In an era of rapid information dissemination, journalism ethics are crucial in combating misinformation, propaganda, and fake news. Ethical journalists employ rigorous fact-checking, verification processes, and responsible sourcing to provide accurate and reliable information. By upholding ethical standards, journalists act as a bulwark against the spread of falsehoods and contribute to the overall information ecosystem.

Accountability and Corrections

Ethical journalism emphasizes accountability and the willingness to rectify errors or inaccuracies. Journalists who adhere to ethical standards promptly correct mistakes, issue retractions, and engage in transparent and honest dialogue with their audiences. This practice reinforces the credibility of journalism and demonstrates a commitment to accuracy and integrity.

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[4] United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

Professionalism and Self-Regulation

Journalism ethics contribute to the professionalism and self-regulation of the field. By adhering to ethical guidelines and codes of conduct, journalists demonstrate their commitment to ethical practices and hold themselves accountable. Professional organizations and industry bodies play a vital role in upholding ethical standards and providing guidance and support to journalists.

Freedom of the Press and Ethical Boundaries

Reporters, editors, and others provide commentary on the events that affect people's lives through ethical, watchdog journalism. It is based on moral principles. When reporters strive to report on issues with accuracy, fairness, and truth; when they want to do the least amount of harm;

The fundamental components of what we might refer to as journalism as a public good are defined by individuals when they hold themselves accountable to peers and the larger community. Editors and reporters do not speak for the executive branch, big business, or human rights advocates. However, they can help people become more aware of what is right and wrong, respectable and despicable, shameful and honourable. The co-evolution of ethical journalism and the safeguarding of human rights in Europe have been closely intertwined for over 150 years. During the mid-19th Century, while Jean-Henri Dunant was formulating his profound vision of humanity during wartime, which led to the establishment of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions, influential European editors were articulating ethical principles to govern their newspapers. One hundred years later, coinciding with the adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Federation of Journalists collectively endorsed the initial international set of principles governing ethical journalism.

In the present day, journalism and human rights intersect at a moment characterized by remarkable and momentous transformations. Amidst the era of globalization and the rapid proliferation of digital media, the landscape of information is being reshaped, thereby raising novel inquiries about journalism, human rights, and information policies.

In the present era, individuals are presented with unprecedented opportunities to exercise their freedom of expression. However, the crucial question arises: How do they assume accountability for their perspectives? Furthermore, how do people discern the credibility of information? In a climate where communication tends to be fragmented and anonymous, how can media and journalists persistently influence societal standards and actively contribute to constructing a novel ethical framework for information that is inclusive of all individuals? Lastly, it is worth considering how media policy, as opposed to legal measures, can serve as a means to foster an information environment that upholds ethical principles, including respect for human rights.

Human rights standards relevant to journalism

To examine the interconnection between the ethics of journalism and human rights, it is crucial to consider how they both relate to values, morality, and the legal framework. This exploration is not merely an intellectual exercise; it holds direct relevance for individuals working in journalism, influencing their actions and the decisions they encounter in their professional endeavours. Moreover, this examination should be approached with a positive mindset, aiming to identify the collaborative role that ethical journalism and human rights play in a time marked by political tensions, escalating inequality, and social upheaval. Journalists themselves have a vested interest in upholding and advancing high standards of human rights, particularly the right to freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Article 10 of the ECHR stipulates that everyone possesses the right to freedom of expression. However, this right is not absolute and can be overridden by decisions made in the interest of matters such as national security, the prevention of disorder or crime, or the protection of an individual's reputation. It is precisely these potential limitations on free speech that concern journalists, as they fear that governments, when enacting laws, may define "security," "disorder," or "reputation" excessively broadly, thereby restricting free speech and impeding legitimate scrutiny of public affairs.

Naturally, human rights can at times conflict with one another. The need to strike a balance between competing rights presents challenges for both legislators and journalists. For instance, Article 10 of the ECHR must be weighed against Article 8, which outlines the right to privacy and has come to define the concept of an individual's right to respect for their private and family life, home, and correspondence. Both lawmakers and journalists recognize that freedom of speech can clash with certain interpretations of an individual's right to privacy. Making judgments in the courtroom or the newsroom without prioritizing one right over the other is a complex endeavour that lacks a straightforward solution.

Rights to Privacy

Journalists possess an understanding of the importance of privacy and generally perceive no conflict between honest, ethical reporting and the protection of privacy. However, journalists reject the notion that "privacy" should be used as a shield for "secrecy" when matters of public interest are at stake.

The right to privacy, which encompasses respect for private and family life, is a fundamental human right, akin to the right to freedom of expression. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) establishes that every individual is entitled to respect for

their private and family life, and this right has been invoked in numerous court cases, such as those involving unjustly dismissed employees, individuals engaged in extramarital affairs, and victims of sexual harassment.

Unfortunately, in many countries, state institutions abuse this fundamental right. In nations governed by totalitarian and military regimes, invasions of privacy routinely intersect with violations of other fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of the press.

Privacy and media freedom are essential components found in most human rights charters, as they facilitate the enjoyment of other rights, such as freedom of expression, the freedom to act by one's conscience, and freedom of association. For journalists, the central ethical question revolves around striking a balance between respecting privacy rights and their own legitimate need for investigation, scrutiny, and disclosure.

Privacy regulations serve as a crucial check on the abuse of power, ensuring that individuals maintain some control over their personal information. Ethical journalists recognize the importance of respecting personal privacy, although they are generally less concerned about state or corporate confidentiality, as claims of "a private life" often serve to limit accountability and conceal hypocrisy.

The ethical quandary faced by journalists lies in distinguishing between a "public" person and a "private" person. In this regard, the European Court of Human Rights has consistently acknowledged the diminished rights to privacy for public figures while safeguarding the interests of private individuals. For example, in 2010, the Court ruled in five cases from Finland, including complaints by magazines and journalists regarding criminal prosecutions for invasion of privacy following an incident in 1996 involving a well-known politician, his girlfriend, and his wife. The Court determined that the prosecutions violated Article 10 of the ECHR and awarded compensation in each case.

Journalists, who are currently subjected to unprecedented levels of official surveillance, should be at the forefront of demanding protection for privacy rights. However, legitimate concerns arise within the media when excessively strict application of privacy rules hinders their ability to publish content touching on fundamental aspects of an individual's private life, such as their family life, sexual behaviour, orientation, or medical conditions, when such publication serves the public interest.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Canada

Canada is known for its strong commitment to ethical journalism and upholding professional standards in the media industry. The Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) plays a significant role in promoting and supporting ethical journalism practices across the country.

The CAJ provides a comprehensive code of ethics that outlines the fundamental principles and guidelines for journalists in Canada. This code emphasizes accuracy, fairness, integrity, independence, and accountability in reporting. It serves as a guiding framework for journalists, reminding them of their responsibilities to the public and the importance of maintaining ethical conduct in their work. In addition to the code of ethics, the CAJ offers resources, training programs, and workshops to enhance journalistic skills and promote ethical decision-making. The association actively engages with journalists and media organizations to foster a culture of ethical journalism and address emerging challenges in the digital age.

Norway

Norway is widely recognized as a frontrunner in promoting press freedom and maintaining high ethical standards in journalism. The Norwegian Press Complaints Commission (Pressens Faglige Utvalg) plays a crucial role in upholding these standards. It is an independent body responsible for overseeing ethical guidelines and addressing complaints regarding media content in Norway. The Norwegian Press Complaints Commission ensures that journalists and media outlets adhere to ethical principles, including accuracy, fairness, and respect for privacy. It provides a platform for the public to raise concerns and file complaints about potential breaches of these principles. The Commission conducts investigations and issues rulings based on its ethical guidelines, aiming to maintain transparency, accountability, and responsible journalism.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is an international non-profit organization dedicated to defending press freedom and the rights of journalists worldwide. With a mission to protect the essential role of journalism in society, RSF advocates for media independence and fights against censorship, and works to ensure the safety of journalists reporting from dangerous environments. By shining a spotlight on abuses, supporting targeted journalists, and mobilizing public opinion, RSF seeks to create an environment where journalists can report freely, truthfully, and without fear, fostering transparency, accountability, and the free flow of information on a global scale.

South Africa

South Africa has a vibrant and diverse media landscape that emphasizes ethical journalism. The Press Council of South Africa plays a significant role in promoting and upholding ethical standards within the country's media industry. The Press Council serves as a self-regulatory body and provides guidelines for responsible journalism. It is responsible for handling complaints and disputes related to media content, ensuring that journalists and media organizations adhere to ethical principles and practices. The Press Council's role is crucial in maintaining the integrity and credibility of the media in South Africa.

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

UNESCO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that promotes freedom of expression, media development, and the ethical principles of journalism. It has published numerous reports, guidelines, and initiatives to support ethical standards in journalism, including the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and the Journalism Education Model Curricula. In addition, UNESCO advocates for responsible journalism practices, the protection of journalists' safety, and the fight against disinformation. By emphasizing media literacy and supporting ethical training initiatives, UNESCO strives to empower journalists and citizens alike to critically assess information, contribute to informed public discourse and safeguard democratic societies against misinformation and propaganda.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has established regulatory bodies that oversee and enforce ethical standards in journalism. The Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO) is one such organization. It sets and enforces a code of conduct for newspapers and magazines, ensuring that journalistic practices are in line with ethical guidelines. Before IPSO, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) was the self-regulatory body for the newspaper and magazine industry in the UK. It handled complaints from the public regarding ethical breaches in journalism and sought to ensure fair and accurate reporting. Various institutions and organizations in the UK focus on media ethics and education. Journalism schools and media organizations emphasize ethical principles in their curricula and training programs. Additionally, academic research and initiatives by organizations like the Media Standards Trust contribute to the understanding and development of ethical standards in journalism.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
16 November 1945	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created
10 December 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly
1996	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted

2005	The Ethical Journalism Initiative (EJI) was introduced by the International Federation of Journalists
2008	Establishment of the Charter of Rome
2011	UNESCO released a publication that encompassed the outcomes of a two-year project focusing on media self-regulation in South East Europe and Turkey

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS (ICCPR)

This treaty, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966, further elaborates on the right to freedom of expression and sets out obligations for member states to protect and promote this right. It recognizes the importance of ethical journalism in facilitating the free flow of information and ideas. It provides a comprehensive framework for the protection and promotion of civil and political rights worldwide. The ICCPR is particularly relevant to ethical journalism due to its emphasis on the right to freedom of expression. While the ICCPR recognizes the importance of freedom of expression, it also acknowledges that certain restrictions may be necessary to protect public interests such as national security, public order, or the rights and reputations of others. However, any limitations imposed must be in accordance with the law, necessary, and proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR):

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, the UDHR recognizes the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which encompasses the principles and protections that underpin ethical journalism. Ethical standards in modern journalism align with the UDHR's recognition of the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media. This fundamental right empowers journalists to report and share information responsibly and ethically, promoting transparency, accountability, and the public's right to know. The right to freedom of expression, outlined in the UDHR, supports ethical journalism practices by providing journalists with the space to investigate, report and analyse matters of public interest without undue interference or censorship. Journalists are granted the freedom to present diverse perspectives, challenge authority, and contribute to public discourse, ensuring the free flow of information and a vibrant democratic society. Furthermore, the recognition of

the right to freedom of expression in the UDHR implies certain ethical obligations for journalists. Ethical standards require journalists to exercise this right responsibly, upholding principles of accuracy, fairness, impartiality, and respect for the dignity and privacy of individuals.

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 59(1)

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 59(1), adopted in 1946, holds significant relevance to ethical standards in modern journalism as it emphasizes the fundamental importance of freedom of information and the press. The resolution recognizes that these rights are essential for the functioning of democratic societies and the protection of human rights.

Regarding ethical standards, the resolution underscores the crucial role of the media in providing accurate and reliable information to the public. Ethical journalism necessitates a commitment to truth, fairness, accuracy, and responsible reporting. Upholding the principles outlined in Resolution 59(1) helps ensure that journalists adhere to these ethical standards.

The resolution's emphasis on freedom of information aligns with the ethical principle of transparency, enabling journalists to access and disseminate information without undue censorship or interference. It affirms the right of journalists to investigate and report on matters of public interest, holding those in power accountable.

Furthermore, the resolution acknowledges the responsibility of the media to act in the public interest, promoting informed decision-making and fostering an informed citizenry. Ethical journalism involves considering the potential impact of reporting and avoiding sensationalism, misinformation, and bias.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The Ethical Journalism Initiative (EJI)

The Ethical Journalism Initiative (EJI) was introduced by the International Federation of Journalists in 2005 as a comprehensive program aimed at providing support for ethical journalism training and fostering discussions on the future of journalism. This initiative has been implemented across various countries in the Middle East and Asia, and in 2010, country-specific programs were established in Azerbaijan and Russia.

The Charter of Rome

The Charter of Rome was established in 2008 by Italian publishers and journalists as a Code of Conduct within the industry. Its purpose is to foster ethical reporting on refugee and immigration issues. This initiative was prompted by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) expressing concerns about racist media portrayal following a multiple

murder incident. The Charter outlines ethical guidelines and is accompanied by a comprehensive program aimed at increasing awareness, providing training, and establishing an independent observatory to monitor media coverage of discrimination issues. Thus, its worldwide promoted principles, it faced some serious difficulties such as inadequate support and even the changing media Landscape worldwide

European standards on media ethics

In 2011, UNESCO released a publication that encompassed the outcomes of a two-year project focusing on media self-regulation in South East Europe and Turkey. This project involved various organizations, including the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe, and the South East Europe Network for Professionalization of Media. This collaborative effort aimed to examine and establish European standards of media ethics within the region.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Establishment of clearer definitions of the right to legitimate journalism and privacy

One possible solution lies in establishing clearer definitions of the rights of legitimate journalism and privacy, as well as fostering a stronger commitment among journalists to privacy rights. European countries could provide exemptions for media organizations engaged in journalistic activities, provided that they adhere to privacy standards. Undoubtedly, the need for more effective self-regulation in this domain cannot be disregarded. The recent controversy in the United Kingdom surrounding illegal telephone "hacking" by journalists, for instance, has raised questions about the credibility of media outlets that claimed to have eradicated such practices but were subsequently exposed for misleading both Parliament and their own Press Complaints Commission. Journalists must be precise in explaining their role when asserting that the public has a right to know and that the public interest outweighs the privacy interests of the individuals involved. In cases where privacy is at risk of violation, journalists should consider factors such as an individual's societal position, reputation, and public role.

Education and Training

Education and training programs introduce aspiring journalists to ethical principles and dilemmas commonly encountered in the field. They raise awareness about the importance of ethical considerations and equip journalists with the knowledge to recognize and navigate ethical challenges. Training programs focus also on developing critical thinking skills that help journalists evaluate situations, assess ethical implications, and make informed decisions. Journalists learn to consider the potential impact of their reporting on various stakeholders and weigh competing values and interests. Those can provide journalists with an understanding of established ethical frameworks and guidelines specific to the profession. They explore codes of

ethics, journalistic standards, and industry best practices, enabling journalists to apply these principles in their work.

Media Ethics Workshops and Seminars

Workshops and seminars offer opportunities for journalists to engage in dialogue and debate around ethical issues. They provide platforms for sharing experiences, perspectives, and best practices, fostering a culture of ethical reflection and continuous learning. These events facilitate open discussions on ethical dilemmas commonly faced by journalists. Participants engage in conversations around real-life scenarios, analysing the ethical implications and exploring different approaches to handling such situations. Media ethics workshops and seminars delve into established ethical principles, codes of ethics, and guidelines specific to journalism. Participants examine these frameworks to better understand the ethical responsibilities and obligations of journalists.

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