

Traditional journalism applicable to online journalism media essay



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The news is very important in today's society because it connects us to the world. Because of this, it is important for the news to be accurate and accessible. Journalism largely relies on the credibility and accuracy of its writers. With the emergence of online journalism in the form of news sites, blogs, and citizen journalism, an issue regarding ethics may arise. With the onset of speedy and real-time arrival, actual details may be compromised in online journalism. In an age where anything can be shared and accessed online, there is a question on whether online journalism has compromised the ethical guidelines set in traditional print journalism. It then becomes important to analyze whether or not the ethical guidelines of print journalism are still being applied to and if they work with online journalism in order to be able to gauge whether there is a need to create new ethical guidelines for online journalism.

Ethics plays a big part in journalism, for it helps uphold the high standards and the good practice of the field. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in their code of ethics names four main guidelines, namely to 1) “seek the truth and report it”, 2) “minimize harm”, 3) “act independently”, and 4) “be accountable” (SPJ, n. d.) Traditional journalists have been following these guidelines for years. However, with the rise of online journalism, there is a question on whether or not these guidelines are still being followed. This study aims to explore whether or not online journalists still adhere to the SPJ code of ethics, whether or not these ethical guidelines are applicable to online journalism, and in turn, determine the relevance of ethical guidelines in journalism in our society.

Review of Related Literature

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We cannot deny that there has been a rise of online journalism. In the articles we used, it is mentioned that this rise in online journalism has affected traditional journalism. In this review of related literature, we will be discussing the challenges online journalism poses to traditional journalism and the place of ethics in this.

The work of Jane B. Singer entitled “ Who are these guys? The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism” discusses journalistic professionalism and how online journalism challenges it. She says that the notion of professionalism is based on the admittedly self-serving idea that certain people in our society are entitled to fill a particular prestigious occupational niche and that this entitlement stems primarily from the professional’s special skills, training, codes of conduct, commitment to public service and autonomy. (Singer, 2003) Journalists also say that ethical guidelines are needed, because of the service they provide to the public and for journalists to achieve some sort of “ autonomy”. (Singer, 2003) Aside from this, she also mentions 3 dimensions of professionalism which are cognitive, normative, and evaluative. (Singer, 2003)

She then moves on to online journalism, saying that the issue facing members of the journalism community today is how to define their professional niche as it is challenged by those who now work in the new medium. Through online journalism, anyone can perform traditional journalistic functions of gathering and disseminating information online and the news now

becomes more personalized. (Lasica, 2001) The article also states the recent rise of web logs or 'blogs', interactive personal journals that typically combine commentary, conversation and original reporting, further blurs the line between professional and non-professional. The most persistent criticism however of online journalism and the clearest line traditional journalists have sought to draw between themselves and those working online has involved ethical behavior. (Singer, 2003) A quote from Lynch in the article mentioned that journalists involved with online news do seem to lack a 'rulebook' in an environment that changes rapidly and unpredictably and that has neither a long tradition nor an opportunity for reflection. (Lynch, 1998)

The article also mentions that whether traditional ethical practices can or should be transplanted to online journalism is debatable. Some journalists say that there should be a different set of guidelines for online journalism while some say that existing codes should be grafted onto an online environment. (Singer, 2003) She also mentions several related issues like the difficulty of verifying information, editors as mainly in charge of adapting stories and turning them around quickly and the potential for speed making judgment of news more vital than ever. (Singer, 2003) The article appears neutral and so we cannot tell if the author has any stand on having a new code of ethics for online journalism or if she is for grafting the existing code to online news.

An article entitled Ethics and Credibility in Online Journalism says that when access to printers was limited, journalists were allowed more time to verify sources, check for error, and revise accordingly. With the onset of new media, this time decreased considerably. This poses a threat on ethics and <https://assignbuster.com/traditional-journalism-applicable-to-online-journalism-media-essay/>

credibility of online news and journalists. Bradley Osborn explores this problem, along with factors that affect journalism practices.

Osborn opens by presenting his audience with two contrasting perspectives on online journalism. He dubbed one, The Pessimist, quoting Sandra Mims Rowe, Portland Oregonian editor: "...the runaway Internet, makes a journalist out of anybody who has a modem. It values speed and sensationalism over accuracy." He also quotes Frank Rich, a New York Times columnist, and dubs him The Pragmatist. Rich says, "[The Internet]'s a medium, not a message, and it can be used as irresponsibly or as honourably as a printing press or a TV network can." (Osborn, 2001, p. 3).

Osborn names some ethical issues that have emerged with the rise of online journalism. Some of the issues he touched on are " graphic manipulation ... commingling of editorial and advertising content" and hyperlinks (Osborn, 2001, p. 4). He claims that many others may arise along with the rapidly changing times and media landscape. These changes may require new ethical approaches. Still, he claims that codes of journalistic ethics are timeless. As such, they continue to be relevant today even with the changes in journalism brought about by new media.

Although constantly endeavoring to uphold journalistic standards, credibility, Osborn finds, has declined over the years. He presents results from a 1999 survey conducted among journalists by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. According to the survey, fifty percent of the journalists included in the survey question the news credibility. One of the factors that

has contributed to the decline of credibility is the thinning line between commentary and reporting.

In addition, credibility suffers because of the prevailing notion that most online publishers are untrained professional journalists. Credibility is also declining because of the

increasing need to break news first. New media has afforded journalists the capacity to publish news quicker than they've ever been able to, but this speed has also reduced the time they could spend checking quality, facts, and errors.

Ultimately, Obsorn concludes that there are obvious advantages that come with the emergence of online journalism, but that there are also obvious disadvantages. Online journalism, being a relatively new field, is yet to be explored. To establish its credibility as a news medium, Osborn believes that it is best to stick to the traditional code of ethics (Osborn, 2001).

In an article on the importance of ethics, credibility and reliability in online journalism, Demir mentions that in today's postmodern world, the society experiences major changes to our conventional definitions, including media. These changes gave way to the creation of new media, which offers users the convenience of accessing content online along with a more interactive platform where communities can be formed. The internet has risen to be the most significant and dominant medium of the present day, and allows the community a huge amount freedom to upload any type of content. " In an environment where every one is a potential publisher, the issues of

anonymity, identity, access to information and protection of intellectual
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property affect how online journalism works.” (Demir, 2011) Due to the freedom it provides, issues have been raised regarding ethics, credibility, and accuracy behind the multitude of content found online. In his article, Muge Demir discusses how online journalism has given way to traditional journalism, and how the profession has changed in terms of ethics, credibility, and reliability.

Demir mentions that the ethical issues experienced online are “ impossible to control” and described as having a destructive nature in journalism. Each society has its own set of ethics

which may vary from other societies. Due to this nature, Demir claims that it is “ hard to gather the internet world under a roof which consists of the same ethical values” Since the scope of the internet goes beyond a single society, it would be difficult to create a uniform code of ethics that will be approved by all. Demir also notes the unstoppable rise of new media which is potentially changing the field of ethics, and the existence of new media outlets (e. g. internet) may give way to new ethical problems.

The creation of the Internet has been considered as a fourth type of journalism, where the speed and anonymity may distort the press. (Demir, 2011) In the virtual space, anyone can be a journalist, where being the first to report is considered to be more important than the accuracy of the news content (e. g. delivery of new via Twitter). There is a pressure between the users to deliver and post brand new information, even without reviewing the content and because of this phenomenon, some end up with either premature or incomplete news. Like print and visual media, the internet may

also “ be used in an irresponsible manner or under ethical rules.” For Demir, this new type of journalism requires a new approach when it comes to ethics, he considers the internet as having “ diversity to the receivers and senders” and could “ cause damage in the linear paradigm”. The quality of the content has been “ slipped out of the hands” of the internet gatekeepers, or lack thereof. “ Lack of editorial audits and pre-printing manipulation of an electronic copy may be listed among the reliability concerns” Also, with the numerous graphical manipulations of images in the internet, one can question how reliable the content found in the internet really is. From a research done by UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), the study found that those who are not internet users are more suspicious of the content found online than those who use the internet regularly. “ While more than half of the internet

users (54%) deem a great majority or all of the information on the internet to be reliable and accurate, only one third of the non-users agree to this opinion.” Since information in the internet is used freely and lacks a control system, it “ enhances the potential for errors and exploitation.”

In conclusion, Demir states that even though the electronic press is somewhat reliable, the reading mass only looks into the instant news pieces instead of detailed, accurate information. With the gradual increase of ‘ citizen journalists’, “ We have to consider journalism which we do not know whether to go better or worse in the future to be a profession which has now been adopted by every one.” For Demir, the Internet, a bold and new concept in journalism, should be “ required to adhere to the ordinary ethic

and reliability, to guarantee success and to be able to look into the new communication technology in a more reliable manner.”

In Stephen Ward’s article Global Media Ethics, he discusses the importance of global ethics in the practice of journalism and he stated two main reasons for this. The first is practicality, according to Ward, “ a non-global ethic is no longer able to adequately address the new problems that face global journalism”. The second reason Ward pointed out is ethics, “ new global responsibilities come with global impact and reach.” (Ward, n. d) Today, with the rise of new media, news is being reported from all parts of the world real time. A single click can reach a different time zone. Information dissemination is easier and faster, and this fact is alarming. The influence, impact, and the scope of new media have reached greater heights. There is even greater weight now to guarantee that journalists all over the world follow a universal code. To ensure responsible information dissemination, accuracy and diversity of news reports, and to help people from different countries get a more global perspective in world issues like poverty and environmental degradation, having global media ethics is necessary. It is important that news

reports contain cross-cultural perspectives and there is balance and objectivity in the report. Impartiality of journalists towards their own country and group is crucial in promoting a global perspective for citizens.

Restructuring or reformatting the media system for it to have a wider scope of global news will entail constructing a standard global code of ethics. It is crucial for institutions and governments to support the construction of a

global media ethics code, without their support the movements of journalists towards a higher quality of journalism will be put to waste. (Ward, n. d.)

Lastly, moving onto the Philippine setting, an article on the promises and perils of online journalism says that it is important to know the potential of online journalism in the Philippines in order to be able to evaluate the need of a code of ethics for online journalism. Based on Manuelita Dela Torre Contreras and Cripsin C. Maslog's article entitled Philippine Online Journalism: Promise and Perils, the online medium seem promising particularly in the field of publishing and mass communication. By studying the history and development of online journalism and using content analysis and interview for data collection, the article is able to enumerate the benefits of online journalism by categorizing them into four areas: First, being a " source of news and information". Second, being a " communication channel". Third, being an " alternative means of publication", and fourth, being a " means for other services". (Dela Torre Contreras & Maslog, 2006)

There is however a limitation regarding the presence of the internet in country, one of them being the lack of infrastructures and facilities to be able to link the country to the " wired world" and adapt to the ICT environment. Nevertheless, the article has concluded that this does not completely stop online journalism from developing; therefore, giving hope that online journalism in the Philippines will have a promising future. With the vast

potential of online journalism in the country through the enumeration of benefits done by Dela Torres Contreras and Maslog's study, it can be said that there is a need for a code of ethics for online journalism because it has become one of the main sources for news in the country.

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All of the articles mention that online journalism has affected traditional journalism in some way, may this be in the global setting or in the Philippine setting. It is also notable that all of them mention ethics at some point and they all mention that a code of ethics is needed as it plays a role in journalism especially with making news credible and reliable. Some of the articles mention that it is better to graft the traditional code to online journalism. However, some also believe that a new code should be made for online journalism, may it be in the global or Philippine sense.

Study Framework

The New Media Theory, according to Mark Poster's book, *The Second Media Age*, predicted "a new period in which interactive technologies and network communications, particularly the Internet, would transform society." (Poster, 2008)

According to David Holmes' book, *Communication Theory: media, technology, and society*, the difference between the first media age and the second media age is characterized by the following (Summarized in *Theories of Human Communication* by Stephen Littlejohn and Karen Foss):

"The first media age was said to be characterized by (1) centralized production (one to many); (2) one-way communication; (3) state of control, for the most part; (4) the reproduction of social stratification and inequality through media; (5) fragmented mass

audiences; and (6) the shaping of social consciousness. The second media age, in contrast, can be described as: (1) decentralized; (2) two-way; (3)

beyond state control; (4) democratizing; (5) promoting individual consciousness; and (6) individually oriented.” (Holmes, 2008)

With the rise of the online world and the characterization done by Holmes, it can be said that we are living in the second media age which Mark Poster predicted. We are able to use media as a means to interact and to participate in the community. This is particularly true in the field of journalism, wherein online journalism is has become a dominant medium for news and information. The characteristics of the second media age found in the new media theory can be observed in online journalism through its following features:

First, decentralization in the online context; with the internet being considered as a decentralized medium, it does not have a single authoritative figure. Thus, in the context of online journalism, there are no gatekeepers in the online community to validate and uphold standards for news stories and information shared online.

Second, the internet is characterized as a two-way communication system, meaning users are not only able to receive information, but are also capable of sending them. Through posts and comments, the users are able to actively participate in discussions based on the content found online, particularly when it comes to news.

Third, being that the internet is not controlled by the government and promotes the freedom of speech and press among its users. The usage of the online platform cannot be limited by the state due to its democratizing nature. Through such nature, journalism online has become more liberal.
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Lastly, the internet is personalized due to the fact that content the user consumes is assumed to be taken in individually. It is individualized because the users are able to modify the content they find online to suit their personality and needs. Because of this, users who consume online journalism are able to perceive opinions on their own accord and share this to the online community.

Since online journalism widely differs from what Holmes considers to be the first media age, being that it is more similar to the second media age, it brings up the question whether a new code of ethics should be implemented or the code of ethics found in traditional journalism should be adapted by its online counterpart.

Statement of the Problem, stated as research questions

This research aims to discover whether the ethical guidelines of traditional journalism may be used in online journalism or if there is a need to have a different code just for it. This study seeks to study the difference between the processes of verification and publication (time used to gather, verify, and edit news, materials needed/used, etc.) of online and traditional print journalism. This study also seeks to find out the difference in the research process or production (manner of writing and gathering news, time needed, manner of publication, etc.). These will be done so that we will be able to discover what the differences are and so we will be able to see if the traditional code of ethics may be used in online journalism or if there really is a need for an entirely different code just for online journalism.

Research Questions:

What is the difference between the process of verification and publication of online journalism and traditional print journalism?

What are the differences in the research process/production of online journalism and traditional print journalism?

Hypothesis:

There should be a specific code of ethics made for online journalism.

Methodology**a. Research design and method**

For our research, we will be making use of the qualitative approach. Utilizing this approach is more suited for the investigation since we want to get at the realities of the situation, in this case, ethics in online journalism. Since our research is fairly complex and tackles the idea of using the Philippine Journalist's Code of Ethics for online journalism, we need to be able to go beyond the simple "yes or no" hypothesis used by quantitative methods. Our study is not as dependent on the sample size, but more on the qualities of the interviews we will be conducting. With the qualitative method, we will be able to assess certain issues regarding our topic.

Due to the qualitative nature of our approach, we will be using a semi-structured interview method to collect data and gain knowledge from certain individuals. Using this method will ensure that we will gain a deeper examination of issues surrounding our topic. With in-depth interviews, the participants (in this case, journalists) will be able to discuss and share their

perceptions on the subject of the code of ethics being implemented in online journalism, probing can also be done if we find that the information is not sufficient. In addition, we will be able to guarantee a high return/response rate and an

assurance of no ambiguous responses. Lastly, we will be able to discover and touch on certain aspects of the study, which other methods cannot provide.

b. Target population, sample size, and sample procedure

The study's topic, mainly being centered on journalism and ethics, is geared towards journalists. The proposed sample size is at least five journalists. This is to address the issue of feasibility, since the group has little access to the journalistic community and to well-known journalists. The group is also working around several time constraints. This being the case, it mandates that the journalists be credible and capable of providing comprehensive answers. As such, the interview guide should cover all topics needed for the study.

The group has chosen purposive sampling and snowball sampling as the primary sampling procedures to be used in the study. Purposive sampling is to be used because the study requires that interviewees be skilled in the field in order to ensure credibility and validity of results. Other sampling methods may not be able to ensure the credibility of interviewees.

In addition, snowball sampling will be used. This sampling procedure operates on referrals from previous sources. Again, this is to address issues regarding feasibility. The group recognizes that there may be several

constraints in terms of acquiring possible interviewees for the study. There <https://assignbuster.com/traditional-journalism-applicable-to-online-journalism-media-essay/>

are several problems that may arise, including conflicting schedules and limited sources. To address this, snowball sampling is to be

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used. By using this sampling procedure, the group gains easier access to the journalistic community, and to credible journalists.

c. Description of the research instrument

As previously stated, the interview will be semi-structured, with an interview guide giving a clear direction, but also allowing for flexibility in case the need for follow-up questions arises. The first few questions are the most non-threatening ones, so as to establish rapport with the interviewee. It will then proceed to the more in-depth questions. The most important questions are to be asked near the start of the interview, to maximize the time with the interviewee. It is important that the most important questions be asked at the start because so as not to lose the interest of the interviewee.

d. Analytical strategy

Given the different means by which we are to conduct the interviews, the researchers are to match the means of gathering data with an appropriate method of transcription. If the interview is to be conducted face-to-face, the interviewers are to record the interview provided that the interviewee gives his/her consent. The interviewers will also record personal notes in order to ensure the consistency of the responses once transcribed. If the interview is to be conducted online, the exchange of emails or replies will be recognized as the official transcript.

e. Scope and Limitations

The study covers Philippine journalism. It tackles traditional and online journalism in light of ethics, and explores the possible implications of this emerging form of journalism on the traditional code of ethics today.

The study is limited to the Philippines as it only seeks to frame the study around the Philippine journalism code of ethics. The means by which the group is to acquire data is also limited to interviews. The results will be largely reliant, and consequently, limited to the expertise and opinions of the interviewees. There are also no other outside sources by which data collected from interviewees may be substantiated and supplemented.