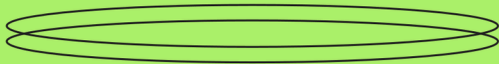


# COMM 2035 Communication, Ethics and Law

## Lecture 6 Ethics / Law and Journalism Part II

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Professor of Practice  
Semester 1, 2025 / 26



# Digital media ethics

- Digital media ethics deals with the distinct ethical problems, practices and norms of digital news media.
- Digital news media includes online journalism, blogging, digital photojournalism, citizen journalism and social media.



- It includes questions about how professional journalism should use this ‘new media’ to research and publish stories, as well as how to use text or images provided by citizens.



## A REVOLUTION IN ETHICS

- A media revolution is transforming, fundamentally and irrevocably, the nature of journalism and its ethics.
- The means to publish is now in the hands of citizens, while the internet encourages new forms of journalism that are interactive and immediate.



- Our media ecology is a chaotic landscape evolving at a furious pace.
- Professional journalists share the journalistic sphere with tweeters, bloggers, citizen journalists, and social media users.



- Amid every revolution, new possibilities emerge while old practices are threatened.
- Today is no exception.



- The economics of professional journalism struggles as audiences migrate online.
- Shrinkage of newsrooms creates concern for the future of journalism.

### Video :

Social Media Ethics and Etiquettes, Ethical Issues in Digital and Social Media, Project Management WES , 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ho6Z4EEpJA>



- Yet these fears also prompt experiments in journalism, such as non-profit centers of investigative journalism.
- A central question is to what extent existing media ethics is suitable for today's and tomorrow's news media that is immediate, interactive and “always on” – a journalism of amateurs and professionals.





- Most of the principles were developed over the past century, originating in the construction of professional, objective ethics for mass commercial newspapers in the late 19th century.
- We are moving towards a mixed news media –a news media citizen and professional journalism across many media platforms.

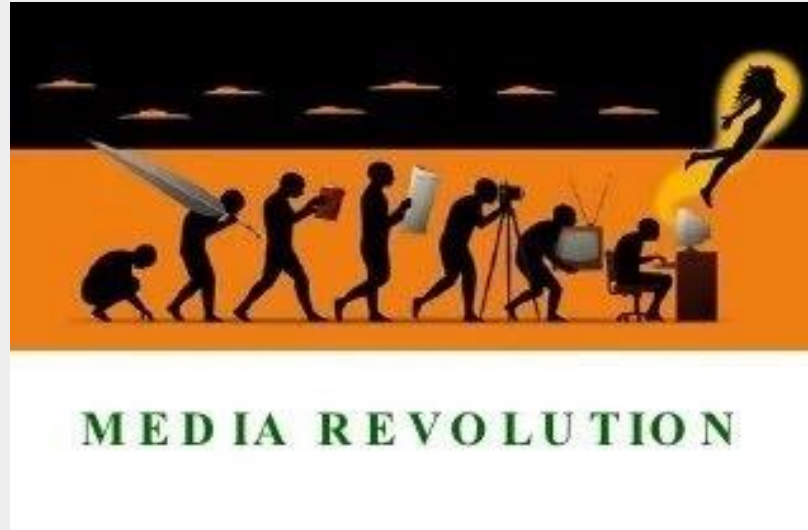


- This new mixed news media requires a new mixed media ethics –guidelines that apply to amateurs and professionals whether they blog, Tweet, broadcast or write for newspapers.
- Media ethics needs to be rethought and reinvented for the media of today, not of yesteryear.



## TENSIONS ON TWO LEVELS

The media revolution has created ethical tensions on two levels.



- On the first level, there is a tension between traditional journalism and online journalism.
- The culture of traditional journalism, with its values of accuracy, pre-publication verification, balance, impartiality, and gate-keeping, rubs up against the culture of online journalism which emphasizes immediacy, transparency, partiality, non-professional journalists and post-publication correction.



- On the second level, there is a tension between parochial and global journalism.
- If journalism has global impact, what are its global responsibilities?
- Should media ethics reformulate its aims and norms so as to guide a journalism that is now global in reach and impact ?
- What would that look like ?



# DIFFICULT QUESTIONS FOR DIGITAL MEDIA ETHICS : WHO IS A JOURNALIST?

- The ‘democratization’ of media –technology that allows citizens to engage in journalism and publication of many kinds –blurs the identity of journalists and the idea of what constitutes journalism.



- In the previous century, journalists were a clearly defined group.
- For the most part, they were professionals who wrote for major mainstream newspapers and broadcasters.



- The public had no great difficulty in identifying members of the “press.”
- Today, citizens without journalistic training and who do not work for mainstream media calls themselves journalists, or write in ways that fall under the general description of a journalists as someone who regularly writes on public issues for a public or audience.





- It is not always clear whether the term “journalist” begins or ends.
- If someone does what appears to be journalism, but refuses the label ‘journalist’, is he or she a journalist ?



- If comedian Jon Stewart refuses to call himself a journalist, but magazines refer to him as an influential journalist (or refers to him as someone who does engage in journalism) . Is Stewart a journalist ?

## Video :

‘The Problem With Jon Stewart’ takes a serious leap into advocacy journalism ,Review by Brian Lowry, CNN , 30 September 2021.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/30/entertainment/the-problem-with-jon-stewart-review/index.html>

Is a person expressing their opinions on their Facebook site a journalist?





- Codes of mainstream media ethics caution journalists to use anonymous sources sparingly and only if certain rules are followed.
- The codes warn journalists that people may use anonymity to take unfair or untrue “potshots” at other people, for self-interested reasons.



- Online, many commentary and “chat” areas do not allow anonymity.
- Online users resist demands from web site and blogs to register and identify themselves.



- Anonymity is praised as allowing freedom of speech and sometimes helping to expose wrongdoing.
- Critics say it encourages irresponsible and harmful comments.
- Mainstream media contradict themselves when they allow anonymity online but refuse anonymity in their newspapers and broadcast programs.



- The ethical question is: When is anonymity ethically permissible and is it inconsistent for media to enforce different rules on anonymity for different media platforms?
- What should be the ethical guidelines for anonymity offline and online?



## SPEED, RUMOR AND CORRECTIONS

- Reports and images circulate the globe with amazing speed via Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, blogs, cell phones, and email.
- Speed puts pressure on newsrooms to publish stories before they are adequately checked and verified as to the source of the story and the reliability of the alleged facts.





- Major news organizations too often pick up rumors online.
- Sometimes, the impact of publishing an online rumor is not world shaking –a false report that a hockey coach has been fired.



- But a media that thrives on speed and “sharing” creates the potential for great harm.
- For instance, news organizations might be tempted to repeat a false rumor that terrorists had taken control of the London underground, or that a nuclear power plant had just experienced a ‘meltdown’ and dangerous gases were blowing towards Chicago.



- Increasingly, journalists are blogging ‘live’ about sports games, news events, and breaking stories.
- Inevitably, when one works at this speed, errors are made, from misspelling words to making factual errors.



- These false reports could induce panic, causes accidents, prompt military action and so on.
- A related problem, created by new media, is how to handle errors and corrections when reports and commentary are constantly being updated.



- Should news organizations go back and correct all of these mistakes which populate mountains of material?
- Or should they correct errors later and not leave a trace of the original mistake –what is called “unpublishing?”



- The ethical challenge is to articulate guidelines for dealing with rumors and corrections in an online world that are consistent with the principles of accuracy, verification, and transparency.
- The ethical challenge is to redefine what independent journalism in the public interest means for a media where many new types of journalism are appearing and where basic principles are being challenged.



# ENTREPRENEURIAL NOT-FOR-PROFIT JOURNALISM

- The declining readers and profits of mainstream media, as citizens migrate online, has caused newsrooms to shrink their staff.
- Some journalists doubt the continuing viability of the old economic model of a mass media based on advertising and circulation sales.



- In response, many journalists have started not-for-profit newsrooms, news web sites, and centers of investigative journalism based on money from foundations and donations from citizens.
- Some journalists go online and ask for citizens to send them money to do stories.





- This trend can be called “entrepreneurial journalism” because the journalist no longer simply reports while other people (e.g. advertising staff ) raise funds for their newsroom.
- These journalists are entrepreneurs attempting to raise funds for their new ventures.



- The new ventures raise ethical questions.
- How independent can such newsrooms be when they are so reliant on funds from a limited number of donors?



- What happens if the newsroom intends to report a negative story about one of its main funders?
- From whom will these newsrooms take money?



- How transparent will they be about who gives them money and under what conditions?
- The challenge is to construct an ethics for this new area of journalism.



## REPORTERS USING SOCIAL MEDIA

- Many news organizations encourage their reporters to use social media to gather information and to create a “brand” for themselves by starting their own blog, Facebook page, or Twitter account. However, online commenting can put reporters, especially beat reporters, in trouble with their editors or the people they comment about, especially if the news outlet says it provides impartial reporting.



- For example, a reporter who covers city hall may report dispassionately in her newspaper about a candidate for mayor.
- But on her blog, she may express strong opinion, saying the candidate is an unlikeable and incompetent politician.



- Such comments would give the candidate cause to complain about the lack of impartiality of the reporter.
- The ethical challenge is to develop social media guidelines that allow reporters to explore the new media world but also to draw reasonable limits on personal commentary.



# ETHICS OF IMAGES

- There are the new ethical issues raised by the rise of new image technology.
- These images include both photographs and video.





- Citizens and professional journalists have new and easy ways to capture and transmit images, such as cell phones linked to the internet via wireless technology.
- They have new technologies for altering and manipulating these images.



- This convergence of ease of capture, ease of transmission, and ease of manipulation questions the traditional principles of photojournalism which were developed for non-digital capture and transmission of pictures and video.
- As mentioned above, one issue is whether newsrooms can trust the easily obtained images of citizens and citizen journalists.



- Who is the sender and how do we know that this image is really of the event in question?
- Another issue is whether a journalist or a citizen used technology to alter the photograph, e.g. to add an object to the picture or to take an object out.



- The manipulation of images is so tempting that mainstream newsrooms have fired a string of photojournalists over the past decade to discourage fraudulent practices.
- Even with manipulation, not all issues are clear.



## Reference

### **2024 Guide to Ethical Photography and Copyright Compliance**

by Jana Ferreira 16 February 2024

<https://aftershoot.com/blog/ethical-photography/>



## Video

### **Ethics in Street Photography**

by Zach Dobson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4v3OOuc907s>



# **Photography Ethics and Why They Matter**

<https://www.photoethics.org/content/2018/5/31/photography-ethics-and-why-they-matter>



# The ethics of photojournalism

To shoot or to rescue?





- Changing the meaning or content of the image so as to mislead viewers is considered unethical.
- However, the line between a technical change and a change in meaning is not always clear.



- An image maker can enhance the colors of a photo until it is quite unlike the original picture of the object or the event.
- Also, editors may argue that it is permissible to alter images for the covers of fashion magazines (and other types of magazine) since the cover is a work of 'art' to attract buyers while they browse magazine stands.
- There is much for ethics to do to clarify the principles of responsible image making and how those principles apply to difficult cases.



# Fake News , Misinformation , Disinformation

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- The issue of “fake news” has been a dominant theme in the headlines for several years.
- How do we define a term that has come to mean so many different things to different people?





- At its core, we are defining “fake news” as those news stories that are false: the story itself is fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes.
- Sometimes these stories may be propaganda that is intentionally designed to mislead the reader, or may be designed as “clickbait” written for economic incentives (the writer profits on the number of people who click on the story).



- However, it's important to acknowledge that “fake news” is a complex and nuanced problem, one that is far greater than the narrow definition above.
- The term itself has become politicized and is widely used to discredit any opposing viewpoint.



- Some people use it to cast doubt on their opponents, controversial issues or the credibility of some media organizations.
- In addition, technological advances such as the advent of social media enable fake news stories to proliferate quickly and easily as people share more and more information online.




- Increasingly, we rely on online information to understand what is happening in our world.
- The universe of “fake news” is much larger than simply false news stories.

- Some stories may have a nugget of truth but lack any contextualizing details.
- They may not include any verifiable facts or sources. Some stories may include basic verifiable facts, but are written using language that is deliberately inflammatory, leaves out pertinent details or only presents one viewpoint.

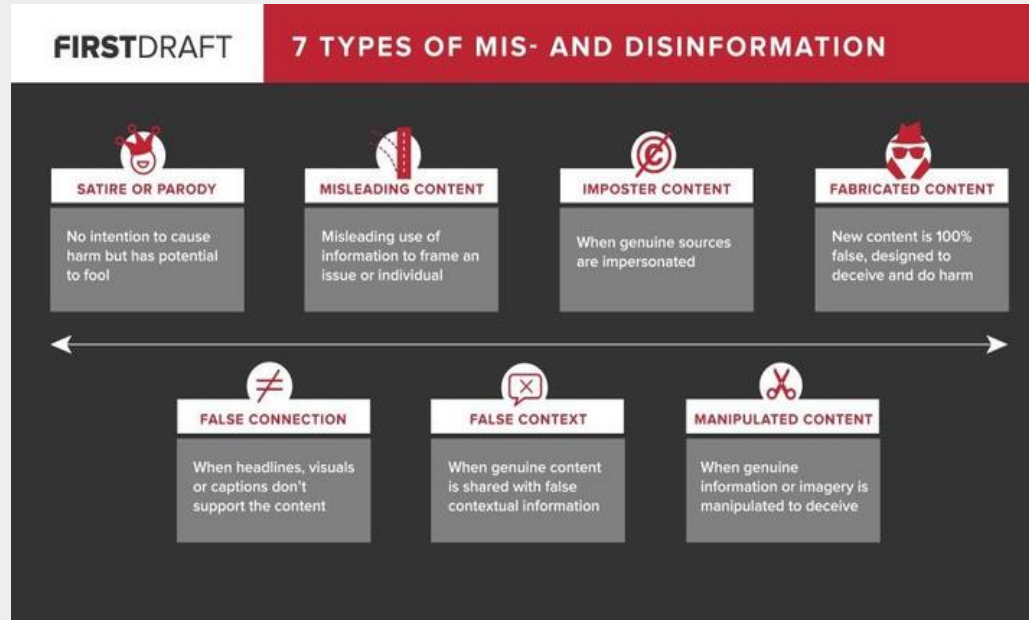




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- “Fake news” exists within a larger ecosystem of mis- and disinformation.
  - Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is mistakenly or inadvertently created or spread; the intent is not to deceive.
  - Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created and spread "in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disinformation>).



- Claire Wardle of [FirstDraftNews.com](https://firstdraftnews.com) has created the helpful visual image below to help us think about the ecosystem of mis-and disinformation.
- And as she points out, "it's complicated."



Misinformation and disinformation is produced for a variety of complex reasons:

- Partisan actors want to influence voters and policymakers for political gain or to influence public discourse (for example, intentionally spreading misinformation about election fraud) .



- More clicks means more money. Some news stories are created by people wanting to generate clicks for financial gain, regardless of the content (for example, Macedonian teenagers) .



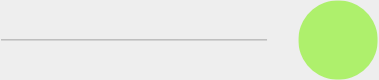


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# **The Real Impact of Fake News: The Rise of Political Misinformation—and How We Can Combat Its Influence**

Political Analytics , Strategic Communication , School of  
Professional Studies , COLUMBIA SPS  
2 January 2024

<https://sps.columbia.edu/news/real-impact-fake-news-rise-political-misinformation-and-how-we-can-combat-its-influence>

- 
- The blurry lines between news and entertainment and the explosion of news sites, as well as the pressure of the 24 hour news cycle, may contribute to shoddy writing that doesn't follow professional journalistic standards or ethics



- The technological ease of copying, pasting, clicking and sharing content online has helped misinformation and disinformation to proliferate.
- In some cases, stories are designed to provoke an emotional response and placed on certain sites ("seeded") in order to entice readers into sharing them widely.



- In other cases, "fake news" articles may be generated and disseminated by "bots" -computer algorithms that are designed to act like people sharing information but can do so quickly and automatically.





# **How Fake News Affects U.S. Elections**

By Jenna Marina Lee, University of Central Florida, 26 October 2020

<https://www.ucf.edu/news/how-fake-news-affects-u-s-elections/>



# Examples of Viral Fake News

- "Donald Trump sent his own plane to transport 200 stranded marines"
- A fake news story is picked up by a major media talk show host.



UCONSERVATIVE.COM

**Donald Trump Sent His Own Plane To Transport 200  
Stranded Marines**



- “FBI director received millions from Clinton Foundation, his brother’s law firm does Clinton’s taxes”
- An unreliable and biased news site generates over 538,000 engagements on Facebook by using a fake headline.



- "Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for president"

Fake news site fools world media and generates 960,000 Facebook engagements.



- Coronavirus Bioweapon – How China Stole Coronavirus From Canada And Weaponized It
- One of a long list of fake Coronavirus news stories and articles.



- Evidence Surfaces That The FBI Planned And Executed January 6 Capitol Riot
- Example of a common far-right conspiracy theory regarding the January 6 riots.





From :

Fake News: Separating Truth From Fiction: 4. Fake News Examples , by Valencia College, LibGuides, last updated : 7 October.

<https://libguides.valenciacollege.edu/c.php?g=612299&p=4251645>





Reference :

**The science of fake news**  
**Addressing fake news requires a multidisciplinary effort**

9 March 2018

[https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mbaum/files/science\\_of\\_fake\\_news.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mbaum/files/science_of_fake_news.pdf)





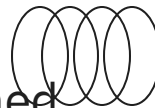


## 世界各地反「假新聞」的行動

Funke, D., & Flamini, D. (2019). *A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world -Poynter*. Poynter.  
[Retrieved from:https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/](https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/)



# Fact Checking



- Fact-checking is the process of verifying the factual accuracy of questioned reporting and statements.
- Fact-checking can be conducted before or after the text or content is published or otherwise disseminated.
- Internal fact-checking is such checking done in-house by the publisher to prevent inaccurate content from being published; when the text is analyzed by a third party, the process is called external fact-checking.

HKBU Fact Check

<https://factcheck.hkbu.edu.hk/home/en/>

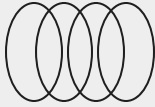


香港青年協會青年研究中心青年創研庫（2022），『假新聞』  
現況與應對的探討。

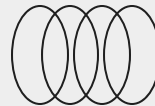
[https://hkfyg.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/%E9%9D%92%E5%8D%94%E3%80%8C%E9%9D%92%E5%B9%B4%E5%89%B5%E7%A0%94%E5%BA%AB%E3%80%8D%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E%E7%A8%BF\\_%E5%85%AC%E5%B8%83%E3%80%8C%E5%81%87%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E%E2%94%80%E7%8F%BE%E6%B3%81%E8%88%87%E6%87%89%E5%B0%8D%E7%9A%84%E6%8E%A2%E8%A8%8E%E3%80%8D%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6%E7%B5%90%E6%9E%9C.pdf](https://hkfyg.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/%E9%9D%92%E5%8D%94%E3%80%8C%E9%9D%92%E5%B9%B4%E5%89%B5%E7%A0%94%E5%BA%AB%E3%80%8D%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E%E7%A8%BF_%E5%85%AC%E5%B8%83%E3%80%8C%E5%81%87%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E%E2%94%80%E7%8F%BE%E6%B3%81%E8%88%87%E6%87%89%E5%B0%8D%E7%9A%84%E6%8E%A2%E8%A8%8E%E3%80%8D%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6%E7%B5%90%E6%9E%9C.pdf)



# Protection of Journalistic Sources in the Digital Age

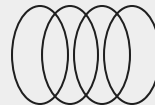


- The protection of journalistic sources is central to the ability of journalists to properly investigate stories, as well as for the protection of individuals and whistleblowers who provide information to them.
- Compelling the disclosure of sources has a chilling effect on freedom of speech and media freedom, in addition to hindering the free flow of information.



- Why is confidentiality important in journalism?
- Protecting confidential sources is a cornerstone of ethical reporting.
- When journalists have agreed to protect someone's identity, they should make every effort to do so, especially in circumstances where a source could be arrested or harmed.

A red, rectangular stamp with a distressed, ink-like texture. The word "CONFIDENTIAL" is written in bold, uppercase letters across the center of the stamp, which is tilted slightly upwards to the right.

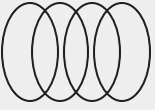


- UNESCO released a comprehensive study of changes that impact on legal frameworks that support protection of journalistic sources in the digital age.
- While the rapidly emerging digital environment offers great opportunities for journalists to investigate and report information in the public interest, it also poses particular challenges regarding the privacy and safety of journalistic sources.

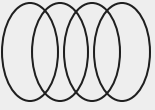


United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



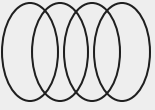


- These challenges include: mass surveillance as well as targeted surveillance, data retention, expanded and broad antiterrorism measures, and national security laws and over-reach in the application of these.

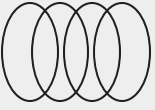


- All these can undermine the confidentiality protection of those who collaborate with journalists, and who are essential for revealing sensitive information in the public interest but who could expose themselves to serious risks and pressures.

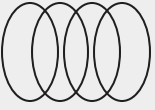




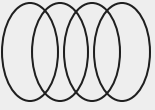
- The effect is also to chill whistleblowing and thereby undermine public access to information and the democratic role of the media.
- In turn, this jeopardizes the sustainability of quality journalism.



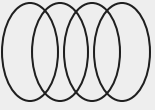
- The research was conducted within UNESCO framework of Internet Universality which advocates the Internet governance principles of Human Rights, Openness, Accessibility, and Multistakeholder Participation.
- The protection of confidentiality of journalists' sources relates especially to the right to freedom of expression (and the correlatives of press freedom and access to information), and the right to privacy.



- The study found that the legal frameworks that protect the confidential sources of journalism are under significant strain in the digital age.
- This context is leading journalists to adapt their work methods in an effort to shield their sources from exposure.

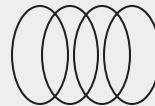


- A further finding is that all stakeholders have a crucial role to play in the introduction, development or updating of better legal safeguards for all acts of journalism, including for whistleblowers.
- The research also provides recommendations on journalistic source protection, starting with independent oversight on surveillance and data retention, through to the development of education and training programs in digital safety.

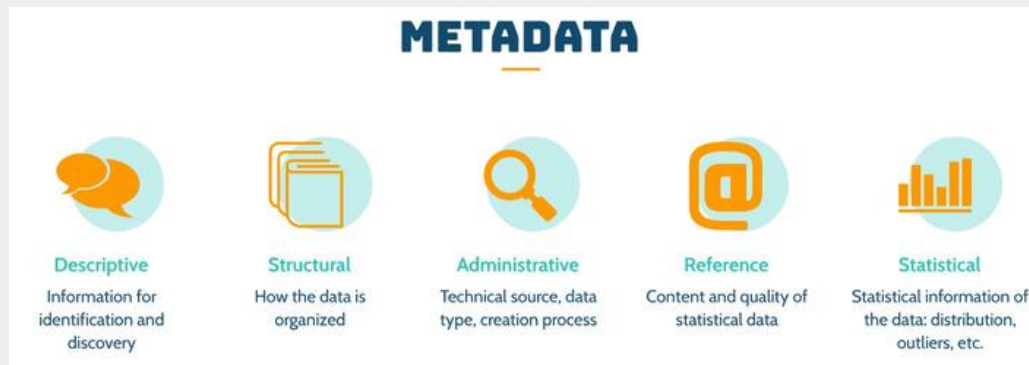


The UNESCO study set a robust and comprehensive source protection framework would encompass the need to:

- Recognise the value to the public interest of source protection, with its legal foundation in the right to freedom of expression (including press freedom), and to privacy. These protections should also be embedded within a country's constitution and/or national law.



- Recognise that source protection should extend to all acts of journalism and across all platforms, services and mediums (of data storage and publication), and that it includes digital data and meta-data.





## Reference :

*Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age*,  
UNESCO Publishing , 2017.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248054>



# AI in Data Journalism :

## What are the Ethical Implications

Most of the large media organizations in US use artificial intelligence in three key areas of the news production process:

- story discovery
- story generation and
- story distribution.





- Newsrooms that focus on speed, like the Associated Press and Bloomberg, employ AI in the story production step with automated content generation.
- Smaller newsrooms have focused more on using AI as a story discovery and reporting tool. Interviews conducted with 12 people who work in media, tech and law focused on the way their organizations incorporated ethical decision-making as they implemented their technology.



- Many of the ethical issues facing artificial intelligence in journalism are issues that journalists already face, just in a different context.
- One example is the importance of having clean, reliable data, which is also imperative to data journalism.
- Another is the need for transparency and disclosure policies for automated content generated pieces, which media organizations already need to do for projects like investigative reporting.



- There are ethics codes for journalism and there are ethics codes for AI, but there are no widely known ethics codes for artificial intelligence use in journalism. Individual media organizations have certainly discussed ethical use of this technology, but few, if any at all, have added these concerns to their codes of ethics.



- Other ethical situations, such as attribution and transparency, are specific to AI. There are not yet industry-wide standards for properly crediting or attributing content “written” via algorithm.
- Regulations, however, are not the same as ethics, and it’s important that media organizations have an ethical code to follow regardless of legislation.



- This report proposes an ethical framework that media organizations can follow as they integrate artificial intelligence in their newsrooms.
- These guidelines focus on steps to consistently evaluate quality of data and algorithms, analyze potential bias in models and act transparently with AI-based endeavors.
- This framework was developed in conjunction with universal journalism values such as accuracy, fairness, respect and responsibility to the public (Society of Professional Journalists, n.d.).

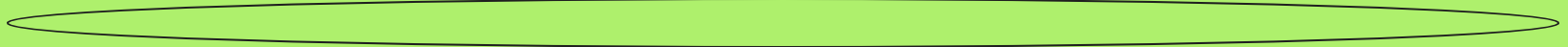




## Reference :

AI in Journalism: Creating an Ethical Framework , by  
Haley Kim , Syracuse University SURFACE, Syracuse  
University HonorsProgram Capstone Projects , 1 May  
2019.

[https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2095&context=honors\\_capstone](https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2095&context=honors_capstone)



- Artificial intelligence is already being used in some newsrooms to mine data, create algorithms and automatically generate content.
- Using this technology on a daily basis raises new questions for journalists.

### Video :

Artificial intelligence won't kill journalism or save it, but the sooner newsrooms buy in, the better, posted by Hanaa' Tameez, NiemanLab, 18 November 2019.

<https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/11/artificial-intelligence-wont-kill-journalism-or-save-it-but-the-sooner-newsrooms-buy-in-the-better/>





## Reference Reading :

*The use of AI in data journalism : what are the ethical implications ?* European Science-Media Hub , European Parliamentary Research Service , 8 October 2019

<https://sciencemediahub.eu/2019/10/08/the-use-of-ai-in-data-journalism-what-are-the-ethical-implications/>





END

