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Navigating the influence of African media: ethical dilemmas in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This study examined how African identities influence ethical dilemmas in the digital age. Global ethics in journalism, particularly in the digital age, deserves attention considering the amount of content readily available to the masses. To investigate the challenges, a qualitative cross-sectional design is used and thematically analyzed. The findings indicate that the rise of citizen journalism and the development of deontological ethics of new media are the main factors in the failure of the profession in Africa. Citizen Journalism triggered the violation of normative ethical issues, like, privacy and pornography. This problem is also acculturated in the African media. Several debates challenge global thinking about normative media ethics, particularly in Africa media. A new generation of media ethics emanates from current controversies and debates, and there is a green light and a growing concern about the development of global media ethics. Moreover, it affects accuracy in terms of source reliability, the nature of audiences. I suggest that media ethics should not ignore the current global thinking of developing universal global media ethics to restrict local ethical enforcement. The pull of drawing local media ethics and political context should be reversed because it subjugates the practice of journalism, the profession, and citizens' rights to information.

Keywords: Normative ethics, disinformation, new media, global ethics, African media

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Introduction

The subject of this study revolves around the critical review of the relevant literature on the status of journalists, the profession, and new media ethics in the African continent even if the globalized nature of media and journalism practice (Borgmann, 2012). It has been eroded due to a de-Westernization of African media ethical claims (Kasoma, 1996). It also looks at the impact of government on political contexts. Restricting digital media is a gamble for African leaders. A challenging legacy media environment has been created in the media landscape of Africa. Recent government restrictions on access to information and information sharing with digital technologies in Africa in general and in Tanzania in particular have stifled the expansion of internet news networks (Conroy-Krutz, 2020). They further restrict online expression, privacy, and information access while enforcing licensing and taxes on bloggers, online forums, radio stations, and television broadcasters. It shows that the fortune of traditional and new media is uncertain (Anderson et al., 2015; Newman, 2021). Therefore, social media regulation is a dominant rhetoric for most African leaders. As a result, social media regulation has become a popular topic of conversation among most African leaders and academic scholars (Lemaire, 2023; Obia, 2021). Burundi, Egypt, Togo, Ethiopia, Chad, Niger, Senegal, and Uganda all had shutdowns due to the practice of online journalism through social media. For instance, Lemaire writes about the challenges of using social networks by young people in Africa (2023).

Young people in Africa use social networks to participate in politics, while their governments implement strategies to limit online political mobilization. However, young citizens whose governments shut down social networks use social networks to get the news more. This phenomenon is even stronger for older citizens. This is important as new African users join an online environment marred by state control (2023).

The new social media communication has tremendously influenced the trends of journalism practices and legal environments in the new media by limiting free speech and increasing the protection of consumer rights (Newman, 2021; Berger, 2007). Regulating African digital media to control online social media activities and enforcing Internet shout-downs puts freedom of expression at risk (Hamada, 2018). African countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Egypt have proposed a bill to regulate social networks and blogging in their countries that will impact journalism practice, and consumer rights (Hamada, 2018; Obia, 2021). According to Newman (2021), a significant new phase for the Internet,

with more regulation in general, more limits on free speech, and more protection of consumer rights. In addition, the rise of citizen journalism is yet another justification for developing new media ethics. New media ethics is supposed to be included in scholarly debate and research on global media ethics. According to Caldwell (2014), Clifford Christians insists on 'proto-norms as a workable basis for normative ethics applied to media practices that operate on a global scale' (239). It has also been part of the debate, research, and teaching on global media ethics in global journalism. Similarly, digital moral ethics has to support the lifeblood of journalists, media researchers, the journalism profession, and the digital society. However, it is strongly believed that the global-local (global hereafter) assumptions and thinking of new media ethics are irresponsibly handled without any urgent attention to safeguard journalism practices and consumer rights. Consequently, Anderson and Rainie note that 'the fading of the news media contributes to the problem' (2019, p.13). It is believed that the current scholarly touch and debate are subdued. Thus, journalists and the profession of journalism are in crisis in the new media landscape.

Specifically, the rise and development of digital technology, the Internet, and the practice of citizen journalism have had a tremendous impact on the practice, culture, and structure of journalism in the mainstream media and the newly emerging media through obeying the moral obligations of the state, reporters, editors, and media house owners (Anderson & Rainie, 2019; Newman, 2021; Metz, 2015). Ultimately, this changed the craft of the journalism profession. I argue that the profession of journalism is changing and is also in a crisis. Scholars examine whether some are new moral issues of the good community, grounded on one-hand ethics (Metz, 2015; Christian, 2011). Mainstream media, on the one hand, changed many aspects of journalism practice that aimed to reach not only local but also global digital audiences. The technology itself brought a different essence into global media that changed analogue technology to digital.

Ward (2014) points out that the digital media revolution has brought new practice of journalism. Changes are considered in terms of source reliability, the nature of audiences (truth-seeking and change of preference), the genuine practice of journalism, and the type of media used to address active citizens. This is a green light' to change is imposing pressure on both journalists and journalists. According to Lewis (2003, p.95), 'news sources are changing, and so are news audiences'.

In addition, the global media are changing how journalists collect their information from sources (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). Similarly, digital

media cannot avoid this reality. However, the sources are voracious. Uniquely, the audience wants to access and hear information that brings different perspectives. Equally important, audiences need reliable facts. Ward asserts that 'citizens question media sources for their facts, level of knowledge, intentions, and skills' (2017, p.6). Therefore, the sources should be reliable and trusted by the audience. The same should be true for journalists and the media.

Furthermore, traditional media (e.g., television) audiences are transformed into social media (e.g., Facebook) audiences (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). The latter are visual-based and cater to niche audiences. These audiences are of different compositions in terms of education, profession, culture, language, and ideology. Therefore, gratifying the audience's interests and needs requires the genuine practice of journalism. Furthermore, the nature and type of technology are changing the way journalists collect and disseminate information. Instantaneous dissemination of information uses a combination of video, audio, pictures, graphics, and text. Otherwise, they are unable to cope with the market needs. It will not survive in a competitive market. Ultimately, they do not compete in the global context in the digital era (Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Napoli, 2019).

From another perspective, journalism is undergoing a dynamic change in the areas of the economic, organizational, narrative, and relational structures of the media (Perlman, 2021; Hamada, 2018; Posetti, 2018; Ireton & Posetti, 2018). First, the techniques for developing alternative revenue streams create newly intensified ethical pressure. Second, new responsibilities and working conditions, such as disinformation and misinformation, create ethical issues for journalists. Third, journalists depend on the Internet for the construction of news to be more fluid, which demands the open and transparent construction of news. New formats are available that allow individual journalists to follow their styles. Even political shifts in African countries are determining the practice of digital journalism (Al-Najjar, 2011). For instance, patriotism impeded African colonized country journalists' practices for the support of Western-oriented global journalism ethics. This is to appease both the government and the public interest, in which patriotism could be seen as a virtue to journalists, audiences, and government officials, in which impartiality is dismissed. Media content creation and dissemination are changing more than in yesteryear due to the deliberate circulation of disinformation, fake news, etc. (Napoli, 2019). The practice of journalism, under those circumstances, is ultimately changing. In the global context

(Christians et al., 2008), theoretical debates about global media ethics are marked by some disagreements on the nature, possibility, and desirability of global ethics. However, the consensus among scholars (Christians, 2013, 2019; Ward, 2013, 2015; Couldry, 2013, 2016) on the need for global media ethics laid foundations that should also be the basis for new media ethics.

Journalists, media, media organizations, professionals, audiences, and digital society are becoming vulnerable and exposed to ethical problems. The ethical problem is the deadlock between freedom of expression and the free flow of information. Different pieces of evidence show these tangible problems. The Report of Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom, WPF, 2023) indicates that the profession is in a good situation in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Costa Rica, Iceland, Ireland, Estonia, and New Zealand. In some countries like Egypt, Libya, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, China, North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, and Laos are indicted, where the profession is in a very serious situation. Reporter without Borders (RSF) indicates that journalism is threatened by a fake content industry. African, in general, journalism overall has become more difficult on this continent and the situation is now classified as 'bad' (WPF, 2023). North Africa, in particular, continues to be the world's most dangerous region for journalists, with a situation classified as 'very bad' in more than half of its countries (WPF, 2023). At the local level, the report showed that journalism practices and professions in Ethiopia are in difficult situations based on propaganda and disinformation. Africa is the new disinformation and propaganda laboratory (WPF, 2023). It is still a high-risk continent for journalists. Propaganda and disinformation thrive in what is still one of the most dangerous terrains for journalists.

Conceptual frameworks

Digital media ethics deals with the distinct ethical problems, practices, and norms of digital news media. Digital news media include online journalism, blogging, digital photojournalism, citizen journalism, and social networks. The term 'new media' can be used interchangeably with the term 'digital media' or social networks (Ess, 2009). The operational term for this purpose is the former one, social networks. However, the latter term, upon agreement, could represent the term 'new technology'. Ward (2017) puts the concept of social media ethics and the issues considered during journalism practice in the era of the digital media landscape into context. The ethics of social media is concerned with

different ethical problems, practices, and norms in the era of digital technology. I argue that normative theories are not appropriate or applicable to the landscape of digital media. Social media practices have created a new culture of news consumption and production. The emphasis of social media is on interactivity and interconnectivity. Practically, old media are digitized. The digitization of old media is the process by which the old media are digitized but perform the same function.

Therefore, the term 'social media' refers to those digital practices that are highly interactive and incorporate two-way communication, rather than old media. Logan (2010) describes the potential of social networks as the ability to combine audio, digital video, text, interactive multimedia, virtual reality, email, chat, and the Web. Ess (2013) also confirms that digital media are those that generate data and transmit digital data over the Internet, the web, wireless and telephone networks. Thus, ethical responsibility is increasingly attached to autonomous sources and producers. According to Kessler and Bergs (2003), social media technology could be blamed for the quantity and quality of news production. It also affects the development of communication competence. The key question is whether the new technology changes its quality, which is important. For instance, the language of the content is considered the worst thing (Lewis, 2003). Even social media is continuously interacting with multiple channels and sending and receiving more interactive content. Quantity is one of the devastating conditions and challenges to practice quality practice. As a result, multiple activities can flow together and affect each other in the social media scenario. The interactivity level is the highest in the news media. As a result, new media technologies gave birth to citizen journalism, which changed the way people communicated, interacted, generated news content, and consumed news content. Hence, the public and the media suffer from the misinformation in social networks. In citizen journalism, the public and the media lost confidence (Perlman, 2021; Hamada, 2018; Posetti, 2018). To this end, the ability of social media to upload potentially embarrassing photos or videos raises serious ethical issues of privacy.

Values, virtues, and principles

The ethics of existing media are being questioned by different scholars (Metz, 2015; Christians, 2013, 2015, 2019; Ward, 2013, 2015; Couldry, 2013, 2016). However, there is no agreement; the debate is continuing among journalists, students, scholars, and even the general public. Some may consider a set of principles to determine what is right or wrong. The principles cannot furnish all the things that the profession

demands. It could be provided with the help of values and virtues. Virtues help a professional to live up to the principles of an ethical system (Lambeth, 1992). The interplay of virtues, values, and principles in actual ethical decisions is important. Virtue ethics is a character-building exercise (Vanacker, 2020). The new media in the digital age are disregarding the consideration of ethical issues that refer to news values such as objectivity, fairness, honesty, etc. Therefore, these three pillars can serve as a basis for ethics and standards of excellence in journalism and the profession.

Emerging trends in the digital age

The digital divide challenges journalism and the profession. Deliberate circulation of disinformation through social media is one of the challenges of the world (Napoli, 2019). The challenges are debatable among professionals since the rethinking of extant legal and regulatory paradigms is an all-hands-on-deck approach to the problems underlining the necessity of action. In particular, the debate could be systematized between some African media and global thinking on global issues in an attempt to develop global media ethics that would be universal (Wasserman, 2021). Moreover, it is still questioned due to its political misuse as a moral philosophy to subvert freedom of expression, the type of journalism it produced as a result, and Ubuntuism's viability in the context of globalization and technology-driven media.

According to Ward, 'global media, ethics seeks to articulate and critique the responsibilities of a new media that is now global in content, reach, and impact' (2013, p. 2). The need to develop specific aims, principles, and norms of practice that are formulated for a global world that articulates global issues is paramount. The justification for this assumption asserts that social networks are global in reach, technology, content, impact, etc. As a result, this sparked a debate about the development of global media ethics, which emphasizes the importance of universal media ethics. The virtue theory (Christians, 2009), for instance, argues that universal values apply to all of us, regardless of religion or cultural background, because they arise from our common humanity. That is, acting in all things with integrity and responsibility. However, these attempts may eliminate and disagree with relativism (Christians, 2009) because they are always right for all people at all times. That is why universality gives virtue theory its strength and relevance. Meyers (2016) proposes moral norms that hold universally; a commitment to the core virtue ethics of journalism in a global context. Another reason is that the ethical problem urges media professionals to develop global ethics, since

previously established ethics are not sufficient and cannot have the capacity to solve the current global journalism professional and practical problems. Still, another reason could be that traditional media ethics are parochial, not global.

However, the tension between cultural specificity and pluralism continues to challenge media ethicists (Ibold, 2010). Omojola (2008) emphasizes that the search for global media ethics, especially in Africa, is ongoing. On the contrary, Kassoma (1996) emphasized the need for community-oriented journalism practice rather than relying on the individualistic Western approach. The Western approach is criticized because it is based on individualistic media house practices. While in favour of local African Media Ethics, he discarded previous knowledge and skills that the journalism profession and education were unfit for the African context. For me, the assumption is out of reality. The Western experience, whatever criticism it has received, wherever we go, is considered and has contributed greatly to the development of media practice and professions in Africa. The technology itself has its origins in the North. Western journalism and media operate more generally in a more stable political and legal context than in African countries. The African media scene is under the influence of political pressure (Lemaire, 2023). If the media separates itself from government influence, journalists will freely exercise their profession in society, even under the umbrella of global media ethics.

Global journalism asks about the global responsibility to practice journalism. The factors affecting journalists' performance are increasingly global. Still, the tools with which journalists work are global. All journalists' practices are based on the good life of a human being. Therefore, universal ethical standards are important for journalism to meet and alleviate the challenges of globalization, particularly on social networks. Afriethics and ethical relativism (Ward, 2013) are constraints to the development of universal global ethics. Therefore, the ideas of universalism and relativism contradict each other. Technological innovation changes in journalism, and the new pattern of ownership, affect the call for global media ethics.

Of course, the time is ripe for global ethics and global journalism in the digital age. Global ethical standards must include social media ethics; otherwise, global ethics is incomplete. According to Rao and Wasserman, 'Global Media Ethics are a response to the dilemmas of globalization and the need to address injustices that span national jurisdictions and spheres of influence' (2015, p.6). In global Media Ethics research (Ward, 2013;

Ess, 2013), there is broad agreement that truthfulness, truth-seeking, and truth-telling are essential to the pursuit of the profession of journalism (Soysal, 2019; Chung & Nah, 2013; Couldry, 2013). Thus, global social media ethics is an essential aspect of student practice, journalists, researchers, and media practitioners. However, there is no consensus among scholars to promote global media ethics. Above all, the opposing claims of global media ethics have posed a new challenge in addressing the emerging challenges of professionalism and citizen journalism to develop emerging social media ethics. Ultimately, it further poses the dilemma of developing social media ethics in the digital age.

Methodology

The researchers employed web-based research approach. It involves an extensive review of scholarly literature, including academic journals, books and conference proceedings to gain insights into theoretical frameworks, best practices and empirical studies related to a phenomenon (Asemah et al., 2022; Asemah-Ibrahim et al., 2022a; 2022b; Aríjeníwàet al., 2023; Ajokpeoghene et al., 2023; Oduokpe et al., 2023; Nwaoboli, 2023). The researchers used policy source of information, hence, this method is justified since the study at hand is qualitative in nature.

A qualitative research approach and methods were used to obtain qualitative data. In this critical review, relevant documents were obtained using systematic steps of web-based design in the selection of materials and procedures. The systematic step of selecting, categorizing, and thematizing the sources followed a scientific approach. During the procedure, the study used different key terms to categorize and search for the document. The internet-based search terms are 'global media ethics', 'global journalism', 'new media', 'digital media', 'media ethics', 'citizen journalism', 'African media ethics', etc. This procedure helps the researcher to dig up existing research debates and output. The resources were assigned to the dominant subthemes of the study. The study used reports, websites, regulations, research articles, etc. Thus, the method used for this purpose is a systematic web-based cross-sectional design and document thematic analysis (Kothari, 2004).

Results and Discussion

Media ethics: a paradox in the digital age

Case 1: Global media ethics

Global media ethics is at the core of pluralistic journalism; it is also a potential research area for media and communication scholars. The globalized nature of media and journalism practice increased more than

ever (Borgmann, 2012). However, changes in technology and globalization have brought about a change in the demand for a reconsideration of norms because contemporary journalism faces a contemporary crisis (WPF, 2023). Journalists and the profession have always been persecuted. Consequently, it is a challenging time for journalism to reinvent itself in the context of the evolving digital media and technology environment. The paradox of global media ethics and emerging local media ethics is still a source of contention and debate. Some argue that the demand for global media ethics is due to the globalized nature of media and journalism practice (Borgmann, 2012). In contrast, some prescribe de-Westernizing and seeking African media ethics (Matz, 2015; Kasoma, 1996). Moreover, other perspectives to look at alternative journalism ethics are global and local challenges to developing universal global media ethics. According to Kasoma (1996), Western media ethics is criticized for two things; one is Western media ethics, which is biased towards individualist thinking; the other is that it has little care for local values.

Case 2: African media ethics

The approach of alternative media ethics frameworks suggests different ethical assumptions. In Africa, suggested African media ethics are Afriethics and Ubuntuism journalism ethics. These media ethics are highly loaded on the assumption of home-based, communal, and cultural values that govern the whole media system without considering the principles of practice of the Western media. In the case of African ethics, scholars argue that home-based media ethics is advocated for local and African culture and the community (Metz, 2015; Kasoma, 1996). They argued that African ethics is supposed to serve the media sector effectively and efficiently in African contexts. Thus, scholars claimed that Afriethics and Ubuntuism were the principal ethical principles to guide African media ethics.

In the Afriethics case, they argued that contemporary African journalism is influenced by 'Western-inspired philosophy', which is considered a 'destructive of local culture, derives and selfish' approach. Kasoma (1996) argues that vendetta journalism was dominating in the 1990s and that it had been marked by using abusive language on sources. The practice did not approach a source to comment on a story, paint a bad picture, or use sarcasm in reporting. However, he believed that Afriethics and Ubuntuism's underlying premise is that the community comes before the individual. Both Afriethics and Ubuntuism advocate communitarian ethical frameworks. These approaches still have some problem.

Ubuntuism is an Afrocentric paradigm that disregards Western wealth and has the potential to become a normative framework. Ubuntu, for instance, is proposed as an African moral philosophy, which would be considered a framework for African normative media theory (Fourie, 2007). There is still a two-fold debate that exists in the current proposal. One is postmodern criticism of classic normative theories that alienate themselves from Western liberation views of freedom of expression, the role of the media in society, and diversity and pluralism. The other is the support for the postcolonial view that normative theory is a product of Western epistemology, which is fueled by a Western bias. However, ethics driven by African media, which advocate the good of the community, could be criticized because it is not unique, and traditional African values have changed. They can easily be misused for political purposes, which run the risk of jeopardizing journalism ethics. Metz (2015) emphasizes the good of the community, where ethics is interpreted philosophically as a moral theory. Thus, it is difficult to translate Ubuntuism into practical journalism ethics and can cope with rapid changes in the new global media world. According to Fourie (2007), the moral philosophy of Ubuntuism was questioned due to its feasibility in the context of postcolonial African society and culture. It is also questioned due to its authenticity and distinctiveness as an African moral philosophy and worldview.

As stated above, most colonized African countries are still dealing with the aftermath of colonialism. I argue that they were victimized by colonization. For instance, South African Media Ethics indicates that there is a need to change procedural media ethics into substantive media ethics. However, still in the name of development, the media have been used for political power and not for development purposes. Even for many decades, Ethiopia never sought a mass media policy or ethics of the media. In a very recent year (2020), the Ethiopian government endorsed the mass media policy for the first time in Ethiopian mass media history. It has yet to change the status of the profession, journalism, journalists, and the media scenario.

Global challenge: new media ethics

Social or digital media ethics includes profound transformations, for example, in journalism ethics. Smartphones, for instance, allow their owners to serve as 'citizen journalists' whose eyewitness recordings thus radically change the craft of journalism practice. These and related developments (e.g., blogging) are quickly changing journalism ethics in the digital age. For instance, a recent event that occurred due to the death of George Floyd in the United States is a remarkable indicator of the

power of citizen journalism. There are also other instances where citizen journalism could be the world's largest information conveyor for large audiences and news sources for the mainstream media. These instances include citizen reports during the Arab Spring in Arab media ethics contexts (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria).

Therefore, the fast-changing media landscape is related to global media and journalism practices in discussion among journalists, media professionals, and researchers. On the one hand, Ayish and Rao argue that 'new media technologies, as well as the processes of media liberalization, deregulation and privatization across national boundaries, have altered journalism as a profession' (2011, p. 718). However, according to Ward (2011) ethical flourishing, to develop global media ethics, the concept of 'the moral worth of developing capacities that are essential to a decent and dignified life; second, the importance of channeling capacities toward ethical goals such as the ability to interact respectfully with others; and third, the belief that, ultimately, a flourishing life needs an ethical component' (739). As a result, scholars suggest that journalism ethics is increasingly hybridized to incorporate journalism ethics to address matters of amateur and professional responsibilities and rights (Perlman, 2021; Hamada, 2018; Posetti, 2018). Moreover, new media ethics is aimed at developing new concepts for both citizen journalists and traditional journalists operating in the digital age.

The rise of citizen journalism

The Internet has surpassed all other media as a source of news, and many readers look to the Web for updates on national and international news stories. Journalists and news organizations at every stage of the news cycle should be familiar with the technologies that shape online journalism. According to Luckie (2010), almost every major news organization has an online presence that accompanies its traditional publications. In recent years, the rapid emergence of amateur journalism on the Internet has raised more questions about journalism. Citizen journalism is a popular label used to describe a form of media that involves moderated reader participation. Citizen-based media generally start as web-based publications (Tremayne, 2007). Citizen journalism is shaping current journalism practice that is, seeking new media ethics.

If professional journalism is in decline, what is the justification for journalism schools? It indicates that professional journalism is in a state of crisis and is endangered. As newspaper subscriptions are declining, a growing number of people are getting most of their news and information from free sources on the Internet. As a result, revenues supporting

professional journalism are falling at an alarming rate. The current trends are certainly troubling. Some argued and regarded it as a positive development because it provides individuals with the potential to share news and information with a global audience. Internet technologies and new applications are a tremendous resource to engage the audience and add context to news stories of the day.

Most scholars argue that the birth of new technologies paved the way for the emergence and development of new communications networks and information technologies (Mansour, 2018; Ward, 2013; Metz, 2015). In particular, new media technologies have given birth to citizen journalism that has changed the way people communicate, the way people interact, the way news content is generated, and ultimately the way news content is consumed (Jurrat, 2011; Metz, 2015). The new communication technologies make this only possible. It also argued that new technologies of communication have been offering ways for journalists and ordinary citizens to question the status quo. That is, technological advancements allowed members of the public to create and disseminate independent media products (Mythen, 2010). It would be unrealistic to impose professional standards of accuracy, balance, credibility, and fairness on this kind of journalism. Consequently, bias, objectivity, and trust in citizen journalism are some of the challenges that strengthen and undermine the practice of credibility in the field (Anderson & Schudson, 2019; Ward, 2009; Baker, 2009).

According to Jurrat, 'technological advances, especially in the mobile phone industry, facilitating video uploads directly to citizen journalism websites will increase the speed of eyewitness reporting' (2011, p. 17). Another issue worth mentioning is that citizen journalism in Africa consists of unpaid work, lack of professional training, unedited publication of content, plain and casual language, distinct story selection and news judgment, hyperlocal issues, free accessibility, and interactivity, and is largely maintained by amateurs. They lack rigorous editing, rely on individual sources, tend toward a narrow issue focus, foster political learning, and have more mobility online with a greater impact on the way politics and other issues are constructed in cyberspace and the online world.

Disinformation and misinformation

The transformation of the news industry comprises digital technology, social networks, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation (Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Posetti, 2018). Social media platforms have gained popularity worldwide. Social media has

undoubtedly changed the face of journalism where ‘the erosion of trust in journalism and the mainstream media organizations causes audiences to dissipate, further diminishing the remaining profits and fueling the spread of information disorder’ (Posetti, 2018, p. 56) and people on social networks can shape the stories they want to hear or see (Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Carr et al., 2020). The political impact of citizen journalism in the last decade has been astonishing. Citizen journalism has produced fake news. Misinformation and disinformation are also the most contemporary challenges that ‘risks eclipsing the role of journalism’ (Ireton & Posetti, 2018, p. 18) and digitally fueled disinformation about journalism practices and contemporary society (Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Posetti, 2018).

Central issues in the ethics of new media

Existing principles of journalistic ethics do not resolve all the ethical dilemmas that arise from the new journalism scenario of the new media. The Internet integrates the different forms of media into a converged scenario. Consequently, the Internet has brought about thorny issues in the digital environment. Hence, new technologies are a driving force to reformulate or update the code of ethics for new media in a new context, the digital environment. The journalism process in the digital environment has changed. The main features that have changed the process are interactivity, hypertextuality, the use of multimedia, and the immediacy of digital journalism. These have raised new ethical issues. The issues are moral issues consisting of offensive content, intellectual property, digital manipulation, and the process of gathering information. Therefore, the internet and information and communication technologies have created a new challenge for the media, journalists, and their professions. Even self-regulation and self-censorship do not alleviate ethical problems. Another important thing is the driving force of globalization of technology and journalism. These dilemmas have led to the desire to develop new ethics for digital media. Furthermore, the already-established media ethics cannot solve and address the current and future media ethics in a global journalism concern (Ward, 2017).

Ethical dilemmas in the digital age

The complicated cases and issues in the ethics of digital media are increasingly global in scope. There is a tendency to reach out globally. On the contrary, there are also local concerns about the way to address regional issues; these kinds of practices control the media system, especially in developing nations such as Ethiopia. The controlled media system, surprisingly, does so, even if they do not possess some guiding

principles. The guides that exist disturb the activities of journalists and the profession. Hoyes et al. (2007, p. 263) state that 'contemporary challenges to institutional roles in a digital media environment and then turn to three broad normative journalistic values: authenticity, accountability, and autonomy, which affect the credibility of journalists and the content they provide'. The media system compromises the ethics of journalism in a local and global context. In addressing both local and global concerns, journalists face an ethical quandary (Detenber & Rosenthal, 2014), deciding between what is right and what is best for their job. Journalists must choose a clear reference frame to make sound ethical choices and do their job based on the multiple interests and contextual factors that surround them. The ethical dilemma may also arise in choosing the truth, minimizing harm, independence, and accountability, and the global media ethics requirements (credibility, consequences, and humanity). For instance, declining public confidence in digital media is one of the dilemmas that overwhelm journalists in today's newsroom. The audience asks the sources.

Besides, the universe is redolent with fake news. According to Ward, 'the digital revolution in information media and journalism requires a rethinking of the concept of trust in news media' (2017, p.3). It is also professional consciousness that can hinder the expansion of the 'fake news' phenomenon and that comes with full compliance and synergy with the absolute and imperative need for dynamic and current rules enhanced, not only for journalistic ethics but also for good professional conduct and practice. There is a polarized way of thinking among journalists about the negative effect of new media that is labelled (Ess, 2009, p.7) as 'technology good' versus 'technology bad'.

Furthermore, there are some controversies about African journalism models (Ujamaa, Ubuntu, and oral discourse journalism): journalism for social change, communal journalism, and journalism based on oral discourse that conflict with the Western journalism paradigm (Skjerdal, 2012). This brings a paradox to the search for universal ethical principles for global media. It could be another dilemma for developing cultural-based contextual media ethics. Ultimately, this assumption might lead to a roadblock in developing the ethics of digital media. The need for responsible digital media practice has not been compromised by the different interests of one's journalism model (Skjerdal, 2012). This kind of approach can degrade the richness and resourcefulness of the Western approach to journalism. We cannot deny the footprint of Western journalism on African journalism in terms of media technology,

journalism education, media ethics, etc. There is no need to limit media ethics out of fear of ethical imperialism, which imposes principles on cultures without regard for differences, or extreme relativism, which rejects global media ethics as impossible and undesirable (Ward, 2017). According to Deuze and Yeshua (2001), several ethical dilemmas can be identified that seem to have no satisfactory solutions: commercial pressure, the use of hyperlinks, accuracy and credibility, sources, privacy, regulation, and newsgathering methods. In the 21st century of digital technology, ethical challenges confront every person. The first challenge is that scholars argue that ethics must serve as applied ethics throughout the world.

Propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, false news, and information disorder are currently influencing the practice of journalism and its professionals (WPF, 2023). There are some ethical challenges in the digital age. First, the practice of copy-pasting journalism is a serious ethical issue. Second, the availability of user-generated content consists of risks. Fake news, for example, is the most frustrating ethical issue. Third, readers' comments create interactivity but are prone to the dissemination of false claims. Fourth, the danger of digital glitches consists of automatically generated ads. Fifth, photo manipulation is distorting reality. Sixth, the professional media software revolution brought cheap technology in which anyone can produce something that looks professional. Seventh, the global nature and accessibility of the Internet created an unfair treatment of local and global information in the same way. Eighth, fact-checking is quite challenging in digital newsgathering (e.g. Wikipedia). Lastly, in the challenge of immediacy, the time factor compromises professional ethics.

The last, but not least, specific ethical cases are privacy and pornography. Contemporary Westerners tend to take the notion of individual privacy. They consider it as a positive good that is ethically and politically absolute. It could be indicated by the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights as a basic human right. It is the foundation of contemporary notions of individual privacy as opposed to the African notion of communalism, which is strictly due to the emphasis on community rights rather than individual rights.

Factors determining African media ethics

Technological, political, cultural, and economic systems all collide and merge in Africa and are some of the reasons why global journalism ethics are difficult to apply in the region. While media ethics is a universal term, it is often misinterpreted in Africa, and its implementation can be

very challenging. In Africa, where ethnicity and cultures differ, humanitarian journalism is the central issue and concern to consider. Media practitioners often have a hard time achieving equilibrium between sensitivity towards diversity and freedom of speech due to a multitude of ethnic groups with different traditions and norms. Sensitive issues like gender, religion, and race can lead to the marginalization or misrepresentation of certain people (Nwabueze, 2021). The political dynamics and censorship of African countries also significantly shape the media ethics of the region. Governments repress journalists or other groups that criticize them or expose them for wrongdoing, and many media entities face severe political interference. These authors argue such a setting undermines the ethical principles of autonomy and responsibility that serve the media's role as a watchdog on government rule (Puddephatt & Islam, 2019).

In addition, the uncontrolled spread of misinformation and fake news also poses a grave danger to media ethics reason in Africa. As with other parts of the globe, the increasing rapidity with which information is spread on social media makes it harder for African media to combat the rampant spread of false information. The pressure to report stories almost immediately creates a serious problem in reporting ethics, leading to unsourced information that is morally questionable as well as harmful and inaccurate (Banda, 2020).

Moreover, sensationalism as well as economic factors constitutes another reason for the increased deterioration of media ethics in Africa. In the quest for increased sales or viewership, ethical journalism goes out the window, especially in a highly competitive market. This is most common in entertainment and politics, where coverage often is sensational journalism, meaning the reporting is done for exaggerated and misleading headlines rather than the truth (Harrison & Ndlela, 2021). Making steps towards the improvement of journalism in Africa is not easy, because it involves political understanding. The ethical questions journalists' face, for example, with respect to information gathering, is further compounded by the low government openness in these countries. Because of limited accessible, reliable, and accurate information, the media faces ethical dilemmas that question their objectivity (Okafor, 2020).

Furthermore, ethical reporting and journalist safety provide further challenges to African media ethics. In Africa, journalists can be violently assaulted, intimidated, or imprisoned in several countries. Reporting can prove to be a moral dilemma, particularly about how to protect reporters and how to adequately cover sensitive issues that involve power.

Journalists know that in many countries where there is no freedom of the press, the issue of safety is an ethical question (Doherty and Zeleza, 2021). Media exposure and the digital divide represent critical issues within the ethics of Africa's media. While internet usage is on the rise, numerous populations, especially those located in rural areas, still lack access to digital media resources. A few social groups suffer from misrepresentation or lack of representation in the media as a result of this phenomenon (Mlambo, 2020). The development of media ethics in Africa has been placed in jeopardy because of problems linked to the ethics of broadcasting. In several African countries, state-owned media serve government public relations, which results in biased reporting and undermines the media's autonomy as a fourth estate. Also, due to their dependence on sponsors, which creates the potential for conflicts of interest, private broadcasters often have low ethical standards (Chuma & Banda, 2020). Hence, the representations of primary ethical dilemmas of the African media describe the complexity of the relations between culture, politics, economy, technology, media ethics, and practice in the continent.

Conclusions

This study inferred the foundation of ethics in terms of identity-based contexts in a digital media age. The discussion was considered an important attempt at developing an ethical system since the digital media revolution spawned a revolution in journalism ethics. The universal, communal and Afriethic are the most influential. The debates are still stuck in a paradox. All debates, while attempting to bring good thinking to media ethics, contradict each other and are not geared toward bringing global thinking. There are also some reservations about the agreement. Global media ethics is emerging to harmonize ethical issues debated in confined and global media ethics. It is also an emerging trend that threatens the foundations of social media ethics in the digital era. Some digital ethical issues are violations of privacy and pornography. Different factors are also worsening the situation for journalism and the profession. In Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, and very few other countries, both journalism and the profession are in a good situation. However, in some other African countries (Egypt, Libya, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia), the situation is very serious. Still, most countries, including Ethiopia, are in a difficult situation. The issues are either transformed by the mainstream media or precipitated by social media. The existing ethical system is incapable of addressing ethical issues on social media. In the contemporary media system, the overwhelming ethical problems of

pornography and gaming are inescapable. In addition, the complicated cases and issues in the new media landscape are increasingly global in scope.

In the age of globalization, journalism, journalists, media organizations, and the media are under pressure from political, economic, social, cultural, and religious. Even though we are all under attack and in a greater crisis than ever before, it could be a challenging time for most media house systems and journalists. In addition, the democratic process in developing and Arab countries is eroded due to the bad media house system. The media is a tool of political and religious propaganda, where the media and journalists are under the control of the government. Thus, the media is embedded in the government's working circumstances. Moreover, the digital divide is another challenge to journalism. Furthermore, the rise of citizen journalism has significantly eroded the context of media practices. The dissemination of false news paved the way for disinformation and misinformation in the contemporary world. In all the cases considered, the development of global media ethics can overcome and amend the ethical challenges of social networks.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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