

Literature Review on Media Ethics

Yaliang Wang

Abstract:

Being the embodiment of the professional ethics of journalists, media ethics plays a vital role in maintaining the authenticity and objectivity of news, protecting the public's right to be informed and of participation, and enhancing the credibility of news media. In contemporary times, the emphasis on media ethics is not only of incredible significance to fulfill the needs of its sustainable development, but also provides an important guarantee for maintaining social public interests and promoting social stability and harmony. In this context, this paper aims at helping researchers clarify the status quo of relevant researches, main viewpoints put forward already, controversial focus and unresolved problems through literature review from different aspects, including the development of media ethics and the connotation and significance so as to determine the positioning of researches, avoid duplication of work, and find research gaps and breakthroughs. At the same time, it is intended to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation among the academic community by presenting research results and academic viewpoints to build up a benign environment for media ethics and news transmission in the new era.

Keywords: Literature review, news transmission, media ethics

Introduction

The media play a vital role in the information age, increasingly making a significant impact on society (Mahoney et al., 2022; Weber, 2022). One of the most striking is the spread of fake news, in which case, the issue of media ethics has now been a hot spot in the academic community. As it has turned out, media ethics is not only a moral guide of news communication, but also a key tool to maintain the authenticity and objectivity of news while enhancing the credibility of media, which is of incredible importance to promote social harmony and development (May et al., 2022; Nichols and Pappas, 2022). To this end, this paper briefly analyzes the historical background and development of media ethics. Then it points out the definition of media ethics in academic circles, and further discusses the strategies and measures suggested by different academia. Before drawing a conclusion, it explores the research gaps and the challenges researches on media ethics have to face.

1. Development of Media Ethics

The development of media ethics has a long history, whose course is full of discussion and practice of press freedom, social responsibility and moral norms (Elahi et al., 2022). Its embryonic stage was from the 1760s to the

1840s, when Sweden played a pioneering role by promulgating *the Press Law* in 1766 and establishing *Publishers Club* in 1874. This laid the foundation for the construction of press ethics yet to come. In 1841, Horace Greeley stated in *New York Tribune* that newspapers and media should strive to safeguard the interests of the people and promote their moral, social and political rights and interests, which is frequently regarded as the initial germination of the construction of journal ethics in the United States.

In the first half of the 20th century, with the development of liberal practice, the irrationality of human beings and the potential injustice of capitalism were increasingly exposed, so media ethics entered the stage of theoretical development (Washington et al., 2022). In 1904, Pulitzer emphasized in *North American Review* that journalists should have high ideals and moral responsibility; in 1908, a series of codes issued by the University of Missouri issued for journalists proposed a comprehensive and systematic system of media professional ethics for the first time; in 1924, the publication of *Journalistic Ethics* by Nelson Crawford marked the beginning of systematic research on journalistic ethics.

The middle of the 20th century witnessed the construction of media morality and ethics in full swing (Rogerson, 2023). In this period, most developed countries established self-regulatory bodies of press ethics to formulate

professional ethics norms and standards suitable for their own characteristics. Since then, media morality and ethics has entered the stage of regulation and practice.

2. Connotation and Norms of Media Ethics

2.1 Connotation of Media Ethics

Although the development of media ethics and academic attention began early, its connotation has not reached a unified recognition (Drozdek, 2015). In essence, media ethics refers to the theories and methods of dealing with and solving ethical problems in the field of media. It focuses on the code of ethics and conduct of the media and guides media practitioners to adhere to professional ethics, safeguard social justice, and protect public rights and privacy. This means in the process of traditional news, the media need to ensure the authenticity and accuracy, impartiality and objectivity, as well as diversity and universality of the content. All is to protect the public's right to know and right to express. Also, it means the news commentary should avoid subjective assumptions and biases, while respecting different views and positions.

2.2 Connotation of Media Ethics

Regarding approaches to ensuring media ethics, it is suggested that industrial self-regulation and heteronomy should be combined. The former is about that practitioners of media are expected to take the initiative to restrain their professional behavior according to inner beliefs and values, so as to make it conducive to the normal and harmonious operation of communication activities. For that, Britain since the 1950s has gradually established a fairly complete self-regulation mechanism, which is praised by western countries. The latter is about the supervision and management carried out by other social sectors other than the news media industry, including legal management and administrative management, in particular, the legal framework that provides western countries an important guarantee to build up media ethics. For example, *the First Amendment of the US Constitution* protects citizens' right to freedom of speech, but at the same time, it covers a lot to restrain the behavior of the media and prevent the abuse of power.

In recent years, the ethical problems of network news have been increasingly prominent with the rapid development of the internet, for which, governments across the world have issued relevant laws and regulations, putting forward clear requirements for the legitimacy and stan-

dardization of online news dissemination.

3. Research Gap and Development Trends of Media Ethics

3.1 Research Gap

Through in-depth analysis, it is found that the construction of media ethics in has been rich in theoretical support and academic discussion. The rhetorical ethics in ancient Greece and Rome and the ethical theories put forward by Kant and Rawls in modern times have offered ideological resources for the development of media ethics, while the rise and development of communication ethics, news ethics and other disciplines theoretically support its further construction. Scholars have conducted researches from different angles, consequently propelling the benign development of the media industry. Nevertheless, the current research relies too much on the legal framework and ignores the richness and depth of the ethical theory.

3.2 Development Trends

In the context of globalization, the boundaries of media ethics are becoming decidedly blurred. Different countries and regions have different standards of press ethics when they are all confronted with the challenges and opportunities brought by globalization. So, it is to be an important trend to enhance international cooperation and exchanges to jointly develop ethical norms applicable to global media.

4. Discussion

The discussion above reveals the importance of media ethics has for news communication as well as the challenges it faces. In the contemporary society, while pursuing news value, the media must adhere to the bottom line of ethics and ensure the authenticity, objectivity and impartiality of the report in order to maintain the credibility of the news media and the stability and harmony of the society. Otherwise, a widespread controversy would be likely to be caused. One example is the AIDS disclosure of Arthur Ashe, a famous American tennis star who learned in 1988 that he was infected with HIV during a blood transfusion during his heart surgery in 1983. Out of concern for the family's privacy and public opinion, particularly concerns about the circumstances of his daughter's upbringing, Ashe and his family chose not to make the news public. However, in April 1992, Doug Smith, a reporter working with *USA Today*, contacted Ashe to inquire about his HIV status. Despite his pleas to delay publication, the newspaper eventually published the story on April 8 under the

headline *Tennis superstar Arthur Ashe has AIDS*. Afterwards, Ashe opened up about his illness through a press conference and expressed his frustration and pain at the media's disclosure of his privacy. As expected, a debate on media ethics came afterwards immediately.

This case indicates that the media need to endeavor to strike a balance between personal privacy and the public's right to know when pursuing news value. Only in this way can the public's right to know be satisfied while maintaining social harmony and stability. In addition, with the continuous development and progress of society, media ethics will also be compelled to improve to meet the needs of the new era.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be found according to what is discussed above that media ethics have drawn wide academic attention in different times. But even so, there are still some deficiencies in related research. Therefore, relevant researches need to adapt to the development of social media and follow its contemporary trend to explore the related problems arising from globalization and technological progress.

References

[1] Drozdek, A. (2015) 'Media ethics', *International*

Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition), pp.42-47.

[2] Elahi, M. et al. (2022) 'Towards responsible media recommendation', *AI and Ethics*, 2(1), pp. 103-114.

[3] Mahoney, J., Le Louvier, K. and Lawson, D. A. E. (2022) 'Ethical considerations in social media analytics in the context of migration: lessons learned from a horizon 2020 project', *Research Ethics*, 18(3), pp. 226-240.

[4] May, J. J., Shirsat, A. R. and Angel F. González. (2022), 'Proposing a model of social media user interaction with fake news', *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 20(1), pp. 134-149.

[5] Nichols, K., and Pappas, R. (2022), 'The ethics behind social media influencers in dentistry', *Journal of the American Dental Association (1939)*, 153(10), pp. 1010-1011.

[6] Rogerson, S. (2023) 'Practical digital ethics', *ITNOW*, 65(4), pp. 54-55.

[7] Washington, A. L. et al. (2022) 'Uncoupling inequality: reflections on the ethics of benchmarks for digital media', *Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2022*, pp. 2846-2854.

[8] Weber, B. R. (2022) 'Mormon lifestyles: communicating religion and ethics in documentary media', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 37, pp. 574 - 576.