



## *Ethical and Value Controls for Media Practices in the Current Environment Variables*

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### *Abstract*

It is obvious that the ethical controls for media practices have become a pressing and foundational requirement for numerous organizations and governments, as well as for societies at large. This is due to the role that media plays at the international, regional, and local levels, especially during times of conflicts and tensions between peoples and nations. It is worth noting that the impact of media, with both its positive and negative aspects, is significant. Often, its negative effects outweigh the positives. This has prompted many professional organizations and associations to attempt to establish an ethical framework for the media and communication profession, aiming to mitigate the potential harms of media practice on audiences.

Keyword. Controls, ethics, value, practice, media, new environment..

## 1. INTRODUCTION

What poses a real challenge to the right of information, communication, and journalism is the necessity of arriving at a code of ethics for those working in interactive, electronic, or digital media. There are various aspects that can be observed in electronic media, including doubts about its credibility, the anonymity of the sources of news and published comments, the use of inappropriate language that disregards public decency, and the defamation of public figures without specific reasons. This can escalate to insulting the head of state and ridiculing religions, among other ethical principles often overlooked in the new media environment.

The success or failure of media practice in the new digital environment is a subject that involves significant debates and tensions between the wary 'technophobes' on one side and the fascinated 'technophiles' on the other. To present an objective perspective, it is certain that every medium has both enthusiastic supporters and skeptics, as was the case with television and its predecessors. Contemporary media undergoes substantial changes in infrastructure, potentially leading to a significant shift in the nature of media work in the short or medium term. Most indicators predict a positive outlook for media in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

Increased opportunities for freedom in communication and new media, the reach of modern media to a broad popular base in terms of impact (Bureau, 2009, p30), and the growing participatory role of individuals in shaping media content all contribute to this positive outlook. Additionally, the integration and connection of modern media projects with a larger, more significant political, social, and economic project, namely the society of information and knowledge, have helped mitigate challenges such as the credibility and professionalism of individually-managed journalistic data, the issue of virtual identity, and concerns related to intrusion and domination. These challenges find fertile ground in electronic spaces, necessitating a

reconsideration and reframing within the expansive world of cyberspace (Kamosh, 2016, p.203).

## **2. Controls between Morals and Values in the Mainstream Media Environment:**

### **2.1. Definition of Moral Values :**

The values are what a thing does in the status of a standard without increase or decrease. (The Encyclopedia, 2014, p.132)

The term "value" is one of the values, with the 'wa sound in arabic' hyphenated because it represents the standing or position of a thing. It is said that the value of a commodity implies uprightness and moderation, and the value of a thing indicates its straightness, and the essence of being upright is justice. As mentioned in the Quran, "And there was between that [example] a [high] standing order." The standing of a man also refers to his posture and good height. (Al-Sahhah Dictionary, 2004, p.103)

The value of a thing in the Arabic language is its worth and the value of the possession. Its price is described as the value of a person, what enhances him, and the value of so-and-so implies the stability and continuity of his affairs. (Al-Jabri, 1999, p.50)

#### **- Terminological Definition of Values:**

Values are a set of established commands and directives within a specific society and a specific period. They also represent the religious, moral, and social virtues upon which the life of the human community is based. Values are the principles, standards, or qualities considered valuable or desirable, helping to determine whether certain issues are good or bad, virtuous or immoral, correct or incorrect, useless or essential. These issues can be ideas, decisions, individuals, actions, or things." (Shannan and Hajresi, 2009, p.154)

## **2.2. Media Practice Ethics :**

Researchers have defined the ethics of the journalistic profession, with each focusing on a specific aspect. Maher Odeh Al-Shmayla defined it as "the science that addresses the duties imposed on an individual due to his practice of a specific profession. By regulating ethics, he means the set of rules that govern the behaviour of individuals belonging to regulated professions in the form of professional unions. In one phrase, professional ethics are the set of rules that define professional duties, determining the behaviour that a professional must adhere to in practicing his or her work." (Al-Shmayla and Al-Laham, 2015, p.29)

Maher Al-Shmayla emphasized that professional ethics serve as rules for regulating the behaviour of professional unions and also determine the professional duties of practitioners. As for the ethics of journalism, in socialist journalism, it was defined by "Lber Khove" as "those principles and ethical standards that have not yet been legally established but are accepted in the media and supported by public opinion and popular organizations." (Al-Shmayla and Al-Laham, 2015, p.30)

This definition considers them as ethical standards that are not legally established yet, but this has not prevented those in the media field from adopting them as a professional ethical reference. Journalistic ethics were also discussed as a "document that includes a set of principles, values, behaviours, and orientations agreed upon by a group of journalists to govern their behaviour while practicing the journalism profession in all its written, visual, and auditory specialties, in addition to new media." (Mashareqa, 2017, p.10)

## **2.3. The Professional Ethics :**

The Professional ethics, as referred to by those working in mass media, including journalism, mean that individuals should adhere to principles and fundamental values in their behaviour towards themselves, their colleagues, and their

audience. Commitment to these principles and fundamental values is a personal duty, requiring each individual to maintain ethical and upright conduct. (Al-Badi, 1997, p.208)

Dr. Samia Mohammed defines professional ethics (practice values) as "a term that refers to clear rules of professional behaviour in media institutions, as well as effective attitudes and claims related to everything appropriate in the work style and accomplishment. Examples of practice values include the ideal concept of - commitment to objectivity- in news reporting, and claims related to the most suitable technological images for achieving specific communication tasks, as well as claims related to defining standards for good television series." (Djaber, 1984, p.275)

Professional ethics, expressed through codes of honour or professional ethics, complement the rights and guarantees provided, reflecting and defining the rights and guarantees that must be provided to society or the environment in which the communication process is carried out. These codes articulate the social and ethical responsibilities of media professionals towards the society they work in, the Arab community as a whole, and the international community. It is based on the idea that while media is an individual right, it is also a right for society, and it is necessary to protect the rights of both individuals and the community. As the communication and media system matures, the professional level of those working in it rises, increasing the need to define these rules and social commitments for media professionals. (Al-Jamal, 1991, p.65)

Professional organizations are responsible for implementing these rules and monitoring compliance, even though they are voluntary rules representing a personal choice for media professionals. These organizations not only secure rights for media professionals but also establish commitments and responsibilities towards society. Such commitments are often professional and ethical in nature.

### **3. Media Practice: a General Introduction**

#### **3.1. The Concept of Practice :**

The term "practice" refers to the conduct of journalistic work in accordance with the communication policies set by communication authorities, encompassing rights, duties, and the scope of activity, along with all related political, organizational, and punitive regulations. (Al-Jamal, 1991, p.60) In the Arab world, the application of media policies is evident through the presence of media systems leaning towards a liberal approach by granting the right to practice journalism to all citizens. Others follow a socialist (centralized) approach, while some adopt a pre-censorship style by government agencies before engaging in journalistic work.

Communication policies, in their legal aspects, define the boundaries of journalistic practice, determining what is allowed and prohibited to preserve the coherence of the system, its ideology, and its components. (Jassim, 1995, p.93)

Dr. Rasem Mohammed Al-Jamal emphasizes that leaders of communication systems understand the rights of journalists and their practice as "their right to deal with reality with courtesy, and any departure from polite conduct is met with undesirable consequences." In the professional context of the profession, practical experience holds great importance for novice journalists to gain knowledge, take their first steps in the right direction, and determine the type of work or specialization they practice in that newspaper or magazine. (Jassim, 1995, p.94)

The professional knowledge of a journalist is a complex and comprehensive expertise that distinguishes it from other professions, as it is derived fundamentally from journalistic practice in all its dimensions. This practice stems from a precise understanding of the specialization, referring to the type of activity undertaken by the journalist, whether it be in news reporting, editorial work, artistic endeavours, or administrative roles, among others. It encompasses three aspects: the first relates to

personal qualities such as mentality, emotions, experience, relationships, and social dynamics. The second arises from the development of practical experience in specific journalistic activities, with expertise being built through qualitative intensification rather than quantitative accumulation in daily and continuous practice. The third involves leveraging the experiences of others, particularly those creative individuals working in journalism. (Abu Asbaa, 1995, p.84)

Therefore, we can conclude that media practice is the journalist's engagement in the media profession with all its rights and duties. Journalists acquire their expertise through two methods: academic qualification and gaining knowledge through practice and the latter involves a precise understanding of the specialization they practice.

### **3.2. Practice Determinants:**

" Practice Determinants " refer to a set of political, economic, social, and professional constraints and limitations that influence the management of media institutions in decision-making processes, whether these decisions are editorial, related to media messages, or purely administrative. (Abu Asbaa, 1995, p.84) These determinants include:

#### **1. Management Pressure:**

Management naturally represents the policy of the journalistic institution, and as it faces various pressures, it inevitably affects the performance of its employees both editorially and administratively. Therefore, the organization's own structure, the nature of relationships governing its members, the organization of the relationship between leaders and subordinates, and the quality of leadership are all crucial factors influencing the effectiveness of the media institution. (Askar, 1988, p.9)

In order to implement its policies, the management of the media institution exerts pressure on its members, adding to the pressures of journalistic work. The term "pressure" refers to "a set of physical and psychological changes that occur in an



individual and their reactions when facing environmental situations perceived as threats, and pressure occurs in situations where the individual perceives that his capabilities to cope with the requirements of the environment represent a significant burden on him." (Askar, 1988, p.10)

Researchers emphasize the importance of studying work pressure sources, categorizing them into two groups: organizational and personal. Organizational sources become evident through professional differences, such as making crucial decisions amid uncertainty, role ambiguity, role conflict, increase or decrease in role demands (referring to the lack of information needed to accomplish tasks), managerial demands to improve efficiency without laying off any employees, and employees performing tasks they cannot complete in the available time or that require high skills they lack. Additionally, being responsible for others adds another layer of work pressure, as well as the lack of promotion opportunities, non-participation in decision-making, a long administrative organizational structure, and uncomfortable or hazardous working conditions, all contribute to significant organizational pressures that impact the performance of employees in the institution. (Ghousha, 1975, p.10)

"Working conditions" refer to circumstances that can affect the level of production quality either negatively or positively. Personal sources of work pressure also play a crucial role in determining the level of stress because individuals do not respond to stressful situations in the same way. One of the most significant influences is the individual's personality type, which varies from person to person. Some individuals may be more susceptible to stress-related illnesses, such as heart diseases, while others exhibit confidence and calmness, allowing them to work moderately and exert a high degree of control over events. There are also individual differences in stress resistance, such as introverted versus extroverted personalities, and how individuals respond to stressful situations. The alignment of an individual's capabilities



with job requirements and their needs plays a role in alleviating or exacerbating work-related stress. (Askar, 1988, p.12)

Dr. Sameer Ahmed Askar identifies the effects of pressure on organizational behavior, especially when exposure to work pressure is acute and continuous. Some of these effects include: (Abu Zeid, 1978, pp. 115-116)

1. **Pressure and Performance:** As pressure decreases, individuals maintain their performance levels and are motivated to increase performance. Moderate pressure can be responsible for generating innovative activities when individuals attempt to solve difficult and stressful problems. However, at high levels of pressure, negative effects begin to appear, such as stress and dissatisfaction.
2. **Pressure and Job Turnover and Absenteeism:** There is a consistent relationship between pressure, job turnover, and absenteeism, which are considered appropriate forms of withdrawal from jobs where employees experience high levels of pressure.
3. **Aggression and Sabotage:** Severe frustration can lead to the emergence of aggressive behaviour towards individuals and objects, such as assault, verbal abuse, or machine sabotage.

In general, the management of the media institution exerts pressure on its members because "the communicator is one of the mechanisms of the media institution, and the institution's policy involves taking the main contractual terms with the communicator. This confirms complete consistency with the policy that characterizes the behaviour of the communicator, reflecting its goals, purposes, and its relationship with external forces in society. Consequently, the policy influences the determination of regulations, restrictions, publication priorities, and the selection of images that align with the policy and its goals" (Hafedh, 1997, p. 219).

#### **4. Towards a Code of Honour that Guarantees More Freedom, High-quality Performance, and the Preservation of the Media Profession in the Midst of both the Traditional and New Digital Environments.**

In our current times, the media profession suffers from manipulation, extortion, and exploitation. Everyone attempts to use, exploit, and blackmail it, often at the expense of ethics, values, and principles.

##### **4.1. What is the Meaning of the Media Code of Honour and Media Ethics?**

By this term, we mean the journalistic code of honour, which is the legal and ethical foundation necessary for a media institution. It is a tool among the tools of successful media work. Every media institution is required to clearly and precisely define its rights and duties, as well as those of the communicator, in its code of honour. The main axes of the journalistic code of honour are usually determined in the following basic areas: reliability, responsibility, ethics, objectivity, credibility, values towards customs, traditions, and minorities, respect for personal and social privacy, the right to information, and respect for the profession, defending it and protecting it from anyone who attempts to manipulate or misuse it for purposes other than the public interest.

##### **4.2. Media Institution and Code of Honour**

The media institution in society is a social entity, not merely a means to sell advertising spaces and achieve quick profits. It is not a tool for broadcasting shallow messages and programs to ensure the largest possible audience. The entire society, with its various segments and categories, expects a purposeful and responsible media message for the dissemination of culture, knowledge, authenticity, thought, and sound analysis within the framework of Arab-Islamic values, ethics, and principles. Media practice is a noble profession that must be conducted according to ethical, legal, legislative, and professional foundations. The media institution is responsible to

society and the public opinion, holding a great ethical responsibility when it magnifies certain issues and conceals others, or when it focuses on specific elements in the news over others. Deception, forgery, manipulation, concealment, and distortion are much more dangerous than any other crime because when the media institution distorts or forges facts, it manipulates the opinions and ideas of millions of people. Here lies the importance of ethics, commitment, integrity, credibility, and objectivity in media work (Qirat, 2020, website).

What we observe in the field and in daily media practice is the dominance of one of two things: either the commercial aspect, where the financial dimension, profit, and benefit prevail over the public interest, or the political aspect, where the media institution becomes the loyal and committed official spokesperson for those in power and decision-makers. In both cases, the real victims are the truth, public opinion, sound decision-making, and broad segments of society. It is worth noting that there is no inherent contradiction between commerce and media. If there are laws, regulations, and, more importantly, principles and ethics in place, the media institution can be both commercial and serve the public interest and society. This is achievable when greed and the pursuit of quick profits do not override noble goals, honourable professions, and the educational, informative, and enlightening function of the media. The media institution is not a chocolate factory or a shampoo manufacturer; it is the daily chronicler of the nation, the memory of society, and the platform for opinions, ideas, and freedoms. The journalist is the one who sets the agenda, determines priorities, and decides what is presented to the public and what is discarded. Therefore, the journalist must possess a high degree of professionalism, craftsmanship, ethics, commitment, and dedication to serving the truth (Qirat, 2020, website).

## **5. Ethical and Moral Determinants in the Interactive Media Environment:**

The overall rights enjoyed by or demanded by traditional journalists are, in one way or another, applicable to journalists working in the new electronic environment, whether they are professional, political, cultural, material, moral, or others. Journalists in the new electronic environment have the right to enjoy these rights, in addition to the rights conferred upon them by the new environment, which traditional journalists do not possess. These include the freedom of expression, the freedom to access information sources, and the right to interactive and immediate communication with their audience. However, these rights need to be formulated in the form of charters and protocols to ensure that these journalists can enjoy them (Al-Lubban, 2020, website).

In the United States, the law grants electronic journalists all the rights enjoyed by traditional journalists, with the foremost being their right to protect the confidentiality of their sources. It considers the primary mission of electronic journalists to be news dissemination, with the additional tasks of investigative and explanatory coverage of events. Therefore, it is a requirement that their main profession is journalism (Al-Lubban, 2020, website).

In addition to the aforementioned, the new environment introduces some requirements that must be articulated as rights for journalists. These include the right to maintain the confidentiality of their information, not to disclose their passwords or attempt to break them, not to track or trace their electronic movements or attempt to know the links and names of their electronic sources. They also have the right to protect their electronic devices and tools from eavesdropping, intrusion, and hacking, the right to obtain benefits to protect their data, information, and sources, the right to direct access to their sources and media without technological obstacles, the right to devise and use new methods of communication with their audience, sources, electronic and non-electronic media. They also have the right to send, receive, store, and retrieve information electronically, the right to access and utilize restricted information sources

as long as the purpose is public service, the right to professional and technological qualification enabling them to use new media effectively, the right to receive what is known as technological compensation to develop their digital skills, the right to work with advanced and modern devices, and the right to establish local and transnational professional electronic entities with legislation and charters dedicated to them, advocating for their rights, recognizing these entities, and representing them in various forums.

#### **6. What are the Thresholds that must be followed by Media Professionals in the New Interactive Environment? (The Researcher's Personal Perspective)**

From my perspective as a researcher, I believe that media professionals, in general, should adhere to the same duties applied in the traditional environment, also in the interactive environment. We explicitly acknowledge that there are challenges and regulatory barriers in implementing some of these duties. Some may take different forms, and there are still numerous issues that need clarification, explanation, and detailed elaboration on how to comply with these duties in the interactive digital environment.

Media professionals working in traditional media institutions with electronic platforms are professionally more affiliated with these institutions than with electronic entities. Therefore, they still base their professional commitments on the traditional media environment, not the electronic one, despite the changing nature of these commitments. Among these changes is the necessity to defend virtual freedom of expression, the right to engage in interactive media practice, and not infringing on the rights of other websites. This includes not hindering their work, manipulating content, spreading viruses, or sharing links that could affect their credibility and operations.

Moreover, there is an emphasis on formulating professional codes that align with the interactive nature of media work. There is also an emphasis on purifying the

profession from those who do not respect ethical guidelines, avoiding linking to their websites, refraining from infringing on the private fields of others, or tampering with them. It is crucial to refrain from exploiting the features provided by new technological environments to diminish the rights of others, harass them, or violate their privacy, and to avoid conflicts of interest, whether between private businesses and electronic media work or the misuse of the capabilities of traditional media institutions to design private media sites.

## **7. Conclusion**

Technology is just one of three circles that an online communicator should operate within: text, technology, and interaction. Marvelling at technology and its spontaneous use alone do not create professional media. In an era where citizens have become journalists, what distinguishes internet media practitioners are the traits of "professionalism". Thus, the challenge lies not in excluding or marginalizing citizen journalism, blogging, or civil journalism, but in competing with professional tools and assimilating the phenomena that have become a reality that must be addressed.

The online communicator should always remember that embracing these phenomena enhances their position, making them more credible and interesting to the public. It not only enriches dialogue but also contributes to democracy as a whole.

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