

Ethical challenges in digital journalism

A syllabus for Journalism
& Mass Communication
programmes



Erasmus+



1. Data on the programme

1.1 Field of study	Journalism / Communication and Media Studies
1.2 Recommended level [<i>Bachelor/ Masters</i>]	Bachelor
1.3 Recommended study programme/ qualification	Journalism / Mass communication

2. Data on the discipline

2.1 Name	Ethical Challenges in Digital Journalism
2.2 Recommended qualifications for the teacher [<i>practitioner, theoretician, PhD holder in a certain field of study, etc.</i>]	Academic with journalistic background
2.3 Year of study [<i>entry level/ advanced</i>]	Advanced
2.4. Evaluation type [<i>examination/ project/ portfolio</i>]	Examination

3. Preconditions (if applicable)

[Who are the intended students]

3.1 curriculum preconditions (recommended previous courses)	NA
3.2 competences preconditions	Knowledge of general ethical (and legal) issues of journalism

4. Specific abilities

[What do we want students to be able to do]

4.1. Professional competencies (job skills to be developed)	ethical journalism, social responsibility of journalism, media accountability
4.2. Transversal competencies (team work, critical thinking, global citizenship, etc.)	critical thinking, democratic values

5. Discipline's objectives

[related to developing abilities & competencies]

5.1 General objective	The overall objective of the course is that students gain knowledge about the new ethical problems linked with the digital media and journalism environment and increasing sensibility of the journalism students regarding the digital ethical challenges. The students learn the special ethical issues of the digital media, and they get examples on handling these challenges. They will become more aware of how digital technology and increased two-way engagement with audiences are changing the nature of journalistic ethical decision-making and challenging it in new ways. The significance of the ethical problems is enlightened by their technical and social background. The whole seminar is based on the analysis of relevant ethical cases.
5.2 Specific objectives <i>[Learning outcomes – observable, measurable]</i>	By the end of the semester, students in this course will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn the difference among legacy journalism, citizen journalism and activist journalism, • learn how to reach and use anonymous sources (including whistle-blowers) • understand the importance of privacy in the digital media, • learn fact checking technics, • learn the importance of the transparency of the journalistic work, • learn to moderate and respond to online comments, • know the risks of live coverage, live streaming, • learn how to refer articles published in other media outlets • identify online tools to solve ethical challenges (source verification, comment moderation, accountability measurements and the like)

6. Content

[for 12-14 weeks]

Course	Teaching methods <i>[connected to professional & transversal competencies]</i>	Observations <i>[link among proposed teaching methods and intended competences]</i>
New media, new ethics? Adapting journalism ethics to the changing media environment	Lecture and discussion	<p>change of the work of journalists in the digital era, the present media landscape</p> <p>are the ethical principles of journalism eternal?</p> <p>new ethical challenges of the new media environment</p>

		<p>concept of accountability</p> <p>state regulation vs self-regulation</p>
Who is a journalist?	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>journalism as a profession; are there objective criteria to define a journalist?</p> <p>why is it important to define "journalist" and "journalism"?</p> <p>the notion of civic journalism</p> <p>using of the content produced by citizens (citizen journalism)?</p> <p>partisan or activist journalism and impartiality: is impartiality still a journalistic value?</p> <p>Journalists on social media (personal and professional pages)</p>
Anonymity, whistleblowing	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>the value of anonymous sources</p> <p>how to check the credibility of anonymous sources?</p> <p>guarantees of the safety of whistle-blowers</p> <p>legal guarantees of the protection of information sources</p>
Cooperation between disclosure sites and journalists	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>the role of disclosure sites (like WikiLeaks) in the public sphere</p> <p>what can be learned from the WikiLeaks story?</p> <p>ethical aspects of well-known cross-border investigations (Panama Papers, Lux Leaks etc)</p>
Speed vs accuracy, speed vs fair use of rivals' results	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>risks of the high speed of information circulation</p> <p>mechanisms to safeguard the accuracy of the information</p> <p>how to handle the users' complaints?</p> <p>how to refer articles and information published by other media outlets in the sharp news competition?</p>

Risks of live coverage in the era of live streaming	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>how to prepare a live coverage to minimise the risks?</p> <p>the risks of live streaming in the social media?</p>
Fake news – a new problem?	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>fake news stories from the history of journalism</p> <p>“traditional” mechanisms of the editorial teams to avoid spreading false information</p> <p>technical and social background of the current fake news problem</p>
Fact checking in the digital media environment	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>best practices of fact checking tools and methods in the digital era</p>
Transparency of journalistic work	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>the notion and importance of transparency</p> <p>role of the journalists in the improving of media literacy</p>
The ethics of data	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>ethical use of statistic data and other data sources</p> <p>ethical issues of data visualisation</p>
Offensive comments	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>responsibility of the media outlet for the comments</p> <p>hate speech in the digital media</p> <p>how to moderate the debates</p>
Journalism as an ethical business	Lecture, discussion, case study	<p>separation of ads and news in the digital media</p> <p>clickbait and other technics for increasing the turnover</p>

7.1. Compulsory (core) bibliography

Fengler, Susanne. 2012. "From Media Self-Regulation to 'Crowd-Criticism': Media Accountability in the Digital Age." *Central European Journal of Communication* 5, no. 2: 175-89.

Foreman, Gene. 2016. *The Ethical Journalist: Making Responsible Decisions in the Digital Age*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell

High level Group on fake news and online disinformation. 2018. *A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation*. Brussels, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>

McBride, Kelly B., Rosenstiel, Thomas B. 2013. *The New Ethics of Journalism: Principles for the 21st Century*. London, New Delhi, Singapro: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Muller, Denis. 2014. *Journalism Ethics for the Digital Age*. Brunswick, London: Scribe Publications.

Simon, Joel. 2015. *The new censorship. Inside the global battle for media freedom*. New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

Zion, Lawrie, Craig, David. 2016. *Ethics for Digital Journalists: Emerging Best Practices*. New York, Oxon: Routledge

7.2. Additional bibliography

Covert Activity: the Washington Post, Edward Snowden and the National Security Agency, Knight Case Studies Initiative, Columbia University.
http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/caseconsortium/casestudies/147/casestudy/www/layout/case_id_147.html

Bardoel, Jo, and Leen d'Haenens. 2004. "Media responsibility and accountability: New conceptualizations and practices." *Communications* 29, no. 1: 5-25.

Bertrand, Claude-Jean. 2000. *Media Ethics & Accountability Systems*. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers.

Brown, Lee. 1974: *The Reluctant Reformation: On Criticizing the Press in America*. New York: David McKay.

Ess, Charles. 2009. *Digital Media Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fengler, Susanne, Tobias Eberwein, Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Colin Porlezza, and Stephan Russ-Mohl. eds. 2014. *Journalists and Media Accountability. An International Study of News People in the Digital Age*. New York: Peter Lang.

Friend, Cecilia and Jane Singer. 2007. *Online Journalism Ethics: Traditions and Transitions*. Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe.

McQuail, Denis. 2003. *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication*. New York: Oxford University Press.

MediaAcT. 2013. *European Policy Brief*.
http://www.mediaact.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/policy_brief3_01.pdf.

NPR Ethics Handbook. 2012. <http://ethics.npr.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/NPR-Ethics-Handbook-5.2.2012-Final-Edition.pdf>

Russ-Mohl, Stephan. 2017. *Die informierte Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde: Warum die Digitalisierung unsere Demokratie gefährdet*. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag

Ward, Stephen J. A. 2010. *Ethics for the New Investigative Newsroom*.
https://www.wisconsinwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Roundtable-Report_April-26-2010.pdf

Wyatt, Wendy N. ed. 2014. *The Ethics of Journalism. Individual, institutional and cultural influences*. London: I.B. Tauris

8. How is the discipline connected to the expectations of the professional /epistemic community

The digital media, the social media, the mobile technologies changed the working conditions of journalists and traditional media outlets significantly. The speed of the information's spreading, the amount of available data and sources, the secure technologies of anonymous data leaking, the direct user feedbacks in the comment section, the live streaming are huge possibilities for the high-quality journalism, but in the same time all of these factors conceal huge risks. The new media landscape raises several new ethical questions that must be answered in an even more competitive and distrustful environment.

9. How is the discipline connected to the rest of the journalistic / communication studies curriculum

The course is based on the general ethical and legal knowledge of the students, and is connected to all other courses dealing with the new skills of journalism. The learned ethical aspects should be used on the courses practical dealing with the journalistic profession and practice.



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