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Chapter 3

Social Media: A Turning Point into Global Journalism Identity and Ethics

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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Abstract

Social media are growing drastically representing a further step in the ongoing deterioration of journalism profession and ethics. The lines between professional journalists and amateurs have been blurred; consequently, the structure of news media has substantially changed affecting the core traits of the profession and its ethics. This phenomenon has challenged the already disputed concepts of journalism as profession and journalists as professionals. While this challenge is tremendous, research on its implications to journalism identity and ethics is scant. The existing literature focuses on new or digital media usage, newsgathering, production, dissemination, and consumption, with little emphasis on journalism ethics or the profession itself. This chapter seeks to examine how social media contribute to the ethical dilemmas off and online journalism encounter and how this transformation puts the profession at risk.

Keywords: social media, digital communication technologies, global journalism ethics, journalism profession

1. Introduction

It has only been about 20 years that news has been contextualized, gathered, disseminated, and consumed in four distinct media outlets—print, radio, television, and online [1]. These media have diverse environments in terms of ways of production, distribution, and consumption, which ultimately create different professional identities and perceived credibility among audiences [1]. The four different news media environments, though, have distinct features; all share common similarities of journalism profession. Journalism as profession is operated under hierarchical organizational settings, within specific constrains and ethical standards [2]. Due to the

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digital technologies of the social media or social networks platforms, journalism profession as we know it has entered a very different phase hinges on the revolution of convergence. Media convergence is not just a matter of technology merging; it is an endless process with comprehensive and substantial implications on every aspect of journalism culture including producers, consumers, distribution of power, and influence. As Henry Jenkins argues, convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process ([3], p. 37).

The main two partners of the convergence process—producers and consumers—compete to maximize their benefits and expand their control over the flow of news and information. Both have aims and motives that pull them to share the same media platforms, yet with different purposes. As Jenkins claims, news media organizations try to speed the flow of content across delivery channels to enlarge revenue opportunities, expand markets, and enhance viewer commitments. On the other hand, citizens struggle to control the flow of news and information [3]. The two partners are trying to win the battle of autonomy, independence, power, and revenues. In this battle, citizens who are free from the journalistic routine and constrains of news media organizations have become much more active in producing and distributing news and views. At the same time, news media organizations lack the prestige, power, and influence that were once a hallmark of journalism. Audiences are universally migrating away from mainstream traditional journalism and seeking for news and content available at social media platforms [4].

The resulting explosion of the network of "mass self-communicators" [5] has led to a wealth of news and information content online that comes from outside the walls, or firewalls, of professional journalism organizations. Citizens of social media not otherwise employed as journalists find themselves with access to tools for producing, recording, and sharing text, photos, video, audio, and other forms of content more quickly and easily than ever before [6]. In this battle, convergence, interactivity, customization of content, and hypertextuality along with the widespread penetration and availability of new technological "tools of the trade" are redefining journalism, how it is carried out, and, of course, who is a journalist; meanwhile, it raises new ethical dilemmas [6].

Social media as used in this chapter is a "catch-all term" referring to a wide variety of web-related communication platforms utilized by unprofessional and unemployed citizens who use blogs, wikis, social networking, and all other social media forms for the purpose of sharing news and views on unlimited topics. For the purpose of operationalization and clarification, Journalism here refers to two different types: (1) offline or traditional journalism, namely newspapers, magazines, radio, and television news and (2) online or digital journalism including both the online versions of traditional journalism and "only online news sites" that report on top news stories and that do not have offline version platforms. The distinct feature of both off and online journalism is that it is operated by full- or part-time journalists who mainly earn their life by working in news media organizations. On the other hand, social media include social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, Ozone, and RenRen), online discussion forums, content-sharing sites (such as You Tube), and microblogging sites (such as Twitter or Sina Weibo), in addition to the search engines (such as

Google, Yahoo, Bin, or Baidu) [7]. Social media are platforms driven by citizens who are not specialized in journalism. However, this distinction does not mean that professional journalists do not use social media—as citizens—to produce, disseminate, and consume news. One cannot exclude them from being part of social media platform community, but in this case, they do not represent their organizations, instead, they express their own views, interests, and attitudes that have no connection and implication with their employers.

The importance of this chapter stems from two facts: (1) The literature dealing specifically with the ways in which social media affect ethics and moral decision-making in off and online journalism is scarce. Earlier and current studies have investigated the impact of social media from different angles using different methods; however, social media and journalism ethics studies are understudied [8]. (2) News media organizations at present time are least trusted institutions. Trust in news is declining overtime, and the percent of people who worry about false information or fake news being used as a weapon is 70% of the total population examined in Edelman Trust Barometer of 2018 [7]. Similarly, Meyer finds that traditional journalism is no longer perceived as either credible or trustworthy source of news and information [9]. Hence, the profession experiences a real threat where borders that protect those who work inside the house of journalism and exclude those who are invading it from outside are crashed. This chapter seeks to provide a conceptual groundwork for future empirical studies of the notions of professionalism and journalism ethics as they relate to the emergence of social media and as they are closely related. Ethical issues controversy lies at the core of the debate of journalism profession. The key issue this chapter addresses is the implications of social media platforms to both journalism professionalism and ethics.

2. Structural digital transformation and journalism profession

Sociologist William Dutton at the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) argues that we are witnessing the emergence of powerful new news platforms and networks, which act independently and out of control of the traditional mainstream media. Dutton has termed these powerful platforms as the "Fifth Estate" that already undermined and worked beyond the boundaries of existing news media organizations [10]. Dutton believes that the Fifth Estate could be as important to the twenty-first century as the Fourth Estate has been since the eighteenth. He argues that in the twenty-first century, a new institution is emerging with some characteristics similar to the Fourth Estate, but with sufficiently and reasonably distinctive and important features to warrant its recognition and existence as a new separate Fifth Estate. Such network is opening new ways of enhancing the accountability of political organizations, news media organizations, and other loci of power and influence [10].

In response to the emergence of the Fifth Estate, mainstream news media organizations attempted to understand and identify the technical and social challenges raised by the rapid growth of this phenomenon. Emphasis was given to a number of practical issues: editorial control, scalability, ownership of intellectual property, the blurring of professional and

personal spheres, as well as concerns about the representative or unrepresentative nature of the networks seeking for recognition [11]. It is obvious that strategic dilemmas as identified by the mainstream media are not directly or indirectly related to journalism ethics that have been, unfortunately, pushed to the backstage. Nearly all researches were conducted in this area with specific explicit or implicit purpose to examine the usage, functions, roles, and effects of social networks in comparison to traditional media [8].

In this context, I argue that the most critical issue social media have brought is the ethical challenges and its impact on the decline of trust in the profession and journalists as professionals. If readers, listeners, and viewers distrust social media platforms, this negative attitude is likely to be extended to other journalism platforms whether they are off or online. This is why the profession as a whole is at risk. Symptoms of the crisis are numerous, among which are decline of news media audiences, circulation, and advertising revenues. The ongoing decline of journalists' jobs, the declining interest among journalism students to enter media job market [12], and the shutting down of several news media institutions across the world are also obvious indicators of the crisis. Surveys of journalists show that the numbers of full-time journalists working for mainstream news media in the United States, for example, have declined substantially from about 122,000 in 1992 to about 116,000 in 2002 and even more so from 2002 to 2013 [13]. This situation is threatening the overall functions and roles of journalism in the society as a social institution responsible for providing accurate, fair, honest, objective, and comprehensive account of daily events. In fact, these new platforms, whether we agree or disagree, like or dislike, have become an alternative source for news and views especially for youth, minorities, activists, and even majorities especially in countries where mainstream news media are affiliated to and controlled by the governments.

Social media watch the traditional watchdog, checking its legitimacy and credibility, questioning its accuracy and standards, and forcing a new transparency [14]. However, the other side of the coin bears misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. The current literature underestimates and overlooks the negative side of social media especially its implications to the profession and its core; the ethics. Social networks enable both grassroots and elites to bypass mainstream news media and take their message—unmediated—to their supporters or followers. In addition, "disinformation has become a truly global problem, extending beyond the political sphere to all aspects of information, including climate change, entertainment and many other issues" [14]. The key characteristics of the social media as alternative for off and online journalism make it a double-edged sword. In one hand, it is based on the technology of freedom that enhances transparency, democracy, and personal interests. Social media empower the marginalized people who suffered from inability to express their opinions and voice their interests in the mainstream news media due to the structure of power in a given society. In contrast, social media users are, by traditional journalism criteria, not responsible professionals or communicators who can be held accountable. Social media are free, albeit irresponsible, and unaccountable journalism platforms, hence it is powerful tool to damage and corrupt. Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely. Social media citizens (producers and consumers) are free from the institutional hierarchies, constrains, and regulations of off and online journalism. While freedom reinforces self-personal interests, lack of responsibility and accountability works against the ethical foundations on which the

profession of journalism has been founded since its establishment five centuries ago. Freedom has been shifted from the owners and journalists of small number of news media institutions to all people. In this replacement process, new owners of freedom are not constrained by either laws or ethics that govern the environment of old owners.

In this context, it is important to highlight the statement made by Guy Berger, UNESCO Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development in his introduction to the book of "Journalism, Fake News and Misinformation." Berger argues that disinformation is a social media phenomenon that powerful actors—and I can add—antitransparency and dictators—today are exploiting to clamp down on the news media. As a result, new and rigorous laws are scapegoating the "easy" targets of news media institutions or lumping them into broad new regulations, which mainly intend to censor and restrict off and online journalism, but which restrict all social media platforms as well [15]. This is not just an apprehension, but a reality where governments in most Arab countries seize the opportunity of people complains, to tailor the laws that undermine the right of communication, the right of information access, and the well-established right of freedom of expression. In today's context of disinformation and misinformation, Berger argues that the ultimate risk is not only unjustifiable regulation of journalism, but that public may also come to disbelieve all content—including journalism [15]. Having said this, the key challenge faced by journalism educators, professionals, policy makers, and civil society organizations is how to minimize or entirely erode the corrupt side of social media platforms mainly the unethical outcomes (i.e. misinformation, disinformation, fake news, propaganda, brainwashing) without limiting the communication rights of citizens and professional journalists. I, therefore, agree with Jane Singer who argues that the fundamental challenge that social media platforms pose for journalists in off and online journalism is not about money or even job security. It is about the notion of professionalism [16]. However, I may disagree on how Singer defines "online journalists." For this chapter, the source of the threat is related to the citizens or social networkers, who are not part of the journalism profession. Websites or online versions of traditional journalism as well as the online-only news sites that embrace professional journalists constitute a part of the professional camp of journalism. They are supposed to be employed by news media organizations, have an adequate body of knowledge and training, committed to the code of ethics, and at the same time struggle to safeguard the profession from government and commercial interventions to maintain their autonomy.

The view of Larson [23] for the profession is more or less applicable to online journalists whose job is mainly producing and disseminating news and views. Larsen sees that any profession has a sense of identity that exists among its members. Therefore, professions "tend to become real communities, whose members share an enduring relationship, an identity, individual and group obligations, specific interests and general loyalties" (p. x). However, it is a fact that there is no profession that meets these criteria perfectly; doctors, for example, have lost the autonomy of private practice as they have become employees of corporate healthcare providers [17]. This debate raises an important question of whether journalism—under the explosion of social networks—is a profession sufficiently able to meet the reasonable requirements of professionalism itself as an ideological construct [18]. A question that we need to discuss in brief. Doubts about journalism as a profession date to at least to the start

of the twentieth century, when Joseph Pulitzer proposed that journalists should receive regular education and training to acquire and improve their social standing [19]. In this regard, Weaver and his colleagues carried out several cross-national surveys among journalists and found that disagreement prevails among journalists of the world on professional norms and values to the extent that they cannot claim the emergence of "universal occupational standards" in journalism [20]. Other scholars have engaged with this question to identify the common grounds that may shape a distinct ideological occupation of journalism. Shoemaker and Reese [21] after examining the issue conclude that though journalists adhere to similar journalistic values and norms, they apply it differently in different cultural contexts [21]. For me, it would be naïve to assume the existence of such occupational ideology among all journalists serving in different cultures across the world, especially in this liquid phase of news production without empirical investigations to examine how much journalists believe in similar occupational ideology.

However, much of the research on professionalism centers on attributes theory, which identifies particular traits for a profession. The set of attributes vary from one study to another; yet, most studies focused on the following attributes: (1) The occupation is organized around a body of knowledge or specialized technique. (2) Members of the occupation have considerable autonomy to conduct their work. (3) Members of the occupation are willing to put public service ahead of personal and economic gain. (4) The occupation has an established professional culture to promote its values, norms, and symbols. (5) The occupation socializes its members through education and training. (6) Members of the occupation produce an unstandardized product. (7) The occupation is usually lifelong and terminal [22]. Without doubt, none of these attributes is applicable to social media citizens and it barely describes off and online journalists nowadays as will be shown later. This judgment is supported by several studies that document the failure of off and online journalism in serving objectively, independently, and as public service-oriented institutions.

Attributes theory of professionalism has experienced severe criticism, which is beyond the limit of this chapter. Yet, the three dimensions for professionalism theory: cognitive, normative, and evaluative seem more relevant to the current discussion. A cognitive dimension requires a specific body of knowledge and techniques that professionals employ while they perform their tasks. A normative dimension provides the ethical framework that justifies the privilege of self-regulation that society awards them. The evaluative dimension indirectly highlights the significance of the profession, its autonomy, and prestige [23]. Jane Singer's analysis of the applicability of the three general dimensions of the profession to journalism seems important. She claims that the cognitive dimension, involving a core body of knowledge and techniques possessed by professionals, is problematic. If we try to apply this dimension to journalism, we will find that journalists have never had a shared approved knowledge base in the way that doctors or lawyers have. In all Arab countries, for example, the majority of old generations of journalists have never obtained bachelor degree in journalism. However, this phenomenon has gradually disappeared under the restrictions and regulations of press syndicates. In the United States, the vast majority (82%) of contemporary journalists are college graduates—but at least as of the early 1990s, barely half of those

graduates (56%) had majored in journalism or any other communication-related area [13]. Journalism's strongest claim to professional status as Singer argues is the normative dimension. Safeguarded by the First Amendment, US journalists have long claimed to provide a public service—not just to help individuals but also to help democratic society as a whole [16].

This normative dimension is not without criticism; history tells us, at least in most developing countries, that the constitutional articles do not represent an obligatory procedure in several countries. The applicability of such constitutional articles and international conventions does not serve well as a benchmark for the normative dimension of journalism profession. Constitutions of all Arab countries, for example, stipulate that journalism is free profession to serve public interest, to watch policy makers, and to enhance democracy, good governance, and to fight corruption. Even though none of these countries enjoys the privilege of "free press category" as identified by all Freedom House reports since its establishment in early 1990s right now [24]. With regard to the third dimension of journalism, which is its autonomy and prestige, it is enough to refer to the report of Edelman Trust Barometer of 2018 mentioned earlier in this chapter indicating that 70% of the total population view journalism as fake, disinformation, and misinformation. Journalists' professional autonomy also as Hardt cited in Dickinson and Bigi [25] has been weakened due to the impact of new production technologies that eventually threaten the news output itself. His findings support the notion that new technologies are likely to have different impacts in different contexts as they are likely to be adopted in diverse ways [25].

Professional autonomy as a cornerstone defining journalism profession can provide a good explanation of why social networks are threatening journalists and the profession. Professional autonomy problem, I argue, is the main cause for the expansion of social network platforms that, in turn, deepen the problem as it have taken over the authority and control of off and online journalists. Historically, nearly all news media organizations in Western and Eastern countries were either owned by or affiliated to political parties. Gradually and after the Second World War, newspapers liberated themselves from party ties and declared themselves independent actors. Despite this liberation, most news media still take an ideological standpoint such as liberal, conservative, or social-liberal that will color both opinion and news pages [26]. There is no doubt that when journalism institutions are owned and operated under the tight control of the governments, the decision of selecting the news stories and how they are covered is not professional. In such cases, the governments set the news media agenda and use journalists as spokespersons. The pioneering "Functional Analysis of Mass Communication" developed by Wright [27] proves that news media largely reproduce the existing social order. Subsequent studies for five decades of classical-to-neo-functionalist evolution have revisited, criticized, and refined Wright's model but have settled on the conclusion that news media are not autonomous, journalists are not free in their daily judgment, and that journalism tends to reflect the political structure more than the individual or news media independent judgment [28]. Since news media are dependent to governments and political systems, journalists have weak or no voice on how news are contextualized, gathered, and disseminated. According to Bennett's first formulation of indexing theory, news is formulated as a dependent variable of

governmental discursive structures [29]. However, if the dominant power in the inner circles of the government is characterized by plurality, diversity, and opposing views, then the voices in news stories will be varied. This is what Bennett and his colleagues have provided in their revision of the original indexing theory to reflect a particular, not universal, relations between press and USA government during Bush years (from the Iraq war to Hurricane Katrina [30]. Literature review suggests that journalists' autonomy is a matter of negotiation between different layers of influences. It is constrained at higher levels of politics, economy, and organization of news media; then negotiated at the editorial level; and finally exercised at the level of practice [31].

Journalists' autonomy, I argue, shapes the core of journalism profession and the most important strategy in the fight against the threat of social media platforms. Yet, this does not mean that autonomous journalists enjoy freedom without responsibility. As Kant suggests, autonomy is the product of rationality that enables man to impose moral laws on himself, and it is this ability to legislate ourselves that binds us to these laws. Hence, autonomous individuals are bounded together in a social setting by morals [31]. This double meaning of autonomy makes it the cornerstone of journalism profession. In addition, the holistic vision of this concept must link it to the type of knowledge that enables journalists to take the right decision. As Susan Shell argues in today's liberal world, the term "autonomy" both describes a fact—the ability to choose and suggests a right—the right to exercise that ability without external interference, either by overt force or by lack of truthful information. Autonomy, so understood, as both a quality that a self must minimally possess to be a self at all and one that all (adult) selves are presumed to insist on or deserve ([32], p. 1). Autonomy in one of its aspects means occupational control over who enters the field and the grounds for expertise. At the same time, it means a process of self-regulation, which gives the public a positive sign of good governance.

Professional journalists everywhere claim that they are abided by a universal code of ethics. Consequently, professionalism is the concept that renders autonomy [33]. As journalism is not fully a profession, in the sense that its professionals may not have a universal type and amount of knowledge in comparison to medicine, law, or engineering; for example, news media organizations are relatively weak. They have low entry barriers, and its options for sanctions are few; thus, the autonomy of the individual journalist represents unwarranted thing—the potential power of which warrants some levels of control [31]. In an empirical study of journalists' perception in 18 countries for professional autonomy, Zvi Reich and Thomas Hanitzsch find autonomy to be restricted on two levels—external and internal. The external restrictions refer to all forces restricting the political autonomy of the news organization, including state censorship and ideology, economy, legislation, and regulation. Internal restrictions relate to force and pressure rooted inside the news media organizations [34]. In his global survey of journalists across the world and inconsistent with this result, David Weaver concludes that majority of journalists are not only unhappy about how free journalists are in their work, but also they perceive large gaps between the ideal of autonomy and the actual freedoms they practice [35].

Autonomy problems, in fact, help us understand how and why social media platforms considerably influence the profession of journalism, be it off or online. Arguably, social media or citizen journalism began as a direct and determined response to the perceived weaknesses of mainstream journalistic professional autonomy. The first Indymedia site was established to cover the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, and the political protests surrounding it, which became known as the "Battle of Seattle." Activists who anticipated that mainstream media coverage of their protests would be strongly biased toward portraying them as criminals took matters into their own hands by publishing their own, alternative text, audio, and video reports from the protests through new digital publishing platform of the Web [36]. Inception of social platforms as shown in the "Battle of Seattle" is rooted in the failure of journalism industry to reflect an independent coverage of a controversial event as well as the inherent privileges of the new digital platforms. Technology has played an important role as disruptor and enabler in these developments. First, the rise of the Internet as a popular medium has led to a substantial increase in available channels for information and entertainment. Second, the proliferation of possible channels for news content undermined the attractiveness of the journalistic product, leading to a continuation of decline in audiences and revenues. Third, decline of audiences and revenues, in turn, enforces news media organization to accept both commercial and political funding and interventions, which eventually undermines journalistic autonomy [36].

The ultimate result of this cycle of effects is the decline of trust in journalism profession as a whole. Historical roots of the social media provide an evidence that the awareness of citizens for the unfair alliance between traditional news media and governments was the main cause behind inception of this phenomenon. If audiences perceive off and online journalists as fair, objective, and autonomous, they will trust them and migration to alternative platforms will be at its lowest rate. Scott Gant, 2007 in his book "We are All Journalists Now," explicitly claims: the mainstream media neglect much of what is worth knowing and worth thinking about. Now, with the rise of social media platform, many more people are passing on their observations and ideas, playing a role previously occupied only by members of the institutional journalism ([37], p. 45). Further, media criticism has become less an organizational activity and more of a practice embedded in the social media platforms. One of the most important consequences of social media is the structure of accountability it provides for traditional "professional" media [38].

Social media platforms have a distinct feature by the direct relationship between news producers and consumers, and no editors are currently served as mediators in this relationship [54]. The collapse of gatekeeping represents a direct attack on the elites (journalists, policy experts, public officials, academics, etc.) who have operated as the mediators and representatives of social and political meaning under the social responsibility theory. At the same time, citizens have become independent and free producers and consumers of political and social meaning they construct out of the mix of mediated narratives they are presented [39]. The collapse of gatekeeping has shifted the power and influence from the hands of a small number of journalists to all citizens who are capable to manage the process

of newsgathering and dissemination. In practical terms, journalists lost the monopoly of gathering, handling, and disseminating news and information. Furthermore, any institution can directly contact its public without the traditional mediation of journalists, the dominant rule in the last three decades ago [40]. Gatekeeping as a process of ensuring comprehensive and fair coverage, therefore, is no longer strictly necessary; the gates have multiplied beyond all control [41].

Given the previous discussion, journalism educators and professionals cannot ignore the considerable impact of social media platforms. It is evident that such platforms have been increasingly blurring the boundaries between news media organizations' websites, the blogs, and collaborative spaces of citizen journalists. The blurring of lines can be observed in the metaphors of dialog professional journalists and journalism educators use to define "good" journalism practice [36]. In response to this reality, a recognition that the already weakened entry barriers to the profession has become more lenient than before and that control over journalists whether through the organizational constrains or the code of ethics has become more weaker and negotiation over what is journalism and what is journalist has become more transparent. Two research trends arise: The first is whether journalists and journalism students see it as an open, collaborative, and/or strict and closed profession. The second relates to the ways social media redefine practices, ethics, and identity of journalism profession [42]. In her study on renegotiating the journalism profession in the era of social media, Jaana Hujanen concludes that ideals and practices governing journalism are being revisited by journalism students in terms of the challenges and opportunities that social media and citizen journalism offer [42]. Similarly, the Project for Excellence in Journalism study found that both the journalists and their publics are prepared to accept a new different vision of journalism [4] in which the key function of gatekeeping of traditional mainstream journalism is no longer exist [43].

The aforementioned discussion demonstrates that the ills of off and online journalism throughout the world are partly responsible for the appearance and growth of social media. The tight restrictions under which professional journalists operate give rise to a new digital alternative empowered by freedom without both responsibility and accountability and usually without sufficient knowledge and expertise that guarantee rational judgments. Thus, the problem is not with citizen journalists who exercise too much autonomy but with professionals who practice too little autonomy. This in turn directs our attention to many important questions that need more exploration. How can we understand the phenomenon of citizen journalism? Is it without boundaries or is it without ethics? What makes it persistent? More importantly, what are the factors behind its expansion and dominance to the extent that it has become a real threat to the existence of professional journalism? The answer comes from the sociological theory of civil society developed by Jeffery Alexander in his book "Civil Sphere" in which he describes civil society as a sphere that is analytically autonomous, empirically differentiated, and morally more universalistic visa-vis the state, the economy, and from other social spheres and institutions as well [44]. Alexander argues that it is the civil sphere of justice that established the democratic societies. Justice fulfills collective obligations while at the same time safeguarding individual autonomy. He emphasizes the strong relationship between civil sphere and democracy and the freedom that embraces political and cultural spheres [44].

The central theme of Alexander's theory is of great value for our discussion of the challenges social networks impose for off and online journalism. Alexander sees that power and self-interest are not the only interest that shape societies and that ideal of community and justice, integration, and feeling for others are important. This solidarity is possible because people are oriented not only to the here and to now but also to the ideal, to the transcendent, to what they hope will be the everlasting. Alexander argues that the discourses and institutions of civil society go beyond the social restrictions of daily life, providing more universalistic civil codes for democratic critique, action, and reform. This autonomy from political and economic power is due to the fact that social solidarity grows from a symbolic structure deeply rooted in the core of social life [44]. Social media citizens are integral part of the civil sphere in which they express their views and attitudes free from the boundaries of journalistic institutions. They are part of the Internet virtual community that has its own language, cultural, rituals, and sometimes ethical or unethical practices. Scholars of communication are invited to examine the ideals and norms that constitute the behavior of social media community globally and locally with special emphasis on its implication to the current debate of what is journalism and who is a journalist. The central issues are (1) Whether the communicative behavior of social media citizens satisfies unmet needs that off and online journalists are supposed to meet (2) To what extent the content of social media platforms is viewed by Internet users as a real substitute for off and online journalism and why (3) To what extent freedom and autonomy social media platforms experience hinder or enhance its potential role to protect an independent civil sphere (4) What institutional changes off and online journalism have to experience in order to meet the challenges posed by social media platforms.

Given the challenges posed by social media, developers of journalism education programs everywhere may need to decide on choosing between the convergence-oriented curriculum or the individual courses or tracks.

The previous discussions and questions lend support to my argument that if off and online journalism institutions work on the principles of open and ethical participatory publishing, allowing their audiences freedom of interaction, and their journalists' full autonomy to decide on what and how news stories are published, social media platform threat will be gradually marginalized. In Internet environment characterized by the fast growth and penetration of distrusted online social platforms, what matters is not the amount and speed of news but its accuracy that helps inform, enlighten and empower the recipients and the society. What matters is the outcome, not the output. Social media from this perspective should be seen as an opportunity not a threat for mainstream news media organizations.

3. Social media and global journalism ethics

Obviously, unethical issues of traditional journalism are not exclusively related to or started with the introduction of social media platforms. Literature documented the failure of mainstream news media in meeting the universal standards of ethics [45]. Yet, the problem has

been intensified in the age of Internet in unprecedented way. Social media platforms challenge the essence of the profession and attack its ideals and norms as they are occupied by gossip, rumors, fake identities, and e-commercial activities [46]. The emergence of unlimited online communities interested in countless number of topics and interests, with and without any commitment to laws and ethics, brought endless troubles for the already troubled and disputed profession like journalism [47]. I cannot ignore the fact that these online communities help attain the fundamental function of the autonomous public sphere as stated by Jürgen Habermas [48]. There is no doubt that this new phenomenon has positively promoted the civil sphere; meanwhile, it comes at the expense of quality of journalism as it blurred the lines between professional and non-professional journalistic work [49]. The lack of reliable institutional and professional standards in addition to lack of experience, training, and education raises the question of what is journalism and who is the journalist in this new flux environment [47]. Here, one has to raise the question of whether the social media platforms have added to or extracted from the normative ideals of traditional journalism. Evidence show that, unfortunately, this new phenomenon has undermined the basic role of journalism. In democratic societies, the news media organizations fulfill two functions. First, they inform the public and serve as an open platform for deliberation through providing all opinions available. Second, they scrutinize those who are in power and watch their mismanagement [50]. To perform these duties properly, news media, Asp argues, should be fair to represent all partners involved in the news stories, informative to supply up-to-date accurate information, and finally serve as watchdog to hold powerful public figures accountable [50]. These ideals linked journalism to the universal value of objectivity where journalists are impartial, detached, or nonpartisan [51]. Without good and reliable information, citizens struggle to engage in a democratic system of governance, as evidenced by falling voter participation both during and after elections.

The role of journalism as watchdog to hold public officials accountable has been shifted to social media platforms, where anyone can be a watchdog to scrutinize the mismanagement and misbehavior of all in power. As Singer argues, anyone can publish anything with virtual impunity; moreover, the publisher can choose to remain anonymous. On the other hand, the two-way or multiple ways of communication encourage interaction and enhance democracy [52]. Singer's claim of supporting democracy is in fact unsupported by empirical evidence. What is more realistic is that, though information and interaction increased in terms of quantity, scope, and speed, its low quality impedes its potential role in fostering democracy. Existing literature points to the fact that despite the current global society is flooded by information through social media platforms and news media organizations, democracy is not being well served. Political participation is being deteriorated in Western and non-Western democracies. In contrast to the expectations of the optimistic view, the most obvious impact of social media upon democracy has been its disruptive capacity for traditional political practices and institutions [53]. In other words, disinformation, misinformation, and fake news of social media platforms cannot contribute to creating the informed citizen; rather it converts him to be apathetic, inactive with no or little political efficacy. In his review of the contemporary history of digital journalism, Ben Scott points to the crisis

created by the new social media platforms. Rather than being the rescue for journalism by restoring a public service mission to create a better civic life, he concludes that these platforms are steps in the continuous deterioration of journalistic quality and democratic values [54].

Practicing freedom in the absence of responsibility either from inside the individual, organization, or society resulted in proliferation of unethical acts that not only limit the power of these platforms but also endanger off and online journalism as well. Perlmutter and Schoen, 2007 listed a number of unethical problems of social media platforms as follows:

- lack of fact-checking and editorial oversight;
- lack of logical coverage of topics;
- rumors and lies dissemination;
- privacy invasion;
- plagiarism and copyright violations;
- lack of accountability; and
- deception, manipulative practices, and undisclosed conflicts of interest [55].

Among the ethical problems of social media platforms is the use of hyperlinks that allow journalists to feed their stories with a wealth of information [56], and while enriching the news, it makes it difficult to identify the responsible person in case of ethics violation [57]. This is simply because the content is changing every second to the extent that accurate, fair, complete, and balanced coverage of any event would be impossible [57]. The immediacy brought by the social media platforms, where everyone is a potential publisher, allows for even less deliberation by the journalist and editor who try to compete with social media platforms [58]. This has created a verification problem because content can be changed, manipulated, or removed out of context from the original [59]. Furthermore, the acceleration of the news cycle has raised concerns about the erosion of the discipline of verification among journalists themselves [60]. The verification problem, in turn, negatively affected sources and message credibility that has been the asset of journalism. Credibility has been connected theoretically and empirically with perception of trustworthiness and expertise. It has been measured with survey research asking the public to report their perception about bias, trust, fairness, and accuracy [61]. The erosion of credibility of social media platforms was explicitly stated in the call of the Vice President of European Commission Frans Timmermans who said: We live in an era where the flow of information, disinformation, and misinformation has become almost overwhelming. That is why we need to empower our citizens with the mechanisms to identify fake news and check accuracy of content they receive [62]. The structural characteristic of social media platforms allows its users to be anonymous. They can transfer information to others without specific identity. Moreover, someone may take someone else's words and

modify or change them or grasp someone else's identity and disseminate information and news as if they were belong to the other. The communication system of social networks is susceptible to disruption. Individuals are more likely to behave in undesirable ways when they are anonymous [63].

In this context, it is worth to emphasize the notion that social media fake news and unethical behavior can be an opportunity for journalism credibility. The ethics collapse is seen by Charlie Beckett, a professor from the London School of Economics, as a wake-up call for off and online journalism to be more transparent, relevant, and to add value to people's lives [64]. In face of crisis of "information disorder and the unethical public relations communications," ethical journalism should remain as the central pillar of a sustainable model of practice even while fighting financial and trust crises [14]. The journalist no longer has much if any control over what content people use, nor what items they think are important. As a result, the influence of off and online journalism in setting the agenda of the publics and in shaping the political life, in general, is being weakened. In such an open and overcrowded media environment, the mission of the journalists has to be shifted from being information disseminator to an emphasis on ethics [52].

One of the explanation for the discrepancy between off and online journalism in one hand and social media platforms on the other hand in terms of amount and type of ethics violations could be found in Shoemaker and Reese's Hierarchy of Influences model. The model posits that constraints on traditional media content occur at five different levels: the individual, the routine, the organizational, the extra media, and the ideological level [65]. Research has shown that off and online journalism are constrained by the five layers of constrains, and therefore, they tend to be relatively ethical even if not independent. News is detached from journalists' interpretations. Mainstream news media journalists are observers rather than interpreters. Social media platforms, in contrast, are free from the five layers of constrains and thereby there is no separation between news and information they constantly provide and their own interpretations [66]. Hence, all sampled guidelines examined in a number of studies framed social media as risky and dangerous tools. News media institutions also revealed their anxiety about their journalists' uses of the social media platforms [67]. Similarly, the Social Media Today report suggests that 49% of people in the United States have heard breaking news via social media that turned out to be false [68].

4. Conclusion

The initial step to examine the implications of social media platforms for global Journalism ethics is to recognize the fact that journalism ethics entered as Stephen Ward puts it in its fifth stage, a stage of overlapped media where communications technology blurred the boundaries between traditional mainstream news media and social media platforms [69]. Publics at this new stage access news and views from multiple sources, some of which are offline, some are online—extended version of offline copies, the third category are purely online with no affiliation to the profession, that is social media or citizen journalism platforms. Historically,

ethics was developed for a journalism that reports locally to address local public based on the nation-state borders. This logic is no longer exists where journalism has become global in terms of technology, geography, cultures, identities, and interests. Due to this transformation, several studies during the last decade tried to expand the conceptual and empirical base of journalism ethics as a discipline [69]. Due to globalization of communication technologies, the society to which journalists now have to be accountable is not as easily defined as before three decades ago. News media organizations are now invading the four corners of the globe [70].

The core question here is: Should ethical values for off and online journalism be seen as particular to the sociocultural context in which journalism operates, or are there universal values that could guide journalists around the world irrespective of their cultures and locations? [71]. Social media platforms whether we consider them as communication technologies or different ways of communication provide the practical need to think about a model of journalism ethics that transcends geography and indigenous cultures and that considers what is common among all civilizations and cultures. One implication of social media platforms is that media scholars and university professors should "de-Westernize" journalism ethics [69]. In the sense that centrality of Western model of journalism ethics should be questioned, non-Western journalism values and norms should be globally considered in scholarly conferences as well as university textbooks and professional circles. We are in need of more critical theories to resist attempts to impose a hegemonic system of Western ideas and values on other cultures, especially "neo-liberal" ideas ([69], p. 5).

At this stage, an important question should be raised: Do we need to completely ignore the current ethics and think about a different model that suites the new communication technologies of social media platforms? My answer is that ethics are the same irrespective of the channels of communication, be it off or online. Yet, communicators, professionals, and policymakers have to think about ways of self-regulation to help monitor the previously mentioned ethical problems related to technology per se. The challenge that social media platforms brought for journalism ethics is tremendous and not easy to be overcome. What journalism ethics could be in this liquid time of newsgathering, production, and dissemination where every citizen irrespective of his/her cultural background, education, ethical orientation, and respect for others can circulate news and views in one click. Currently, we have two different models of journalism ethics: one that governs the off and online journalism as defined in this chapter where professional journalists try to apply the ethical standards differently and sometimes with bold violations to universal values and norms. The second model prevails among citizen journalists who occupy the larger amount of the public sphere and who are likely more readable and usable by the public everywhere. According to the traditional ethical model, journalists are truth-seeking professionals who aim to offer factual, accurate, and balanced coverage people can trust [72]. On the other hand, the citizen journalist model does not care about accuracy, verification, objectivity, balance, and truth telling; what he is interested in is spontaneous; and quick publication of anything at hands assuming the responsibility of the users to verify or not to verify what they consume.

The dilemma here is whether the traditional model journalist should integrate with social media platform citizen to cope with the technological determinism, leaving his genuine ethics forever or he should behave independently to safeguard his identity and to cope with what I call ethical determinism? The right answer is none of these options is reasonable and practical as both have their weaknesses that jeopardize journalism profession and ethics. The fact is that mainstream news media journalists have become an integral part of the social media platform. A recent study conducted in Sweden, which is known for its heavy social media use, found that 71% of journalists in the country use social media privately or professionally on a daily basis [73], and thereby, any initiative for refining or developing journalism ethics should not ignore the overlapping usage of both professional and non-professional journalists for social media platforms. Secondly, saying that current journalism ethics is no longer relevant nowadays is a false assumption, as the core of ethics throughout history of journalism (print, radio, and television) is the same. What is new at present time is the new technology that requires different technological ways to trace and identify all issues raised in this chapter, which is built in the structure and the logic of the Internet free and interactive technology rather than the human being.

What I propose is an evolutionary model of traditional journalism ethics that while consider the technological determinism requirements, it does not accept negotiation over its original ethical orientations. In other words, while adhering to the traditional model of ethics, professional journalists have to apply what I referred to earlier in this chapter: the principles of participatory, interactive, democratic, and at the same time ethical journalism. A good journalist according to evolutionary model of ethics is keen to listening to and reflecting a variety of voices and stimulates discussion and engagement with the public and within communities [74].

In this context, Hamada has introduced a comprehensive global ethical model rooted in Islamic cultural theory [45]. The model is based on four guiding principles: respecting pluralism and cultural diversity, freedom of expression, justice, and moderation. What distinguishes the Islamic ethical model is its human universal ethical values that should be given priority over political partisanship, national and personal interests, or technological determinism. The essence of the model and its strength stem from the fact that it seeks to create the balance between what is global and local, what is native, and what is not to the extent that it defends both universal solidarity and cultural differences. It is a cross-cultural ethics model, designed to overcome several shortcomings of other important but biased toward Western hegemony paradigms [45]. The model looks at differences of other competing cultures as opportunities rather than threats. The principles of openness, interactivity, engagement, participation, and respect of others guide the model; therefore, it is developed to cope with social media platform challenges while appreciating the original ethics of journalism. Recently, a number of scholars affiliated to "Worlds of Journalism Study" have examined the principles of this model in 12 Muslim-majority countries including 3500 working journalists in Africa (Egypt, Sierra Leone, and Sudan), Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates), and Europe (Albania and Kosovo). Although the authors developed a little bit different model of Islamic Ethics, they conclude that journalists' roles in Muslim-majority countries are not so much shaped by a distinctively Islamic worldview as they were by the

political, economic, and sociocultural context in which the journalists work [75]. Finally, although the Islamic model as suggested represents a practical approach tackling challenges raised here, it should be complemented by empirical and analytical investigations to monitor how and why social media platforms endanger off and online journalism at different cultural contexts and how the latter should be reoriented and reconstructed; otherwise, our civilization will enter in a self-destruction process.

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