

# Mass Media Journalists and Social Media Ethics in Sri Lanka

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8120208>

Received: 17 December 2024; Revised: 29 December 2024; Accepted: 30 December 2024; Published: 31 December 2024

## ABSTRACT

One of the most important components of broadcasting media professionalism is media ethics. The majority of journalists in Asia have quickly adopted social media in recent years. Professional journalists' enthusiastic involvement in this technological advancement has expanded the field, affected professional journalism ethics, and caused the public to question whether Sri Lankan mainstream media journalists are trustworthy. This study discussed the findings on how far the emerging of social media affect journalistic ethics observance 'truthfulness, objectivism, balance and fairness and accuracy' as important resources for journalism in the mass media and how journalists employed social media in their job. To make the data very apparent, two television media firms were chosen using probability and deliberate sampling approaches, and they were given questionnaires to complete in order to investigate how social media affected their professional ethical values. According to this factual viewpoint, it is crucial to make extra efforts to counteract the ongoing effects of social media on mainstream media broadcasting journalism ethical principles. This can be achieved by focusing on internal training to prevent ethical ambiguity, newsroom ethics and codes, and specific social media rules. By taking these proposed proactive actions, major broadcasting media journalists in Sri Lanka may eventually will flourish under the consideration of ethical principles of professionalism. Media self-regulation body is very important for the accountability and flourish of broadcasting landscape. Broadcasting media organizations and journalists should observe principles of Objectivism in their daily activities

**Keywords:** Social media, Mass media, Facebook, Media ethics, Sri Lanka

## INTRODUCTION

In addition to the political, economic, and social transformations that have occurred in the world in recent years, technical advancements have also caused waves of change in the information and communication sectors. In journalism, the use of social media tools is the part of the new development in the communication revolution landscape not only in Sri Lankan media but to the world at large. They are utilized by many media outlets and journalists; however this raises concerns about their uses and effects in light of media ethics when using new media platforms like Facebook. Asough (2012) mentioned that there are three major areas of worldwide concern within the field of communication ethics as "truth, responsibility and free expression" (Asough, 2012). Journalists believe that journalists fail to accept ethical codes and do not adhere to codes of professional practice, according to a survey that was conducted to learn how Turkish journalists "view ethics or whether they implement ethical codes among the 114 journalists" (Johan, 2002). It is the responsibility of journalists to inform the people about events taking place locally and globally. In the context of social media accuracy and in the study of Morozov 2011), noted that Relying on social media as a journalist in this era of social media revolution and mainstream media alters the traditional perspective on the journalist's identity, which some theorists have labeled as the professional decline of journalism. Actually the study shows that many news organizations their audiences they were not satisfy with their news reporting since they do not consider their journalistic professional ethics in their reporting. Still, certain news media are more suited for certain functions. For example, newspapers usually have informative function, television is suited both for

informative and entertainment purposes, the function of radio is foremost entertainment, while informative purpose is less in focus (Lokumannage, 2023).

The practice of professional journalism requires a commitment to journalism ethics. Journalism as other professions has their own rules, principles and codes of ethics that guide the professionalism. The word „ethics“ comes from the Greek word „ethos“ which means character, while the word „morals“ comes from the Latin word „moralist“ which means custom or manner (Johan 2002).

A series of online software technologies collectively known as social media enable greater engagement, authoring, and creation of online content by any web user. Media ethics consists of a series of covenants, behaviors, regulations, directives, and documents which the media editors or employees must adhere to in a society.

In his 2011 article, Morozov lambasted social media for not being reliable, saying that "This new media ecosystem is very much like the old game of Telephone in which errors steadily accumulate during the transmission process, and the final message has nothing in common with the original" (Morozov 2011). In his study focus more on ethical dilemmas posed by new media technologies, its result show that the impact of new media technologies on traditional media, particularly in Africa remains anecdotal. However, some time some of the information reported through social media was correct, blogs and Twitter also may be responsible for spreading rumors” (Pew Research, 2009). The issue of truth, a fundamental tenet of journalism, may be complicated by mainstream media journalists' use of social media. In the context of social media accuracy and in the study by Asough (2012), it was noted that in this age of the social media revolution and mainstream media, journalists who rely on social media change the traditional perspective on the journalist's identity. Some theorists have referred to this as the professional decline of journalism.

Journalists are expected to report on these issues in an unbiased and truthful manner. Truth is very important and spreading of speculation, rumors and false information nowadays is so first so it could affect the professional ethics since the professional want to get the news out first than need to check all the facts first before publishing or broadcasting. In reality, the emergence and use of social media in recent years has created an ethical conundrum for professionals, raised concerns among the public, and undermined their confidence in journalists working for major media outlets. Therefore it will be important how these mainstream media journalists maintain their social media for their activities. Research Question of this study is how the mainstream media professional journalists in Sri Lanka use social media in their daily activities.

### **Objectives of the study**

To examine critically on how the mainstream media professional journalists in Sri Lanka use social media in their daily activities

How far social media overthrow these professional ethical principles of journalism balance as a fundamental tools for the mainstream media journalism professional practices in Sri Lanka.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the researcher used qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research used a case study design because of the nature of the research which needs to know how the social media affects mainstream media and need also to understand deeply its impacts in the real situation. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011) define population of the study refers to the group or class of subjects, variables, concepts or phenomena. For the purpose of this study, the issues of the population refers to include all the editions of the selected radios, journalists, and others media professionals will be parts of the population for this study. Targets population of the research included journalists, professionals and experience media experts in Sri Lanka. A questionnaire is among the research tool used to collect data and 100 questionnaires were distributed to journalists and media professionals in Sri Lanka. In the Closed-ended questions in this way the respondents asked by the researcher

to select an answers from a list that provided to field in by the researcher. It provides the greater opportunity and simplest way to the respondent to answer the questions appropriately. In this method the researcher used Open-ended and Close-ended questions to make sure that the research questions were fully answered by the respondents. So researcher used this technique since it was appropriate for the requirements of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of number of 93 participants' filled questionnaires and 56 % of the respondents were female, which is about 43 % of the respondents. 61% of the journalists preferred to use Facebook in their daily activities in broadcasting media in Sri Lanka, followed by WhatsApp whereby 31 % journalists used it; while 6 % respondent used Instagram, whereas only 1 % respondent used Twitter in is a daily activity. Result shows that 53% used social media to read the local, national and global news, about 31% used for facilitating news gathering, reporting and distribution of information while remaining 6% of the respondents they just used social media platforms to keep in touch with friends. Respondents indicated that they did not believe that news on social media sites like Facebook was reliable or represented all sides of the authoritative sources that Sri Lankan journalists in the mainstream media might access. The result illustrates that 53% respondents said Yes means for journalist relying on social media affected journalistic ethical principle of fairness, while 26 % of the respondents said No, comparing to 20 % who said they Don't know for the journalists uses social media platform affected the journalism ethical principle of fairness. 48 % respondents said No totally they believed that social media is not good sources of the news should journalist relying on them.

Journalists should attempt to give all people involved in a news story an equal chance to tell their sides of it and should not take one side of the event or news sources. After crafting the inquiries that were posed to journalists, it was decided to examine the effects of social media use in this area of ethics. "lack of balance is the major ethical dilemma of mainstream media journalism in Sri Lanka which is persistently practiced after emerging uses of social media. Do you agree?" Based on their answers to this question, the respondents were divided into groups of media officers and journalists; journalists scored the highest. Lack of balance is the greatest ethical problem in mainstream media journalism, according to 62% of respondents. About 7% strongly disagree with that assertion, while 20% strongly agree. These findings essentially show that journalists themselves are confident that a lack of balance is the primary moral conundrum facing mainstream media.

One interviewee claimed that: "The results from the interviewee show satisfaction, but others did not satisfy on how mainstream media worked in Sri Lanka."

"I am not content. While some media outlets attempt to uphold the ethical standards of journalism or the press, there are other broadcasting media organizations in Sri Lanka that do not. As an illustration, official broadcasting media frequently exclusively present government information on one side of their content. Additionally, a significant portion of Sri Lankan media report news without balance".

One of the most important components of professional journalism ethics is news balance, and journalists who use social media should pay more attention to this component in their work activities. However, in Sri Lanka, it appeared that this was a problem for journalists who rely heavily on social media platforms for news. So, the respondents were questioned, "Do you think that news from Facebook is credible and presents both sides of the responsible sources that can be used by mainstream media journalist?" The results of this question showed that 62% of respondents said "no," 26% responded "yes," and 10% indicated they weren't sure.

To find out, the researcher asked the question to respondents that "according to your experience on using social media as your sources of information do you think the news from social media like Facebook treating the sources equally?" From this question the result pointed out that 78 % which was the highest result marked No, which means that the news from social media was not treating the sources of news fairly, 16 % said Yes and last 4 % of the respondents answered that the Don't know.

In addition to this ethical standard of fairness, the researcher was interested in the opinions of journalists themselves regarding how their use of social media affects this standard. The result illustrates that 53 %

respondents said Yes means for journalist relying on social media affected journalistic ethical principle of fairness, while 26 % of the respondents said No, comparing to 20 % who said they Don't know for the journalists uses social media platform affected the journalism ethical principle of fairness. Some of the respondents who said No provided common reason, one of them said;

“When professional elite journalists rely on stories based on social media without making an effort to verify them, problems can result. Some people and other journalists used social media like Facebook and others for their personal or political interest for the personal benefit rather than promoting development issues,”

According to this question from this study the result indicate that 46 % of the respondents said to a little extent that mainstream media observe the principle of objectivism in their news broadcasting reports, 30 % said there are very few mainstream media journalists who observed principles of objectivism in their news broadcasting reports, about 12 % said very much few mainstream media journalists who observed the ethical principle of objectivism in their news reports, whereby 10 % who agree that the mainstream media journalists obviously possible they observed ethical principle of objectivism in their report even if they relying on social media platforms..

Moreover, the study finds that broadcasting journalists in news media have bias in news coverage and reporting. From the answers provided by the respondents from the question that asked that “Do you believe, based on your experiences, that news media broadcast journalists are biased in their reporting and coverage of the news because they use Facebook and other social media sites more than other platforms? Since mainstream media journalists used social media platforms, especially Facebook, the highest percentage of respondents to this question (66%) agreed that broadcasting journalists in news media have bias in news coverage and reporting, while 24% disagreed, and only 9% did not know whether journalists in Sri Lankan news media have bias in news coverage and reporting.

In order to understand on how the social media affect the accuracy of the mainstream media professionalism ethic, the following question was asked “do you think social media is the good sources of news should journalists relaying on them?” Because there are many generations of journalists working in Sri Lanka's broadcast media today, not all of them will adhere to ethical principles like accuracy; some will simply broadcast the news even if it is false, according to the results and reasons provided by the respondents who took part in this survey, about 48% of respondents said that social media is not a good source of news that journalists should rely on.

Although some of the journalists who believed that news from social media like Facebook is the good sources of news where the journalist should rely on them to find a story ideas of follow up the trend of the story or follow ups for the trend of the story or they can used social ideas, but according to the result as shown one among of the respondent who said No argued that;

“I do believe that for the professional journalists should not rely on social media as a sources of news like Facebook, as you know on social media anyone can say anything, some lie, have agendas to push forwards and have individual biases all of these aspects affecting accuracy and credibility of information they used to broadcast while the individual are not accountable for what they write, problems come to us as a journalists”

For the reputation of their work and the media organizations they work for, accuracy is the most crucial factor to take into account. To ensure there are no doubts in the story being reported, accuracy can include the element of fact-checking. To understand the position of accuracy in the news being reported, the question of what are the most significant effects of social media on the matte was posed.

Also, in this aspect of truthfulness the data from this study deeply found that false information was the common impact when the journalists used social media towards their professional ethic of truth about 45 % of respondents was experienced this impact, while 28 % of respondents said rumor is the common impacts of social media to journalists professional ethics of truth, than 12 % said that favor one side the common impact

of social media where journalists experienced, while only 5 % of the total survey respondents believed that common impacts when journalists used social media like Facebook towards professional principle of truth was spread speculations and 7 % were missing.

Another important thing in this part is the aspect of reliability of the news from social media where by the mainstream media relying on them, the researcher asked the question in order to understand the opinion of the journalists on the statement which said “Is news from social media reliable and worthy of being broadcasting on mainstream media?” This is due to the fact that news authenticity is closely linked to its acceptability for transmission. A study found that 47% of respondents denied that social media news was credible or deserving of being aired, About 45 % respondent said possible to be broadcasting news from social media was credible and worthy, but 3 % respondent said very possible to broadcasting news from social media and the rest 3 % of the journalists said very impossible to broadcasting the news from social media because was not credible and worthy.

## CONCLUSION

Social media has enabled some journalists to use them for news reading, gathering, and distribution as a vital responsibility of the professional journalist, with the aim of informing the public about all events that occurred in society and the world at large for the benefit of their lives. Social media has become the eyes and ears of the mainstream media journalists. This survey depicts that the less of fact check is part of the effect that journalists in broadcasting media practiced after engaging on used social media platforms like Facebook, numerous journalists revealed that they did not thoroughly verify their stories based on social media. Even though it is against the standards of professional journalism, 31 % of respondents claimed they came across the item on Facebook and used it as is despite the lack of reliable sources. It is one of the fundamental principles of journalism that all journalists should grasp the importance of balance and impartiality. It is the responsibility of journalists to uphold the highest standards of ethics and professionalism in the field.

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