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# Journalistic Ethics in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Towards an Update of Deontological Codes in the Ibero-American Context

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**Abstract**

This article critically reviews and updates the principles of deontological codes of communication in Ibero-American Community, aiming to adapt journalistic ethics to the new challenges posed by the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). As a qualitative analysis, it starts from the premise that current deontological codes do not include updated guidelines for the integration of AI into journalistic work. Therefore, the objective is to reformulate some of the main ethical principles and propose structural conditions that could be incorporated into the regulations governing media professionals. To achieve this, a detailed analysis of various deontological codes was conducted alongside in-depth interviews with three types of professionals: journalists, academics, and expert consultants. Some interviewees also work as fact-checkers. The interview responses were coded and analysed according to the guidelines of the constant comparative method (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013) using the ATLAS.ti platform. The results provided sufficient input to update several principles (transparency, human judgement, bias control, verification and cross-checking, avoidance of rights violations, accountability, and citizen participation), as well as to identify four structural conditions for the ethical practice of journalism in the algorithmic age (regulation for a new social pact, awareness of the impact of disinformation, media literacy, and immutable journalistic ethics; Alsius, 2011). The study concluded that the use of AI in journalistic activities requires an adaptation of existing norms to ensure and recover the quality of information and the trust of audiences. Additionally, it highlights the need for balanced regulation that does not allow media abuses through AI while also respecting press freedom.

**Keywords**
artificial intelligence, journalistic ethics, deontology, media, disinformation

# Ética Jornalística na Era da Inteligência Artificial: Rumo a uma Atualização dos Códigos Deontológicos no Contexto Ibero-Americano

**Resumo**

Este artigo analisa criticamente e atualiza os princípios dos códigos deontológicos da comunicação na Comunidade Ibero-Americana, com o objetivo de adaptar a ética jornalística aos novos desafios impostos pelo advento da inteligência artificial (IA). Como análise qualitativa, parte da premissa de que os códigos deontológicos atuais não incluem diretrizes atualizadas para a integração da IA no trabalho jornalístico. Portanto, o objetivo é reformular alguns dos principais princípios éticos e propor condições estruturais que possam ser incorporadas nos regulamentos que regem os profissionais dos média. Para tal, foi realizada uma análise detalhada de vários códigos deontológicos, a par de entrevistas aprofundadas com três tipos de profissionais: jornalistas, académicos e consultores especializados. Alguns entrevistados também trabalham como verificadores de factos. As respostas das entrevistas foram codificadas e analisadas conforme as diretrizes do método comparativo constante (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013), utilizando a plataforma ATLAS.ti. Os resultados forneceram informações suficientes para atualizar vários princípios (transparência, critério humano, controlo de enviesamentos, verificação e cruzamento de informações, prevenção de violações de direitos, responsabilização e participação dos cidadãos), bem como para identificar quatro condições estruturais para a prática ética do jornalismo na era algorítmica (regulamentação para um novo pacto social, consciência do impacto da desinformação, literacia mediática, e ética jornalística imutável; Alsius, 2011). O estudo concluiu que o uso da IA em atividades jornalísticas requer uma adaptação das normas existentes para garantir e recuperar a qualidade da informação e a confiança do público. Além disso, destaca a necessidade de uma regulamentação equilibrada que não permita abusos dos média por meio da IA, respeitando, ao mesmo tempo, a liberdade de imprensa.

**Palavras-chave**
inteligência artificial, ética jornalística, deontologia, média, desinformação

## 1. Introduction: Navigating the Digital Crossroads

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the main technological challenges of our time, with profound implications in various fields, including communication (Murcia-Verdú & Ramos-Antón, 2024). Its capacity to execute complex tasks, process large amounts of information and automate processes has generated both enthusiasm and concern in the media industry. In the realm of journalism, advertising and creative production, AI is redefining professional practices (Ventura-Pocino, 2021) and raising fundamental questions about the role of humans in information creation.

The evolution of AI in the field of communication has been rapid and disruptive (Crawford, 2021). From early content recommendation systems to sophisticated text generation and data analysis algorithms, AI has transformed how information is produced, distributed and consumed within the media industry (Apablaza-Campos et al., 2024). This transformation is framed within a broader context of technological and social changes, characterised by digitalisation, globalisation and the growing influence of digital platforms (Srnicek, 2016/2018) in the public sphere.

The central problem addressed by this research is the impact of AI on communication processes, with a particular emphasis on ethical implications (Ventura-Pocino, 2024), information quality, and the evolution of human-machine interaction in the media context. The integration of AI into journalistic practices presents a series of challenges and opportunities that require critical and multidimensional analysis, as has already been formulated in some studies in recent years (Vidal Castell et al., 2023).

On one hand, AI promises to increase efficiency and precision in data collection and analysis, allowing journalists to dedicate more time to higher value-added tasks. On the other hand, concerns arise about potential job losses, content depersonalisation and erosion of traditional journalistic values (Garde Cano et al., 2024). Moreover, the growing dependence on algorithms in news selection and presentation raises questions about transparency, responsibility and potential bias in the information reaching audiences.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand and address the ethical implications of AI in the contemporary media ecosystem. At a time when disinformation and fake news represent a threat to democracy and social cohesion (Salaverría et al., 2024), especially among younger generations (Pérez-Escoda & Pedrero Esteban, 2021), it is essential to examine how AI can contribute to improving information quality and reliability, or conversely, exacerbate existing problems.

Furthermore, research on the interaction between AI and communication processes is fundamental to anticipating and shaping the future of journalism and communication in general. This study seeks to contribute to the academic and professional debate on how to integrate AI ethically and responsibly into media practices (Codina, 2024) while preserving the fundamental values of journalism and communication.

Therefore, the purpose of this work is to update the ethical principles that underpin current regulations so that they adequately address the challenges posed by AI to professional practice in the media. The methodology employed combines, in the theoretical framework, a comprehensive review of the main deontological codes, current regulations in Ibero-America, and expert literature on journalism with, in the applied section, the conduct of interviews with professionals from three fields: journalists, academics, and consultants. Interview responses were coded and analysed using the ATLAS.ti platform, which was based on the guidelines of the constant comparative method (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013).

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Ethical and Practical Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in Journalism

The integration of AI in the field of communication has experienced significant evolution in recent decades. From early expert systems to current deep learning applications and interfaces (Scolari, 2018), AI has transformed how information is produced, distributed, and consumed (Garde Cano, 2022) and has even been considered an entire *power infrastructure* (Crawford, 2021).

Indeed, Pavlik (2019) argues that AI technologies are redefining journalism routines: machine learning algorithms can analyse large datasets to identify trends and patterns that

might go unnoticed by journalists. Additionally, AI has enabled the automation of routine tasks, such as generating financial or sports news, freeing up time for journalists to focus on more complex tasks (Ventura-Pocino, 2021).

However, this evolution also poses ethical challenges that professional journalistic codes of ethics are not yet addressing with the required depth. As Alsius notes, excessive dependence on AI in news production can compromise journalistic ethical standards, such as source verification and proper contextualisation of information (Ingrid, 2024g). Moreover, the growing influence of algorithms in news selection and presentation has led to concerns about the formation of *filter bubbles* (Pariser, 2011) and the polarisation of public opinion. In short, the integration of AI in media raises significant ethical questions that require careful consideration.

Nevertheless, ethical codes developed primarily in the 1990s and 2000s do not specifically address the challenges posed by the digital environment and AI. Thus, the European Code of Journalism Ethics (Strasbourg, July 1, 1993; Código Europeo de Deontología del Periodismo, 1993) generically establishes the ethical responsibility of media towards citizens and society, recognising the importance of information and communication for personal development and democratic life. The Deontological Code of the Journalistic Profession in Catalonia, updated in 2016 (Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya, 2016), and the FAPE Deontological Code (Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España, 2017), updated in 2017, provide general ethical frameworks for journalistic practice in the digital realm. Still, the application of these principles in the context of AI has not yet been addressed. The Information Council of Catalonia (November 11, 2016) also provided 12 deontological criteria, although these do not fully respond to the challenges facing the journalistic profession in an *algorithmic* environment (Garde Cano, 2022).

The regulation of AI in media is a topic of growing importance, and the rapid evolution of technology poses ongoing challenges for regulators. The recent European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1083, 2024) establishes a common framework for media services in the European Union's internal market and addresses some aspects related to AI use. Even so, it does not expose the risks that AI can cause in newsrooms if the ethical principles of the profession are not expanded.

The joint call of the College of Journalists of Catalonia, the Information Council of Catalonia, and Catalan universities against the use of clickbait in 2023 is another example of how the journalistic community is beginning to debate the distortions suffered by industrial media in the digital environment (Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya, 2023). However, it is important to recognise that clickbait is only a visible manifestation of a broader problem. Traditional deontological codes and ethical principles do not fully address the perversions of *platformisation* (Lovink, 2022/2023) and the influence of AI in contemporary journalism (Garde Cano et al., 2024).

Regarding the ethical principles of the profession proposed in academia, something similar occurs. Lambeth (1992) describes the basic principles of journalistic ethics, including truthfulness, impartiality, freedom, humanity, and service. Similarly, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) argue that the fundamental elements of journalism, such as verification and independence, remain crucial. Alsius (2011) expands these concepts,

establishing four general principles for journalistic ethics: responsibility, truthfulness, justice, and freedom. However, the key question is how to integrate AI in a way that complements and enhances these principles rather than undermining them.

### 2.1. Implications of Artificial Intelligence in Newsrooms

The technological revolution and the development of the internet have substantially transformed the foundations of the information world and the system of public opinion formation, as Ventura-Pocino (2024) points out. Garde Cano (2024) has dubbed this new communicative environment as "blob communication". This necessitates adapting the criteria of good professional practice to reaffirm journalism's ethical commitment to the communities in which it operates in accordance with the principle of social responsibility (Restrepo, 2004).

On the one hand, AI has improved journalists' ability to process big data, identify topics of interest in the internet maelstrom, and produce personalised content for different audiences (Pedrero Esteban & Pérez Escoda, 2021). On the other hand, it has posed challenges in terms of transparency, responsibility, and maintenance of fundamental journalistic values, as well as critical thinking (Codina, 2024). Ventura-Pocino (2021) highlights how algorithms in newsrooms are changing the way editorial decisions are made and content is distributed. This raises questions about who really controls the news agenda and how the diversity of perspectives can be ensured in an increasingly automated environment. Furthermore, AI has facilitated the emergence of new forms of journalism, such as data journalism and immersive journalism. Pavlik (2018) and Martínez-Costa et al. (2021) argue that these new forms of experiential storytelling, enhanced by AI, can increase audience engagement and improve understanding of complex topics.

The phenomenon of fake news and disinformation also poses significant challenges in relation to AI and information quality, including in youth communities (Pérez-Escoda & Pedrero Esteban, 2021). Vidal Castell (2020) analyses how fake news has become a legitimisation resource for conventional media against the digital platforms with which they compete for discursive hegemony. For these media, as Cuartielles et al. (2024) explain, developing AI systems capable of detecting and countering disinformation on digital networks — which undermines their credibility — has become a crucial task. Additionally, AI is also an opportunity for these media to develop new forms of participation. Nevertheless, Gayà Morlà et al. (2022) propose rethinking the theoretical foundations of participatory communication in the context of new technologies, which could open paths for richer and more meaningful interaction between humans and machines in the communication process.

The evolution of human-machine interaction in the context of communication is also redefining the roles of journalists and audiences. Couldry (2021) argues that media remain important precisely because they mediate these interactions and shape our understanding of the world. An essential aspect of this interaction is the question of agency and decision-making. To what extent should we delegate editorial and creative

decisions to AI systems? Sadin (2020) warns about the risks of a *silicolonisation* of life, where AI assumes an increasingly dominant role in decision-making.

## 3. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative approach and stems from the premise that media outlets' codes of ethics do not yet include specific (clear) guidelines for incorporating AI into journalistic routines, as noted in the theoretical framework.

To test this hypothesis, as part of a broader research project, approximately 30 academic articles and publications, as well as around 10 institutional reports and deontological codes published in Ibero-America, particularly over the past 10 years, were reviewed. In addition, in-depth semi-structured interviews were planned, addressing questions (derived from the construction of the theoretical framework) across three thematic areas: the use of AI in journalism within an ethical framework, AI and disinformation, and media education and AI. The interviews are the result of an initial research phase conducted at Pompeu Fabra University, encompassing not only the media field in Spain but also throughout Ibero-America, particularly Ecuador. The research originates from communication studies in Spain because it is within Ibero-America that the most discussion has been published on the phenomenon under analysis.

The sample comprised nine interviewees, eight Spanish and one Chilean, selected for belonging to three different groups of communication professionals whose extensive experience provided the necessary input to develop the final proposal of this research. These three groups have been classified as follows: journalists, academics, and expert consultants. The names and brief biographies of the interviewees are detailed in Table 1.

| Name | Professional field | Brief biography |
|---|---|---|
| Salvador Alsius | Academic | In the field of journalism, he worked at *Diari de Barcelona*, was deputy director of the weekly *El Món*, director and presenter of news programmes and various shows on TVE and TV3, producer of a magazine on Catalunya Ràdio, and contributor to various print media. He has, among others, the Ciutat de Barcelona Television Award. Regarding academic activity, he was a professor at Autonomous University of Barcelona (1976–1983) and Pompeu Fabra University (1992–2016). At the latter university, he was dean of the Faculty of Journalism. His main lines of research have been journalism ethics and newsroom convergence. He has been the principal investigator of several local and international projects. He has the Generalitat de Catalunya's communication research award. |
| María José Recoder | Academic | Associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Autonomous University of Barcelona. She has held various university management positions. Author of articles and books on media and information literacy and crisis communication. |
| Carlos Franco | Academic | Journalist. Professor and researcher in the area of disinformation and fact-checking. He teaches data journalism, convergence room, and television courses at the undergraduate level, as well as data mining and strategic data communication in the master's in Political Communication and the master's in Data Science, respectively. Director of the Data Observatory at the School of Communications and Journalism, an academic centre dedicated to data journalism and fact-checking. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ramón Salaverría | Academic | Professor of Journalism at the University of Navarra and, since 2024, member of the Academy of Europe. His research focuses on digital journalism and disinformation. Author of more than 300 academic publications, he is listed in Stanford University's ranking of the world's most cited researchers. He has also been awarded Researcher of the Year (2023) at the Roblón Awards, which recognise excellence in media and communication research. |
| Laura Pinyol | Consultant and government position | Vice president of the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia. Coordinator of the Commission for Relations with Society, Childhood, Gender and Education in Communication and the Commission for Research, Studies and Innovation. Deputy coordinator of the Content Commission. President of the Platform for Media Education. |
| Nereida Carrillo | Consultant, fact-checker and journalist | A freelance journalist specialising in internet and social networks, with more than four years of experience as a multimedia writer. She collaborates with the *ARA* newspaper and *Capçalera* magazine from the College of Journalists of Catalonia. PhD in Communication and Journalism from Autonomous University of Barcelona. Researcher at Comunicación y Responsabilidad Social — Communication Institute, Autonomous University of Barcelona. Lecturer at Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Autonomous University of Barcelona and Open University of Catalonia. Courses on new narratives and journalism 2.0 at the College of Journalists of Catalonia. |
| Roger Cuartielles | Academic and fact-checker | Predoctoral lecturer and researcher at Pompeu Fabra University. Academic coordinator of the master's degree in Political and Institutional Communication at Pompeu Fabra University Barcelona — School of Management. PhD candidate in Communication. Master's in Communication Research (Pompeu Fabra University), Digital Communication and Journalism: Data and New Narratives (Open University of Catalonia), and in Teacher Training (University of Victoria). |
| Carlos Baraibar | Journalist and fact-checker | Deputy director of *La Tarda* de Catalunya Ràdio, head of the "Fets o Fakes" section, and verification officer at the Catalan Audiovisual Media Corporation. |
| Pablo Hernández | Journalist and fact-checker | He has 19 years of experience in the area of content and editing for television. He has worked at La Sexta, CNN+, Cuatro and Localia. He also wrote for the EFE Agency and *ABC* newspaper. He is now the Academic Research Coordinator at Maldita.es. |

**Table 1.** *Profiles of the interviewees*

The professionals were contacted between October and December 2024 via email, WhatsApp numbers, and at seminars on ethics, disinformation, and AI organised by Pompeu Fabra University, the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia, and the Catalan Association of Journalists. The interview questionnaires contained open-ended questions to gather information that supported the results of this research. It should be noted that some of the key figures referenced in the theoretical context are also part of the interview sample. This decision was made to compare the conceptualisations discussed in the state of the art with empirical data.

For the analysis of the interviewees' responses — and considering that the main objective of this study is to propose a *corpus* of ethical principles — the constant comparative method was used (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013), developed primarily within grounded theory, to generate a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon (Tandoc et al., 2019). The works by Cuartielles et al. (2024) and Tandoc et al. (2019) were taken as references, who used the method mentioned above to conduct open coding of interviews and written materials, followed by axial coding, which enabled them to group the concepts into broader categories.

Following the steps determined in the constant comparative method: (a) comparative assignment of incidents to categories; (b) elaboration and refinement of categories; (c) search for thematic relationships between categories; and (d) simplification and integration of data into a coherent theoretical structure, the extraction of keywords for open coding of qualitative responses was based on the 12 criteria and Annex A (Image Manipulation) and Annex B (Internet Recommendations), which are enshrined in the Code of Ethics of the College of Journalists and the Information Council of Catalonia (2016), with the aim that the proposal presented in the results section is harmonised with the basic principles of journalistic work. With this framework, the categories and axial codes were as follows (Table 2).

| | |
|---|---|
| **Ethical principles** | Transparency, objectivity, truthfulness, careful information selection, rapid intervention, journalistic responsibility, verification, protection of personal data, independence, networks do not stop abuses, networks used for political convenience, ethical supervision, protection of rights. |
| **Regulation of artificial intelligence in the media** | Journalistic ethics, artificial intelligence influence, harmful practices, Digital Service Act, collective complaints, scarcity of regulations, funding by social networks, supervision, responsibility. |
| **Educational responsibility of the media** | Self-education of audiences, technological awareness, media education, harmful content, algorithmic biases, artificial Intelligence risks. |

**Table 2.** *Open coding and axial coding of the interviews*

The platform used for this coding was ATLAS.ti. This qualitative analysis programme has added some AI-powered tools to its menu, which allow for faster coding than manual methods. The "AI Coding + Intent" option (still in the experimental phase) was used, which first requested the research objectives. With these, it suggested several questions to guide the coding, which were reviewed and corrected to fit the purposes of the work. From these, the three main categories indicated in Table 2 emerged.

The result was a list of over 500 axial codes dependent on the three main categories. Many were repetitive, and others did not contribute significantly to the study. Consequently, the suggested codes were disabled, and the tool was asked to adhere to the keywords determined in Table 2. The result was very poor. The tool had not considered many responses that promised to be a good input for the axial codes; in other cases, it had designated quotes that did not correspond to certain codes. Thus, a new review of the interviews was conducted, and each axial code was manually assigned quotes (responses) containing important elements that were used to update the conceptualisations.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analysis of the Interviews

In the "ethical principles" category, interviewees make important contributions towards constructing an ethical regulatory framework that promotes responsible use of

AI in the media. Pablo Hernández (Ingrid, 2024h) believes that a derivative effect of the widespread use of AI could be a decline in trust towards most content circulating on social networks. In this scenario, he notes that building solid *credibility and generating trust* among the public will be essential for media outlets. He adds that it will be fundamental for media companies to demonstrate that their content is reliable, verifiable, and has undergone *rigorous control processes* because, in the end, trust will be the differentiating value that makes a person choose to be informed through a media outlet rather than believing what they find on social networks.

Regarding journalistic responsibility, he states that the media have an important role in alerting AI-generated content. He assures that they can offer clues and advice to their audience to identify when content may have been created synthetically. He is convinced that it is necessary to allow the use of AI, but with transparency, that media outlets declare when, how, and for what purpose they have used these tools so that audiences can better evaluate the content they consume. In short, he affirms that it is necessary to implement a culture of *media transparency*.

For her part, Nereida Carrillo (Ingrid, 2024i) states that there is a need to reflect and establish clear ethical norms for the application of AI in news production. Although, as journalists, ethical guidelines are well-defined, when a new technology emerges, one must reflect on how to apply these traditional norms to these new spaces. She affirms that manuals, recommendations, and reflections have already begun to emerge in this regard, but she believes that there should be more work in this direction so that there is a *broad consensus* on how to use AI ethically in the media. She gives an example that in many newsrooms, AI is used as support for low-value tasks, such as analysing large volumes of data, but — she affirms — it can never fully replace a radio or television presenter because it lacks human competencies (*soft skills*).

She also points out that one must be aware of the biases that can occur and that to avoid them, *transparency* in the use of these technologies must prevail; moreover, humans must remain the *final reviewers* of decisions made by machines. For his part, Salvador Alsius (Ingrid, 2024g) provides more epistemological explanations by considering that journalistic ethics is "*a fairly immutable doctrine* because it is based on principles that do not change with technologies or audience quantification" (00:01:01). He recalls that in his doctoral thesis, he identified these principles, which he summarised in four values: *truth*, *justice*, *freedom*, and *responsibility*.

Regarding the arrival of AI, he maintains that it does not represent such a radical change as the arrival of the internet or other previous technological tools. However, he does believe that AI exacerbates a series of problems that are already quite evident and have always been present, such as lying, distorting facts, and giving false data, among others. He emphasises the so-called "clickbait" or misleading headline, which he describes as "blatant traps". Therefore, for him, *transparency* regarding content is fundamental. He says it is important that the public know how this content is generated.

For this reason, he emphasises, it is essential to have *independent experts* who can decipher the algorithms, understand them, and certify that they are designed based on principles such as truth, independence and, above all, that they do not have biases (this is another major ethical problem presented by algorithms: biases of gender, race, beliefs, ideologies, etc.). Therefore, he assures that what must be demanded is *the right to know how these algorithms are constructed* so that there are guarantees that this technological power will not be abused.

On the other hand, Carlos Baraibar (Ingrid, 2024c) states that it is very difficult to predict where AI will lead humanity since it is a "very powerful tool" (00:15:42). Roger Cuartielles emphasises that the *media are aware of the need to point out fakes* in a context of information overabundance, as this also gives them more credibility because the journalistic profession has been losing the trust of its audience (Ingrid, 2024f). Finally, Carlos Franco states that AI tools are doing an increasingly perfect job in the dissemination of false information, which is difficult to detect. Therefore, he affirms that what is important is, on the part of the media and even *fact-checking organisations*, *accountability*, *transparency*, and *levels of audience participation* (Ingrid, 2024e).

In the category "regulation of AI in the media", Ramón Salaverría explains that the impact of this technology has not yet been fully dimensioned (Ingrid, 2024b). We are just beginning to see the incidence of AI in multiple aspects, and one of them is the proliferation of disinformative content. He feels that this is only the beginning of the phenomenon. Fortunately, "there is still more fear than real evidence" (Ingrid, 2024b, 00:19:51). He also believes that AI can multiply false content and that it is evident that, when it comes to falsifying voices and images, these can become indistinguishable from real content, which gives them enormous manipulative potential.

However, he highlights that, at the same time, these same technologies are being developed *to detect adulterated content* early (Ingrid, 2024b, 00:21:25). Nevertheless, he assures that some elements can give hope, such as the development of *new legislative and legal frameworks* that address this problem, the development of "new technologies, a better academic and scientific understanding of the phenomenon, and better preparation of security forces and bodies" (Ingrid, 2024b, 00:24:07), which are now more prepared to face these problems. He indicates that all of this is progress, but the problem itself does not stop growing.

From the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia, Laura Pinyol (Ingrid, 2024d) points out the need to regulate the use of generative AI in the media because "that idea that the market regulates itself does not work" (00:29:01). She explains that if there are media outlets that have robots generating content, the least they can do is to state somewhere that those contents have been created by those machines. "It cannot be evaded", she indicates. She adds that in this sense, *rules* need to be put in place that media outlets must follow to act ethically because self-regulation is not enough; otherwise, there would be a *feudalisation* (Varoufakis, 2024): a society governed by a few, super hierarchical in the direction of command, in which public powers will have no impact.

For his part, Pablo Hernández (Ingrid, 2024h) says that it would be convenient for *AI-generated content to be identifiable* in some way; therefore, there should be *specific regulations* on how to use AI, but in a general manner. That is, he does not believe that legislation should be exclusively for the media but rather establish a *general regulation* that allows any user to know whether content has been generated by AI or not.

He exemplifies his argument with certain routines in newsrooms where they already use AI for relatively simple processes, such as writing a stock market report or the day's sports results. In those cases, it is practical and efficient to use these tools to *automate repetitive tasks*. However, the problem begins when one tries to go beyond these simple contents and address more complex or sensitive topics. There, an *ethical conflict* arises. He gives another example: what happens if a media outlet publishes an editorial or opinion article generated by AI? Should a media outlet leave the editorial position it defends in the hands of AI? He believes that *being transparent* with the audience would be fundamental there. If an editorial has been generated by AI, the media outlet should make it clear and say: this has been written by an AI, he states.

On the other hand, journalist Carlos Baraibar (Ingrid, 2024c) mentions influential figures from Silicon Valley who have called for a moratorium on the development of these technologies because they could cause irreparable damage, so he feels that a *joint effort* is required to *stop, reflect, and regulate* AI. He believes that the dialogue about the risks of AI and possible regulation is also a challenge that journalism must *collectively assume*.

In the analysis of the category "educational responsibility of the media", the same Carlos Baraibar maintains that *media education* is essential. He points out that many authorities believe that young people do not need training because "they already have a computer" (Ingrid, 2024c, 00:07:52). He adds that the paradigm of the "digital native" must be broken, which assumes that young people know how to navigate cyberspace simply because they were born with these technologies. "That's like saying that, because you were born in an era where cars exist, you already know how to drive" (00:08:12), he points out.

For her part, María José Recoder (Ingrid, 2024a) comments that the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia has been proposing a subject at the primary, secondary, and undergraduate levels in media education. The idea encompasses having academic staff prepared in this field, that is, journalists, to teach this subject. In turn, Nereida Carrillo (Ingrid, 2024i; Lozano-Monterrubio et al., 2024) states that *media and information literacy* help *create resilience against disinformation* and *promote critical thinking*.

### 4.2. Proposal for Updating Ethical Principles and Identification of Four Structural Conditions for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Media

The responses obtained from the interviewees served as the basis for developing a proposal to update ethical principles and to determine four structural conditions for the responsible use of AI in the media. These could be considered in the reformulation

of journalists' deontological codes. This rethinking of principles and the identification of structural conditions that promote the ethical use of AI in the media are presented below, along with the most significant contributions that helped to review each value. It is important to note that this proposal does not introduce new ethical principles but rather reinterprets existing ones within the context of the use of generative AI.

#### 4.2.1. Reformulation of Ethical Principles

Transparency: audiences should know how information is created using AI. Carlos Baraibar points out that it is essential to understand what can be done with technology. He mentions that if AI is used to generate a live presenter, it must be clear to the public that it is not a real person. Salvador Alsius emphasises that regarding content, it is essential for the public to know how it is generated. He also stresses the importance of independent experts being able to analyse algorithms to ensure they are not biased. Pablo Hernández mentions that media outlets must declare when, how, and for what purpose they have used AI so that audiences can better evaluate the content. He also indicates that AI-generated content should be identifiable in some way and that if a media outlet uses AI to produce a news item, it should declare this transparently. Nereida Carrillo believes that transparency in the use of technologies is key.

Human judgement: humans are irreplaceable. Nereida Carrillo mentions that people should not be replaced by AI, such as a radio or television presenter. AI should be used as support for low-value tasks but not for tasks that require "a humanity" that machines do not have. In short, she notes that humans should be the final reviewers of decisions made by machines. She firmly believes that human judgment should always prevail.

Bias control: the production and dissemination of news using AI must be able to recognise biases and practise journalism with honesty and as much pluralism as possible. Salvador Alsius points out that the main ethical problem with algorithms is that they always incorporate biases related to gender, race, beliefs, or ideologies and that these biases are difficult to identify and correct. For this reason, he emphasises the importance of understanding how algorithms are constructed to ensure that this technological power is not abused. Nereida Carrillo notes that it is essential to be aware of the biases and errors that AI systems can introduce.

Verification and fact-checking: the journalist should not place complete trust in AI; all information must be verified by consulting primary sources. Pablo Hernández mentions that media outlets should be islands of trust where information is cross-checked and facts are verified. Roger Cuartielles emphasises that traditional verification eliminates lies while fact-checking turns them into a journalistic piece by pointing them out.

Avoiding rights violations: freedom of the press should not be used to infringe upon the rights of individuals or minorities. Ramón Salaverría and Pablo Hernández speak of being aware of the responsibility that media and journalists have when disseminating information, including that generated by AI, not only to avoid the spread of hoaxes or

disinformation but also to avoid violating the rights of audiences and the general public. Nereida Carrillo mentions that disinformation enhanced by AI can violate the right to political participation without interference in electoral processes, the right to health, and the right to freedom of expression. It can also contain hate speech towards specific groups, such as migrants, feminists, or LGBTQ+ communities, further violating their rights.

Accountability and citizen participation: audiences should participate in the construction of public opinion based on accountability and transparency. Carlos Franco mentions the importance of accountability, transparency, and fostering audience participation in the ethical debate. Similarly, Carlos Baraibar suggests that possible regulation is a challenge that must be collectively assumed. Roger Cuartielles also points out that the fact that media outlets transparently commit to verification for their reading community grants credibility that has been eroding.

#### 4.2.2. Structural Conditions for Strengthening Ethics in Journalistic Practice in the Algorithmic Era

Regulation of the media for a new social pact: Carlos Baraibar states that a joint effort from all parties is required to regulate the use of AI. Laura Pinyol notes that a long-term vision is necessary to anticipate the consequences of technological advances. Salvador Alsius points out that certain essential aspects must be regulated, even though he has traditionally been resistant to the idea of regulations in the media. Ramón Salaverría believes that controls are needed to combat disinformation and that, although it is difficult to combine freedom of expression with such controls, they must go hand in hand.

Awareness of the impact of disinformation: Pablo Hernández points out the seriousness of the problem of disinformation and the need to take measures to address it seriously.

Media literacy: Carlos Baraibar emphasises that media literacy is essential for enabling the public to identify disinformation, and he is critical of the fact that, in many places, the importance of this type of education is still not understood. Laura Pinyol notes that it is necessary to teach young people how to navigate an audiovisual and digital environment that is not always intuitive. María José Recoder proposes introducing a media literacy subject at all educational levels. Nereida Carrillo points out that media literacy is necessary to build resilience against disinformation. Ramón Salaverría states that a paternalistic approach should be avoided, and the focus should be on developing a critical mindset towards information. He also supports the inclusion of a media literacy subject in the education system.

Immutable journalistic ethics: Salvador Alsius states that journalistic ethics are based on immutable principles that do not change with technology. These values must remain unshakeable: truth, justice, freedom, and responsibility.

This proposal, derived from the interviewees' responses, aims to ensure that AI is used responsibly — by the media and journalism in general — without compromising the quality of information or public trust. This reformulation of values seeks to restore the

credibility that the media and journalists have gradually lost due to disinformation practices, which include issues such as the uncritical inclusion of biases, discursive distortion, the strategy of silence, or the dissemination of incomplete stories or those lacking context; as well as the violation of audience rights, such as trivialisation, objectification, sensationalism, stereotyping, stigmatisation, manipulation, and so on (Chavero et al., 2014).

## 5. Conclusions

The theoretical and conceptual inquiry into journalistic ethics in the context of AI, which served as the starting point for this research, naturally overlaps with the emerging categories from the interviews and with the updated conceptualisations that arose from them. This correspondence demonstrates the methodological consistency of the study, as it aligns with the logic of the constant comparative method, which seeks to contrast theoretical concepts with empirical data.

Thus, the literature review regarding the guidelines established in the deontological codes of media organisations demonstrates that these codes need to be updated to be more specific and serve as a roadmap for journalists who use AI tools in their work. Some of these regulatory guidelines have been in force for many years and are therefore not in tune with the current technological context; nevertheless, because they contain the fundamental ethical principles of journalistic practice, they provide a foundation for rethinking and reformulating the values that should serve as a compass for the responsible use of AI in newsroom routines.

From the interviews conducted with communication professionals — all of whom are experienced in the field of journalism and in the study and fight against disinformation — it is clear that four fundamental values remain essential for journalistic practice. These values have neither changed nor will they change over time or due to technological advances. Identified by Dr Salvador Alsius in his doctoral thesis, these values are truth, justice, freedom, and responsibility. They align with the principles that have been reconsidered within the framework of the proposal for the responsible use of AI in the media.

The interviewees agree on the need for a regulatory framework to prevent the misuse of AI by communicators, but they stress that such regulations should not become a straitjacket or an obstacle to the development of the journalistic profession. They advocate for a healthy balance between coherent regulation and respect for press freedom (and, by extension, freedom of expression). They also concur on the importance of effectively promoting media education — or media literacy, as Laura Pinyol prefers to call it-driven by governmental bodies since only this will foster critical awareness among the general public, especially in the context of the proliferation of fake news, which is becoming increasingly difficult to recognise due to AI.

Among the principles analysed, "transparency" was the most frequently mentioned. The interviewees consider it fundamental in the use of AI, as it helps audiences feel more secure when consuming information and could even serve as a tool for the media to regain the credibility they have been losing over the past several decades.

The respondents also express strong opposition to the dehumanisation of journalistic practice, particularly regarding the use of avatars and bots to replace humans in tasks as sensitive as data interpretation and the news production process. Hence, the suggestion to include structural conditions to regulate journalistic activity in this era of AI (regulation for a new social pact, awareness of the impact of disinformation, media education, and immutable journalistic ethics) is not only necessary but urgent.

It cannot be denied that, as in other professional fields, AI has had a great impact on journalistic routines, leading not only to benefits but also to risks that must be minimised through the transparent and responsible use of these technologies. The decalogue proposed in this article is only intended to be the spearhead that paves the way for new proposals that add ethical conceptualisations to enrich the field of communication deontology.

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