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The Role of Journalism Ethics Education in Improving the Professional Ethics Quality and Coping Ability of Graduates in Media Crisis

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Received: 31 May 2025

Revised: 07 June 2025

Accepted: 23 June 2025

Published: 12 July 2025



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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the significant role of journalism ethics education in enhancing graduates' professional ethics quality and their ability to handle media crises. In an era marked by rapid information dissemination and increasing challenges such as misinformation and media bias, the ethical standards of journalism professionals have become critically important. By combining theoretical analysis with empirical research methods, including surveys and case studies of journalism students and graduates, this study elucidates the core essence and objectives of journalism ethics education. It examines how such education shapes the professional concepts, discipline, responsibility, and attitudes of graduates. The research further analyzes the mechanisms through which ethics education influences graduates' moral judgment and practical skills, particularly their capacity to navigate and manage media crises effectively. The findings indicate that graduates who receive systematic journalism ethics training demonstrate stronger ethical awareness, improved crisis management abilities, and enhanced decision-making skills under pressure. Moreover, the study highlights the crucial role of ethics education in supporting the sustainable and healthy development of the journalism industry by cultivating resilient and socially responsible media professionals. Based on these insights, the paper proposes practical recommendations for optimizing journalism ethics curricula, strengthening faculty expertise, and fostering closer cooperation between educational institutions and media organizations. These measures aim to further improve the professional ethics quality and crisis response capabilities of future journalists.

Keywords: journalism ethics education; graduates; professional ethics quality; media crisis response ability

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving information age, the news media industry is undergoing a profound transformation. The proliferation of digital platforms, the rise of user-generated content, and the increasing reliance on social media for news consumption have not only diversified the sources of information but also posed significant challenges to journalistic integrity and public trust. Amidst these changes, the credibility and social influence of the news industry are more closely tied than ever to the ethical standards and crisis management capabilities of its practitioners. Misinformation, sensationalism, and ideological polarization have emerged as pervasive threats, capable of distorting public discourse and eroding the democratic function of the media.

Against this backdrop, journalism graduates — who represent the emerging workforce in the media sector — must be equipped not only with technical skills in reporting and communication but also with a strong foundation in professional ethics. These ethical competencies are essential for navigating complex reporting scenarios, making sound editorial judgments, and maintaining accountability in high-pressure environments. Journalism ethics education thus becomes a fundamental pillar in shaping the professional character and decision-making frameworks of future media professionals.

Moreover, in an era characterized by media fragmentation and information overload, the ability to respond swiftly and responsibly to media crises — such as misinformation outbreaks, public backlash, or reputational threats — has become a core competency. Ethics education plays a critical role in preparing students for such realities by cultivating their awareness of ethical dilemmas, reinforcing normative standards, and instilling a sense of responsibility toward the public good.

Particularly with the emergence of new media ecosystems, where algorithmic amplification and content virality often overshadow truth and context, there is an urgent need to strengthen ethics education in journalism curricula. Through systematic instruction, case analysis, and practical training, ethics education helps students understand the consequences of ethical lapses, the value of transparency, and the importance of serving the public interest. Ultimately, journalism ethics education not only fosters a more responsible and resilient media workforce but also contributes to the preservation of a healthy, informed, and pluralistic public sphere.

2. The Connotation and Goal of Journalism Ethics Education

2.1. Concept and Scope of Journalism Ethics Education

Journalism ethics education refers to the structured process through which journalism students acquire the core moral principles, professional norms, and value orientations that guide responsible news production. This education encompasses a range of pedagogical methods, including classroom instruction, case analysis, simulation exercises, and field practice. It goes beyond mere knowledge transmission — it emphasizes the development of moral judgment, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning skills that are essential in today's complex media environment [1].

The scope of ethics education is broad, covering not only the principles of truth, accuracy, fairness, and impartiality, but also concepts such as transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity. These values are essential in addressing challenges such as disinformation, clickbait journalism, and political manipulation of media narratives. Effective ethics education provides students with the tools to critically evaluate the role of the journalist in society and to understand the ethical consequences of editorial decisions.

2.2. Educational Objectives and Theoretical Foundations

The primary goal of journalism ethics education is to ensure that future journalists internalize professional ethical standards and are able to apply them consistently in their daily work. From a theoretical perspective, this education draws upon normative theories of the press, including the social responsibility theory, libertarian theory, and public sphere theory. These frameworks help students understand the moral obligations of journalism in democratic societies and the role of the media in upholding public interest.

- 1) Journalism ethics courses typically emphasize core principles such as:
- 2) Authenticity: Reporting the truth without distortion or fabrication.
- 3) Objectivity: Maintaining neutrality and avoiding personal bias.
- 4) Fairness: Ensuring balanced coverage and equal representation of different viewpoints.
- 5) Respect for privacy and human dignity: Especially when covering traumatic or sensitive issues.

Real-world ethical breaches — such as accepting bribes, mixing editorial content with commercial interests, or distorting facts to generate sensationalism — are often used as cautionary case studies. Such examples serve as practical illustrations of the consequences of ethical violations, helping students understand the systemic harm caused by unethical journalism.

2.3. Practical Implementation and Skill Development

In addition to theoretical instruction, journalism ethics education places strong emphasis on practical application. Students engage in role-playing, newsroom simulations, and fieldwork designed to replicate real-life reporting scenarios [2]. For instance, they may be asked to conduct mock interviews, cover simulated breaking news, or write reports on ethically ambiguous stories. These experiences are essential for cultivating ethical reflexes under pressure.

A typical exercise might involve students reporting on a hypothetical natural disaster. They must decide how to balance timely reporting with compassion for victims, how to verify facts amidst chaos, and how to avoid sensationalizing suffering. This process trains students to recognize ethical dilemmas, weigh competing values, and arrive at responsible decisions.

Moreover, practical ethics education fosters a proactive ethical mindset. Students are encouraged to anticipate potential dilemmas and consider the long-term social impact of their reporting. Through sustained exposure to realistic moral challenges, students begin to view ethical conduct not as a compliance requirement, but as a professional habit and intrinsic value.

3. The Role of Journalism Ethics Education in Improving the Professional Ethics Quality of Graduates

3.1. Enhance Moral Cognition

News ethics education plays a fundamental role in enhancing graduates' professional ethics awareness, a point widely acknowledged in higher education and media industry talent development. Through systematic course design and practical teaching, students gain a deep understanding of the core values of the news industry, including principles such as truthfulness, objectivity, and fairness [3]. In class, teachers use real cases to explore the intricate relationship between professional ethics and ethical dilemmas, encouraging students to examine the moral challenges inherent in news production from multiple angles. For instance, when deciding on the coverage of a news event, journalists must balance obtaining exclusive information with protecting the privacy of those involved. This process not only deepens students' understanding of ethical standards but also motivates them to actively adhere to professional norms in their future careers. Furthermore, when students recognize the potential for social misunderstanding and public opinion storms caused by inaccurate reporting, their respect for news accuracy grows, fostering a strong professional commitment. Through long-term immersive learning, moral awareness moves beyond abstract principles to become an internal guide for behavior, laying a solid foundation for handling complex communication environments in the future.

3.2. Cultivate Moral Feelings

News ethics education plays an indispensable role in cultivating the moral sentiments of graduates. This education not only guides students to rationally understand professional ethics but also, through the recreation of specific scenarios and emotional projection, fosters their intrinsic recognition of professional integrity. In classroom simulations, students, acting as journalists, face the psychological struggles and social expectations of interviewees, gaining a deep understanding of the ethical responsibilities behind professional conduct. By analyzing typical cases of ethical lapses, such as a well-known media outlet's one-sided pursuit of click rates at the expense of fact-checking, students

gradually develop a strong belief in truthful and fair reporting. Such unethical practices can ultimately lead to public opinion spiraling out of control. They begin to reject unethical behavior and respect those who uphold journalistic ideals [4]. This process of internalizing knowledge into emotional values makes it easier for students to form stable professional integrity and a sense of responsibility in their future careers.

3.3. Shaping Moral Behavior

News ethics education aims to cultivate a stable model of professional ethics among graduates, addressing the ethical challenges faced by the news industry and reinforcing the sense of professional and social responsibility among news professionals. Through systematic course settings and practical training, learners internalize the core values and ethical standards of journalism in real-world editorial scenarios, gradually forming habits of adhering to professional norms. Whether facing power interference, temptation of interests, or public opinion pressure, news professionals with strong ethical qualities can maintain independent judgment, remain rational and restrained, and firmly uphold the truthfulness and fairness of their reporting [5]. Especially during sudden public events, the media's cautious verification of information sources, humanitarian concern for affected groups, and rational guidance of social emotions deeply reflect the profound shaping of professional behavior through ethical education. For instance, in the online news coverage of a recent violent incident, mainstream media reported with compassion, guided by the principle of humanitarian care, which highlights the importance of empathy in journalism. This ethical-driven action logic not only concerns individual professional integrity but also forms a crucial foundation for the credibility of the news industry.

4. The Role of Journalism Ethics Education in Improving Graduates' Ability to Deal with Media Crisis

4.1. Improve Crisis Awareness

Through in-depth engagement with journalism ethics education, students not only gain exposure to theoretical frameworks but also develop a profound understanding of the complex social psychology and public opinion mechanisms behind information dissemination by analyzing real media crisis cases. In class, teachers guide students to reconstruct the specific scenes of crisis outbreaks, such as the tense atmosphere at a news release site and the rapid escalation of public emotions, allowing students to experience firsthand the potential chain reactions caused by inappropriate reporting [6]. By tracking and analyzing the spread of false news on social media, students gradually develop a high sensitivity to news authenticity and recognize their crucial role in the information ecosystem. This situational learning approach significantly enhances students' professional vigilance, encouraging them to adopt a more cautious attitude towards source verification and value judgment in future journalistic practices, thereby fundamentally preventing media crises.

4.2. Cultivate Crisis Response Ability

In an environment where media crises are frequent, news ethics education enhances graduates' emergency response and decision-making skills through scenario simulations and practical exercises. In the classroom, scenarios such as public opinion spiraling out of control and news release errors are set up. Students must quickly assume roles in highly realistic crisis situations, taking on roles such as spokespersons, editors, journalists, or public representatives, to experience the multi-party dynamics in information flow. Throughout this process, ethical principles serve as the core basis for judgment and action, encouraging students to uphold the fundamental principles of truthfulness, fairness, and prioritizing public interest under high-pressure conditions, thereby enhancing their judgment and professional resilience in handling complex public opinion environments.

4.3. Enhance the Sense of Social Responsibility

News ethics education deeply shapes the professional character and value orientation of journalists, enabling them to demonstrate a stronger sense of social responsibility during media crises. Through systematic course training and case studies, students gradually internalize the professional belief that public interest comes first. When dealing with complex public opinions, they can transcend individual perspectives and make information screening and dissemination decisions from the perspective of overall social welfare. In sudden public health emergencies, ethically trained journalists not only focus on the evolving information flow of the event but also emphasize the ethical boundaries and social responsibilities in guiding public opinion [7]. They strive to maintain a balance between scientific accuracy and humanistic care in risk communication. They use professional judgment to balance the tension between the public's right to know and public order, striving to prevent social panic caused by information disorder. This sense of responsibility is not just an abstract slogan; it is reflected in every on-site interview, every in-depth report, and every news release, serving as a crucial foundation for the credibility of the journalism profession [8].

5. Empirical Research: Verification of the Effect of Journalism Ethics Education

To thoroughly evaluate the impact of journalism ethics education on the professional ethics and crisis response skills of journalism graduates, the research team conducted a comprehensive survey of graduates from a university's School of Journalism and Communication over the past three years. By combining quantitative questionnaires with in-depth interviews, the study systematically analyzed the significant changes in students' professional awareness, behavioral norms, and crisis response capabilities before and after taking journalism ethics courses. This analysis highlights the crucial role of journalism ethics education in the development of journalism talent [9]. The findings indicate that graduates who have undergone systematic training in journalism ethics demonstrate a clear advantage in moral judgment and professional integrity, particularly in key areas such as information verification and conflict resolution, where they exhibit stronger self-discipline and practical skills [10].

In the context of media crisis management, respondents who have undergone news communication ethics education generally exhibit higher situational sensitivity and decision-making rationality. They can balance public interests with individual rights during information dissemination and respond professionally from the early stages of public opinion. Some respondents mentioned in interviews that when faced with sudden public opinion events, they can quickly apply the ethical evaluation models learned in class to perform cross-verification of multiple information sources and make reporting decisions based on the 'minimum harm' principle [11]. This ability to convert theoretical knowledge into practical judgment helps them maintain professional composure in complex and changing information environments, avoiding emotional or utilitarian communication pitfalls.

In the digital age, survey data reveals the measures taken by journalists to uphold principles of truthfulness and objectivity. Journalists with ethical training are more likely to use structured verification mechanisms and establish multiple source verification processes to ensure the accuracy and fairness of their reports, thereby effectively reducing the risk of misinformation [12]. In the face of commercial interference or public opinion pressure, most journalists demonstrate strong psychological resilience and a commitment to values, establishing a clear boundary between their professional roles and external influences. This indicates that news ethics education not only strengthens students' professional identity but also enhances their ability to resist improper interference in real-world scenarios.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

6.1. Conclusion

News ethics education not only shapes the value judgment framework of graduates but also cultivates their moral practice skills in specific professional settings. In an information overload and complex public opinion environment, journalists with systematic ethical training demonstrate greater professional resilience and decision-making rationality. They can swiftly initiate ethical assessment mechanisms during sudden public opinion events, balancing multiple interests while adhering to the principle of truthfulness and considering social impact. This internalized professional quality, both deeply ingrained and actively practiced, enables them to uphold professional standards and show humanistic care in media crises, thereby effectively enhancing their ability to handle complex communication events and their sense of responsibility.

6.2. Suggestions

In order to further strengthen the effectiveness of journalism ethics education, promote the sublimation of graduates' professional ethics quality and improve their ability to deal with media crisis, we propose the following suggestions:

First, optimize the curriculum for journalism ethics education. Higher education institutions should, based on the latest developments in the journalism industry and students' actual learning needs, scientifically plan the curriculum and incorporate more practical teaching elements to enhance its effectiveness and relevance. For example, courses such as case analysis of journalism ethics and practical training in journalistic ethics could be offered, allowing students to better grasp journalism ethics knowledge through practical experience.

Second, enhance the faculty team. A high-quality faculty is essential for news ethics education. Higher education institutions should intensify the training of faculty members in news ethics education, aiming to improve their professional competence and teaching skills. Additionally, experienced professionals from the news industry can be invited as part-time instructors to share practical work experience and case studies with students.

Third, establish practical teaching bases. Universities should form long-term and stable partnerships with news media to set up practical teaching bases, providing students with more hands-on opportunities. Through real-world work, students can gain firsthand experience of the importance of news ethics, thereby enhancing their professional ethics and media crisis management skills.

Fourth, enhance communication and collaboration with the industry. Universities should strengthen their communication and cooperation with the news industry, stay updated on industry trends and needs, and flexibly adjust the content and methods of journalism ethics education. Additionally, inviting industry experts to participate in the curriculum design and teaching evaluation of journalism ethics education can improve the quality of such education.

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