

# The Knowledge, Attitude and Acceptance of Journalism Ethics among Journalist

Nur Aziemah Mohd Azman<sup>1+</sup>, Ismail Sualman<sup>1</sup> and Illias Md Salleh<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia

**Abstract.** The research will focus on fifty journalists from different newspaper and broadcasting companies in Malaysia. The researcher chooses journalist that comes from different newspaper and broadcasting companies in order to know how each journalist practice the ethics and the outcomes will be a variety. This study will help us understand the actual level of knowledge on journalism ethics that the Malaysian journalist posses, their attitude towards it and also their acceptance of journalism ethics in their working environment. Moreover, this research will also be helpful in seeing whether the Codes of Ethics which was stated by the Communication and Multimedia Content Forum is practised by the journalists in their writing process or not. The result showed that the journalists are mostly neutral regarding journalism ethics. Gender does not have any significant relationship between knowledge, attitude and acceptance. This shows that male and female journalist are considered as having the same opinion when it comes to determining the level of ethics they possessed. It showed that gender does not plays a role in finding out the journalists' attitude and acceptance towards journalism ethics. It could be by chance that they posses the same level of knowledge, attitude and acceptance of journalism ethics.

**Keywords:** Journalism, Ethics

## 1. Introduction

Journalists have been examining ethical problems in their own and other profesional for decades. Some journalists have written series and even books on ethical problems in medicine like euthanasia and the use of experimental therapies. Other journalists have written about business, and political ethics, like the Clinton scandal, exploring at length such problems as against corporate governance and transparency and moral responsibility.

Because journalism touches almost everyone's life and because it benefit substantially by reporting events ethical conducts in journalism deserves at least as much attention as the standards and ethical conduct of lawyers, doctors or business professionals. This is not to suggest that journalists are ethically defective. Malaysian journalist either print, broadcast or on-line, are often fair and competent, journalism, being what it is, even the most ethical journalist operating from what they view as the best of motive, inevitably will produce some ethically unsatisfactory views.

To enhance pluralism of ideas and serve as the fourth estate, the media is in the spotlight to complete a variety of social roles; and creating a market of opinions is one of them (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011). The journalists are expected to be fair and truthful in providing information and writing the news. They are also expected to adhere to the ethics and use ethical reasoning in writing a piece of news. Even when dealing with sensational issues or privacy, the journalists are bounded with ethics that they must follow.

However, it is hard to draw a line on ethics. Each journalist have their own definition of ethics. Borden (2003:p 277) suggest that in defining ethics, the reasoning is an analytically epistemic activity that is difficult to capture adequately with most of the mapping techniques that have been used to represent sense making in various discipline. This study will explore the level of knowledge, the attitude and acceptance of journalism ethics among Malaysian journalists. A survey will be carried out among 50 journalists to find out what they understand by ethical journalism, their attitude and acceptance towards ethics in journalism.

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<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author.

*E-mail address:* timuncina\_merah@yahoo.com.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The consequences of bad ethical judgments may damage the reputation of the journalists and media organizations as well as the profession in general (Faridah Ibrahim, 2010). There is a broad definition when it comes to journalism ethics. Where should we draw the line? Ward (2008) said that ethics is about practical judgment-the application of principles to issues and decisions. Ethics encompasses theoretical and practical reasoning.

The news organization would publish stories that may win attention and profesional success quickly. Due to stiff competition, it may not be surprising when certain journalists sometimes are insensitive to the ethical consequences of their stories, for the people they cover. New technologies and its application in journalism have raided a variety of ethical questions and controversies. Because it is now relatively easy to capture news events on video cameras many people have footage for sale. Other ethical breaches using technology are link of to privacy, including hidden cameras and microphones and the use of databases to mine personel information about individuals.

There is a need to look into our journalists' level of knowledge regarding ethics, their attitude and acceptance of journalism ethics in order to find out whether they are aware of ethics in their working environment. There are an increasing number of journalists today, who came from varied education background and experiences. The situation is further compounded by online journalists and freelance journalists who write news in their blogs and for tabloid newspaper. Different journalists with different educational background and experience may have differences in their knowledge, attitude and acceptance of journalism ethics.

## **3. Research Objectives**

- To identify the journalist's level of knowledge on journalism ethics
- To study the journalist's attitude towards journalism ethics
- To study the journalist's acceptance of journalism ethics

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

For this study, the researcher will use two of communication theory as its core for the research. This theoretical framework will find out how a journalist's process in writing a story or article to be publish in the newspaper. The researcher will study whether or not the journalist follow the code of ethics or use any ethical consideration in writing the news. This will enable the researcher to further understands their attitude and acceptance of the code.

The researcher will first gather information about the level of knowledge of each journalist about the code of ethics. The knowledge in this case is whether they are aware of the code and whether they know contents of the code of journalism ethics. The type of media in which they apply the ethics is also part of the element to discover the level of knowledge. From the level of knowledge, the researcher can later analyze the attitudes and acceptance of journalism ethics among the journalists.

The level of knowledge is important because based on it, the researcher can later identify how a journalist react to using journalism ethics in their writing process and later on how do they accept the fact that there are journalism ethics to be followed. The attitude of the journalist towards journalism ethics will be the marker of how they accept the journalism ethics in their working environment.

### **4.1. Research Instrument**

In this study, the researcher decided to use quantitative method where a survey will be conducted on to the sample. The survey questionnaire will consist of questions regarding the journalist's level of knowledge, their attitude and acceptance towards journalism ethics. The questionnaire consist of 4 sections A, B, C and D. Each section will consist of 10 questions except for section D where it is mainly about the sample's background and identification. Section A will be multiple choice and open ended questions while section B and C requires the sample to answer the questions based on Likert-scale, or also known as the summated

rating approach. A number of statements are developed with respect to a topic, the score will be calculated in order to get accurate data and respondents must answer the questions based on the five values.

## **4.2. Research Sampling Technique**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the non-probability sampling technique which is the convenience sample. The researcher gathers 100 of journalists' email obtained by reliable resource and send out the survey questionnaire through emails to all of the journalists in the list. All journalists were located in Selangor and are working either as print journalists, broadcast journalists, online journalists or freelance journalists. The first 50 journalists to reply the email with the answered survey as the attachment will be taken as the sample for this research.

## **5. Results**

The result showed that the journalists ( $n = 50$ ) are mostly neutral regarding journalism ethics. Gender does not have any significant relationship between knowledge, attitude and acceptance. This shows that male and female journalist are considered as having the same opinion when it comes to determining the level of ethics they possessed. It showed that gender does not play a role in finding out the journalists' attitude and acceptance towards journalism ethics. It could be by chance that they possess the same level of knowledge, attitude and acceptance of journalism ethics.

Their level of education have significant relationship towards their level of knowledge, attitude and acceptance of journalism ethics because the more they learn about media, the more they are aware of the importance of journalism ethics in their working environment. The longer they are exposed to the media and ethics; be it just ethics or ethical dilemma; they will be more knowledgeable of ethics and how to react and accept it.

Taking into consideration the theories used for this research; the authoritarian theory and social responsibilities theory; the result showed that the theory is acceptable. The journalists are the one responsible to spread information and at the same time keep the balance and harmony between the citizens and the government. The journalists should be able to balance between truth and fairness in writing the news. The authoritarian theory best describes the relationship between journalists and the government ; their duty to spread information from the government to the public without damaging or embarrassing the government. The social responsibility theory on the other hand, shows that everyone has the right to use the media.

The chi square analysis revealed that the concern on unethical news reporting (exaggerating, biasness, intrusion of privacy) has significant relationship with gender, race and education level. While almost all respondents are neutral towards the act of unethical journalism practices, it could be by chance that they agree to the same answer. This indicates that even with different ethnic background and education level, the journalists have the same agreement when it comes to ethics in journalism.

When asked whether or not they should be truthful about the government, the result showed that journalists agree that they should be truthful in their reporting regardless on which party they are aliened with. However, due to the restraint and law prohibiting them from writing against the government, the journalist can only tell the good side of the ruling party. The attitude and acceptance of the journalist towards journalism ethics is neutral. Most of the respondents are neutral to the statement given in the questionnaire. Almost all respondents showed positive feedback in their attitude and acceptance of journalism ethics. However, when it comes to using the CMCF's Codes of Ethics, most of them would either disagree or strongly disagree in using it and referring to it in their writing process. The result of this study indicates that the journalists is well educated with knowledge on journalism ethics even when they do not refer to the CMCF's Codes of Ethics in their writing process. They have generally neutral a attitude in practising the ethics and accepts that journalism ethics is part of their working environment.

Studying media ethics and the ethical codes of the various media professions is an attempt to better understand the workings and conduct of the mass media which play a significant role in society. Like any other profession whose activities affect the public, the media too are bound by formal and informal controls. Part of the informal controls, codes of ethics, when formulated, were significantly influenced by the codes of more established media professions, particularly in the West. While taking a leaf out of the Western codes

may give the local codes a more universal outlook, there is also concern that they may not adequately address the cultural and parochial realities that exist in this multiethnic society. Thus, this research hopes to study the suitability and applicability of the codes, not just in the context of multiculturalism, but also against international standards. Because of its informal nature, the codes of media ethics in Malaysia have been criticised as 'lacking punch'. Due to that, adherence to and observance of the codes is voluntary. A review of the codes and the findings may help the practitioners, both local and international, to strengthen the codes and their utility; and subsequently lend some credibility and respectability to the communication and media professions in Malaysia.

## 6. Discussion

The journalists are the 'bullet' for the government to spread their ideology and gain the trust of the society. This is very true as stated by the authoritarian theory where all is entitled the permission to use the media; but the government is still the one who controls what the media would publish. The journalists are forbidden from writing anything other than the good actions by the government. Looking at the social responsibility theory where the theory inspires self-control by the media for the good of the society, the journalists showed that they are aware of their responsibility towards the citizens where they agree that they should report the truth and be accurate with their information. When asked about whether human interest is more important than social responsibility, most of them are neutral and disagree with the statement. This showed that the journalist accepts that even with the regulations set by the agency, they still have to be ethical in their news reporting in order to full fill their responsibilities to the society. Even being under the control of the government, the journalists do have the urge to be fair towards the citizens. The journalists agree that they should be truthful in their news reporting regardless of which side of the party they are aligned to.

The result of the survey showed that the journalists do apply journalism ethics in their writing process and working environment although not thoroughly. The findings also showed that applying journalism ethics in the writing process and working environment of the journalists could be a practicality where it does help the journalist to make decision between a good news and a bad news. Most of the respondents agreed that ethics should be made compulsory to all journalists in their writing process where they also agreed that by applying journalism ethics, it would help them to write better news and stories in the future. The government may need to take a second look at the current ethical guidelines as the findings of the research showed that the journalists agreed that there are not enough monitoring of the codes of ethics to guide them. The current policy is seen as too vague where it only covers a few area in the field of written media. Furthermore, the government should apply the policy where issues in journalism ethics should be taken seriously because journalism is one of the medium which the outside worldviews our country.

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