

Original Article

Freedom of Speech and Ethical Boundaries in Modern Media

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ABSTRACT

Freedom of speech is a fundamental democratic principle that allows individuals and institutions to express opinions, share information, and participate in public discourse without excessive censorship. However, the rapid growth of digital communication platforms has transformed information distribution and raised new ethical challenges in modern media systems. While traditional media followed strict editorial standards and regulatory frameworks, digital media has expanded public participation but also increased issues such as misinformation, hate speech, propaganda, and lack of accountability. This research examines the relationship between freedom of speech and ethical limitations in contemporary media environments. Using a literature review and analytical approach, the study analyzes the impact of technological advancements, algorithm-driven content distribution, regulatory policies, journalism accountability, and user-generated content on media ethics. The findings highlight the need to balance freedom of expression with ethical responsibility through cooperation among governments, media organizations, technology companies, and civil society. Strengthening digital literacy, improving platform transparency, and developing adaptive regulatory systems are essential to promote responsible media practices while protecting democratic discourse.

KEYWORDS

Freedom Of Speech, Media Ethics, Digital Media Governance, Social Media Regulation, Information Ethics, Journalism Standards, Online Communication, Media Responsibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

As a commonly known fact freedom of speech is considered one of the most imperative pillars of democratic states since it allows the people to share their ideas, opinions, and even information freely without the government and other formidable structures meddling in their matters, due to non-emergency situations. This principle promotes openness, invites and facilitates a social, political and cultural discourse, and allows citizens to become actively engaged participants in social, political and cultural processes. Traditionally, the freedom of speech has been strongly relating with the democratic rule as it encourages responsibility and gives people the freedom to challenge authority, policies, and also participate in the process of making decisions. In the previous communication system, the traditional media houses like newspapers, radio stations and television stations were the focus of influencing the discourse of the people. These outlets worked within well organized editorial procedures that paid attention to professional ethics, responsible journalism and rigorous vetting mechanisms prior to the release of information. Journalists were bound to abide by laid down codes of conduct, which emphasized on accuracy, fairness, objectivity and public interest. These standards were upheld by editorial boards, regulatory bodies and professional bodies in the media, as well as in ensuring that the communication was responsible and credible.

Nevertheless, the fast development of digital technologies made a great difference in the organization of the contemporary communication systems. The advent of the digital platforms, such as the social media networks, blogs, podcasts, and independent online news platforms has significantly increased the capacity of individuals engaged in the generation and distribution of information to the audiences worldwide. However, in comparison to the traditional media systems, where institutional infrastructure was needed, digital media enables common participants to produce and share material on the spot. Communication has been democratized due to this change, which has seen more people involved and diversity of opinion being promoted and civic participation is empowered in most societies.

Meanwhile, the openness of digital media space has posed emerging concerns about ethics. The lack of editorial control and professional review mechanisms in most of the online platforms has facilitated the proliferation of false information, sensational news, and negative content very fast. Moreover, the current media systems are grounded on the algorithmic content distribution model where automated systems give priority and distribution of information with references to user engagement but not their accuracy or social responsibility.

Consequently, the modern media has been highly dynamic in terms of its speed of sharing information, massive quantity of user generated content and intricate digital networks. The current developments offer an opportunity as well as a challenge to democratic communication because there is need to have a careful balance between freedom of speech and ethical communication practices in the contemporary systems of media.

1.2. Evolution of Freedom of Speech in Media

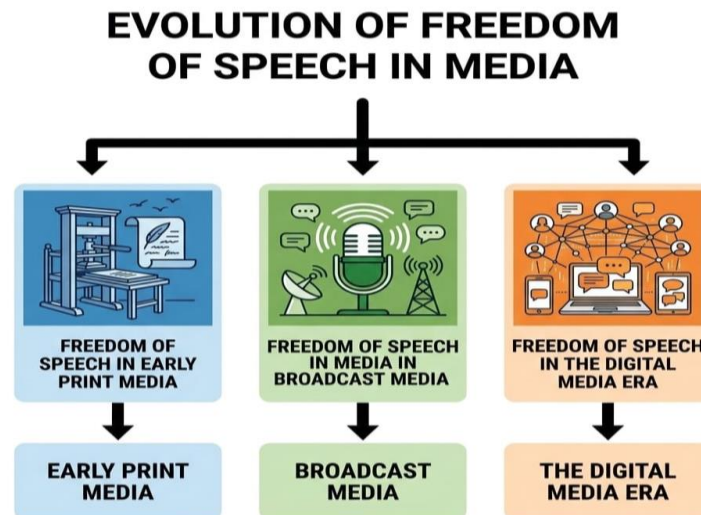


Fig 1 - Evolution of Freedom of Speech in Media

Freedom of speech is a notion that has witnessed dramatic changes as the media technologies and communication systems have been developing. Over the years, the growth of media outlets has impacted the way people voice their work, give information and engage in the debate. Since the first print materials, along with the contemporary digital communication networks, every single phase of media development conditioned the manner in which the freedom of speech is practiced and controlled. Making sense of this development assists in explaining why there is ever-increasing complexity in balancing freedom of expression and ethical obligations in contemporary media conditions.

1.2.1. Freedom of Speech in Early Print Media

Mass communication first came up with the introduction of the printing technology that was used to produce newspapers, pamphlets, and books. The print media particularly dominated this era of the time, as it was instrumental in propagation of political thought, cultural education, and social reforms. In as much as, early print communication opened up more options of public manifestations, it was usually subject to high control by the governments and the ruling classes. Political criticism and distribution of opposing view was suppressed through the enactment of censorship laws by many states. In spite of these limitations, the print media turned into a valuable medium of intellectual discussion and movements towards democracy and especially during the times of social and political changes. Demand of press freedom over the years resulted in legal provision of freedom of speech and press in most democratic societies.

1.2.2. Freedom of Speech in Broadcast Media

Radio and television broadcasting technologies that were introduced in the twentieth century also altered the paradigm of communication. The broadcast media also facilitated reaching large masses of the population and in a cost effective way and hence made it a strong community communicator. Nonetheless, given the scarcity of broadcast frequencies and the need to provide them with major infrastructure facilities, governments and regulatory bodies usually ensured stringent control over broadcasting organisations. Radio and television media houses were supposed to adhere to professional principles and ethical provisions whose purpose is to enhance accuracy, fairness and responsible reporting. Although broadcast media increased information dissemination

and dialogue among the people, the introduction of regulation structures implied that the freedom of speech was normally accompanied by institutional regulation and control by the editors.

1.2.3. Freedom of Speech in the Digital Media Era

The introduction of digital communications technologies has brought about the biggest revolution in the history of media freedom of speech. It is through internet, social media, and mobile communication technologies that the people all over the world are now able to pass information immediately and engage in international dialogues. The digital media enables users to create and share content without utilizing centralized institutions as was the case with traditional media systems. Such a change has enlarged significantly the freedom of expression and reinforced participatory communication. Nevertheless, the digital media environment also poses new challenges, such as the spread of misinformation at a fast pace, online hate, and the impact of the system of distributing content based on the algorithm. Consequently, the future discourse on free speech depends more and more on finding viable solutions enabling to sustain open dialogue, and is concerned with morality issues in digital media ecosystems.

1.3. Ethical Boundaries in Modern Media

Ethical boundaries in the modern media are those principles and standards, which are used to influence responsible communication without violating the basic right to free speech. With the development of the media system in accordance with the appearance of digital technologies, the necessity of the ethical principles has been growing. Through the modern media such as online news media, social networking sites, blogs, and streaming services, individuals and organizations are able to disseminate information to audiences around the world in near real time. Although this fast and transparent communication space leads to the promotion of democratic participation and access to various points of view, it also imposes certain problems in the context of misinformation, sensationalism, invasion of privacy, and harmful content. The ethics limits are used to make sure that the freedom of speech should be exercised in a responsible manner that does not harm individuals, groupings, or the entire society. The most significant ethical value of the contemporary media is the accuracy and truth presented in disseminated information. Media industries and journalists, as well as online content creators, are supposed to fact-check any information they plan to share with the masses before incorporating it in false or misleading content on the Internet. The other critical ethical standard is the respect of privacy and human dignity, and therefore, the media practitioners are not supposed to publish sensitive personal information or contents that may damage the reputation and well being of an individual. The fairness and impartiality are another concern of ethical practices in the media that promotes balanced reporting to reflect many perspectives, instead of supporting a biased or unilateral storytelling. Ethical issues in digital media have gotten more complicated because of the existence of user generated content and distributed information based on algorithms. Many online platforms enable people to post materials without any review, unlike the old media houses where in editorial areas material control is done by an editorial committee. Such decentralization of control may contribute to the rise in the problem of harmful communication, such as hate speech, misinformation, and cyber harassment. This has led to more and more shared responsibility in the ethics of modern media between journalists, providers of digital platforms, policymakers, and users of the media. Defining clear ethical norms also assists to provide a communication perspective where freedom of expression is observed but at the same time, the media content to be offered is useful in contributing to the discourse of informed audiences and social goodwill.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1. Media Ethics in the Digital Era

The digital era has radically changed the organization and working of modern media system bringing new ethical dilemmas of journalism, media organizations, and providers of digital platforms. The traditional media had clear editorial structures through which the functions of professional journalists were to control information through verification before passing to the audience. Nonetheless, the role of the audiences has disappeared and has been replaced with active creators and relisers of information with the emergence of the social media platforms, blogs, and user-generated content systems. That change has made the whole spectrum of opinions more accessible in the public arena and has allowed more people to engage in the democratic discourse. Concurrently, proliferation of misinformation, disinformation and unproven assertions have been fueled by the lack of regular-editing in most digital space. The rate at which media emerges digitally is also a moral issue since it values urgentness over factuality. According to researchers, the ethics of digital media however needs to cover solutions like accountable content generation, verification, cyber bullying, privacy, and the responsibility of the service provider. Moreover, using artificial intelligence and the algorithm-based recommendation systems in the content distribution creates even more ethical challenges, since such technologies may shape the masses opinion by focusing on some stories more than on others. Consequently, researchers suggest that ethics of modern media should be updated to reflect technological consciousness, platform responsibility, and digital responsibility in order to make sure that the freedom of speech is controlled by the principles of truth, fairness, and social responsibility.

2.2. Regulatory Frameworks and Free Speech

Laws that control the practices of freedom of speech and media have grown to be all the more critical within the realm of digital communication settings. Regulatory bodies, governments and the international organizations have come up with several policies of establishing a balance between the safeguarding of freedom of speech and the desire to avoid negative or misleading communication. In democracies, the freedom of speech is regarded as one of the basic rights, which encourages open communication, transparency, and involvement of the people in the governance. Yet, the digital media boom has posed complicated problems connected with fake news and hate speech, cyber harassment and extremism. Consequently, there has been an argument among the policymakers on how far the mechanisms of regulation are supposed to penetrate into the online communication systems. Other researchers propose more robust legal models, which would means that digital forums should eliminate harmful content, apply standards to communities, and exercise transparency in their algorithms. Some believe that the government participation in the economy can degrade the democratic principles by allowing censorship, political control, or curtailing of opposing views. The international bodies are keen to make it clear that a balanced regulation should be used which should protect fundamental freedoms but also encourage responsible communication. The current policy practices are more concentrated on collaborative types of governance that incorporate governments, technology firms, civil society, and media houses. These models seek to support ethical communication patterns by transparency policies, accountability suggestions, fact checking governance and digital literacy classes to empower the citizens to conduct critical analysis of information in the online media.

2.3. Research Gap

Although the current scholarly literature on the subject of the freedom of speech and media ethics has been examined in depth, there are some significant gaps that are still present. A majority of

researchers pay more attention to the theoretical debates on the principles of democracy or regulatory framework, but a lesser number of works are concerned with the practical aspects of these concepts in the context of the rapidly changing digital media ecosystems. Specifically, the notion of the impact of an algorithm-driven platform on ethical communication practices and discourse in various cultural and political environments is under-researched empirically. Also, the literature focuses on both the freedom of speech and the freedom of media shown separately, but does not specifically investigate the frameworks on how the marriages of these liberties and moral obligations can be improved in the online context. The other gap in the research is on how emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, automated content moderation systems and data analytics influence ethical decision making process within media organizations. Also, technological infrastructure, regulatory capacity and digital literacy are unique issues in developing countries, but these contexts are not well represented in most of the media ethics studies around the world. The matters addressed to these research gaps are crucial to drafting a comprehensive set of theoretical models and policy framework that would be recyclable to restore freedom of speech and moral speech practices in contemporary media systems. Research to be conducted in the future should thus incorporate interdisciplinary strategies where the lessons that are contained in the communications studies, information technology, law and population policy are merged in order to have a better understanding of the ethical dynamics of the modern media environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The research approach of this study is mixed-method with implications that incorporate the qualitative and quantitative research techniques in studying the relationship between freedom of speech and ethical limits in modern media settings. By combining three crucial elements, such as literature analysis, media policy analysis, and data collection carried out in the form of a survey, this design allows understanding the subject of ethical communication practices in digital media environments fully. The literature analysis will be the review of scholarly journals, books, policy papers and past research studies on the topics of media ethics, freedom of speech, digital communication technologies and regulatory models. The given stage assists in recognizing theoretical points of view, existing controversies, and gaps in knowledge in the sphere of media governance and communication studies. Along with the analysis of literature, the study implies the media policy assessment, which studies the beginner and international policy frames of digital communication platforms. The policies and guidelines which are designed by media regulatory bodies, technology firms and international bodies are examined to learn how ethical standards are applied and executed in the online setups. This analysis informs about the efficiency of the existing regulatory frameworks in resolving the problems of misinformation, hate speech, and information polarization led by algorithms. The survey-based data collection is the third part of the research design as it will collect the primary data of media users, journalists, and digital communication professionals. The questionnaire will be aimed at gauging the attitudes towards ethical communication, knowledge of media policies, and exposure to digital content regulation and false information. The respondents are interviewed using structured questionnaires which contain both closed ended and open ended questions to provide reliable data. These three elements of research can be integrated to enable triangulation of the results enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the research. Through a synthesis of theoretical knowledge, policy analysis and empirical evidence, it is through the research design that one gets a comprehensive driving framework of the identification of essential factors that affect ethical communication practices within contemporary digital media ecosystems. Attempting to stabilize responsible media practices and at the same time maintain the

principle of democracy by freedom of speech, this, in the end, will allow the study to make evidence-based recommendations.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

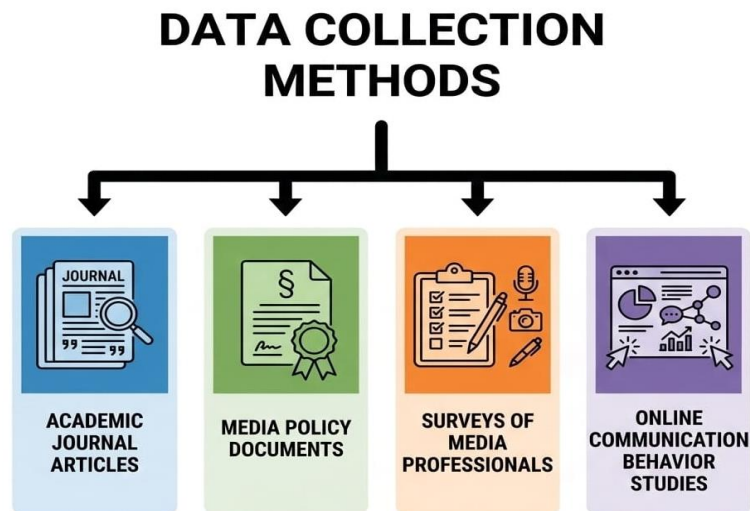


Fig 2 - Data Collection Methods

3.2.1. Academic Journal Articles

One of the key sources of secondary data needed in this research was academic journal articles. The systematic review of peer-reviewed journals in the area of communication studies, media ethics, political science, and information technology was conducted to identify theoretical views and empirical research concerning the issue of freedom of speech and ethical communication in the digital media. Those articles have given understanding of old arguments, new ethical issues, and new regulatory factors about the contemporary media platforms. The fact that scholarly publications have been used also means that the study is based on viable research that has been proven to be credible. Moreover, journal articles have served to discover the main topics, including misinformation, algorithm interaction, online media regulation, and involvement of the audience in online communication. Through the reviews of several scholarly materials, the study could establish a solid conceptual framework and determine literature gaps that guided the research objectives and methodology.

3.2.2. Media Policy Documents

The strategy was to review media policy reports to be aware of the rules on how digital media are regulated to ensure the freedom of speech and practice standards within the media. These papers covered policies by the state regulatory organizations, international agencies, and media sources that touch on the core of issues concerning online misinformation, digital rights, privacy protection, and content regulation. Through an examination of these policy systems, the research was able to see the efforts of the regulatory bodies to moderate between the safeguarding of free expression and the necessity to stop communication practices that are harmful or otherwise unethical. Analysis of the policies was also able to determine the roles that media organizations, social media platforms and creators of the content should take in ensuring ethical standards of communication are met. These documents were analyzed, which gave a more general overview of the institutional and legal framework, which impacts the governance of digital media.

3.2.3. *Surveys of Media Professionals*

The surveys were used in this research as the primary data were gathered with the participation of media professionals such as journalists, digital content creators, editors, and communication specialists. The survey was carried out in order to get the views on the professional perceptions of freedom of speech, professional ethics on reporting, and difficulties of regulating the content of digital media. The structured questionnaires were aimed at collecting quantitative and qualitative data on both problems on misinformation management and ethical decision-making and platform accountability. The feedbacks of media professionals were also insightful real-worlds information about the application of ethical standards in the modern-day media setting. This approach aided in the closing of the gap between the theoretical discourses and the real-life experiences in the sphere of journalism and digital communication.

3.2.4. *Online Communication Behavior Studies*

Online communication behavior research also served as a source of data set to examine the interaction of audience with digital media platforms and information ecosystems. These researches are centered around user engagement trends and content sharing habits and information dissemination within social media sites. The research investigated the contribution of the online audience to the production, sharing, and consumption of the media content by studying available literature concerning the behavior of online communication. These studies offer a reflection of such phenomena as the information virality, echo chambers, and content exposure dictated by algorithms. These behavioral patterns should be understood to analyze the problem of ethical implication of digital communication systems and find factors which drive responsible consumption of information. The results of these researches were useful in the context of the research to comprehend the influence of user behavior on the entire ethical context of contemporary media space.

3.3. **Analytical Framework**

The analytical paradigm through which this research was conducted is pegged on the Ethical Communication Balance Model, which explicates the connection between the freedom of speech, regulation and the responsibility of the media in determining ethical communication practices within the contemporary media profiles. The degree of ethical communication (E), in this context, is perceived as the result of a tradeoff among three significant variables, i.e., the freedom of speech index (F), the regulatory restrictions (R) and mechanisms of media accountability (M). In the simplicity of the formula, the conceptual formula content that was used in the study could be summarized as: the level of ethics-based communication is equal to the sum of regulatory restrictions and media accountability mechanisms that are divided by the index of the freedom of speech. That is, ethical communication requires the efficiency of regulatory framework and accountability systems within the context of the freedom of expression. Freedom of speech symbolizes the extent to which people and the media entities can speak out, exchange knowledge and ideas and engage in the community without suppression or unnecessary limitations. As much as democratic communication requires high level of freedom, an unmonitored environment is likely to enhance the chances of misinformation, destructive speech and undesirable media conduct. Regulatory restrictions refer to legislative, policy and institutional measures that are aimed at preventing damaging communication like hate speech, disinformation and cyber harassment. Such rules aid in ensuring social accountability of media systems. Media accountability procedures may be described as professional requirements, moral principles, fact-checking routines as well as institutional control processes which promote accountable journalism and responsible content generation. When rules and control structures are in place and working effectively, they assist in creation of a well-rounded media

ecosystem that protects free speech and allows in the control of unethical communication practices. Thus, the analytical framework points to making clear that ethical communication is not solely obtained via the absolute freedom of speech, but rather a well calculated action of freedom, regulation, and responsibility. This model offers an organized methodology of understanding the role of these factors on the ethics of communication within the modern system of digital media.

3.4. Flow of Research Process

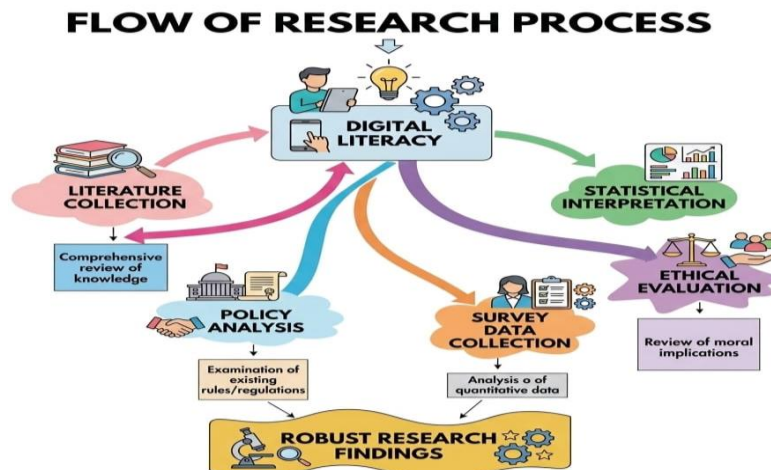


Fig 3 - Flow of Research Process

3.4.1. Literature Collection

The primary research process step included the systematic gathering of the pertinent literature connected to the topics of freedom of speech, media ethics, digital communication, and regulatory frameworks. Literary sources such as academic journals, books, conference papers, and research reports were thoroughly discussed in order to gain a familiarity with the available theories and academic arguments on the subject of media studies. The move assisted in defining a very robust theoretical basis in the study by defining the critical concepts like ethical communication, media responsibility, misinformation, and governance of the digital platforms. The literature collection also helped the researcher to review past empirical data and research gaps that needed to be filled through further research. Through the evaluation of extensive academic literature, the investigation could create a theoretical framework on which the further research process would be implemented.

3.4.2. Policy Analysis

The second phase was the assessment of media policies and regulatory practices that shape the freedom of speech and professional communication practices within digital media setups. The policy documents prepared by the government, international institutions, and the regulations by media were reviewed to see the ways in which the ethical provisions of rules and laws are worked out in contemporary systems of communication. The analysis was about the digital media governance policies, misinformation control policies, the privacy protection, and the content moderation policies. This step was intended to test how well the current regulatory practices did serve the intention of getting a balance between responsible communication and free expression. The study was able to interpret matters concerning policy analysis in the light of how legal and institutional processes also determine the nature of the ethical principles that are adhered to by media houses and online platforms.

3.4.3. Survey Data Collection

The third phase of the research was surveying the primary data that was gathered based on the surveys that were carried out among the media specialists and digital media consumers. The questionnaires were structured to collect data on the thinking of the participants concerning the freedom of speech, the ethical practice of journalism, and effects of digital media platforms on the communication behaviour. To address the question about the extent of online communication, misinformation, and media accountability, both quantitative and qualitative questions were presented in the survey that gave the respondents an opportunity to report on their experiences of this phenomenon. This phase offered practical knowledge on understanding how people located in the media sector view ethical roles and policing issues in the online communication space. The survey outcomes obtained were a significant empirical research element in the research.

3.4.4. Statistical Interpretation

Once the data of the survey was gathered the second thing was to interpret and analyze the responses using statistics. Quantitative data retrieved through the questionnaires was tabulated, itemized as well as analyzed using statistical measures in order to determine patterns, trends and correlations involved in ethical communication practices. The responses of the participants were summarized using descriptive statistics including percentages, averages and frequency distributions. This statistical analysis assisted in determining major factors involved in media ethics and freedom of speech on digital spheres. Data interpretation enabled the researcher to make meaningful conclusions about the perception of media professionals and users concerning ethical communication issues within the context of the modern media system.

3.4.5. Ethical Evaluation

The last research process was the evaluation of ethical implications of the findings gained in the literature analysis, policy review, and interpretation of the survey data. This step aimed at evaluating the interaction of freedom of expression and moral duties in contemporary media settings. The ethical judgment has reflected on matters like misinformation, accountable journalism, responsibility of the digital platform as well as safeguarding the interest of public in communication systems. Such combination of theoretical approaches and empirical findings made the study evaluate the effectiveness of the current regulatory frameworks and media practices in facilitating ethical communication. This phase also assisted in coming up with recommendations on enhancing accountability of the media, enhancing ethical practices and encouraging responsible freedom of expression on digital media ecosystems.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Key Observations

Based on the analysis performed within the scope of the current study, it was possible to identify a number of substantial insights about the correlation existing between the freedom of speech and ethical communication in the contemporary digital media settings. Among the most remarkable ones, it is possible to note the fact that the enhanced level of online involvement has reinforced democratic communication since people of different social, cultural, and political origins may express their views and participate in the open dialogue. The social media networks, blogs, and online discussion forums have been used through digital media to decrease the conventional communication barriers in order to engage citizens in democratic processes more actively. This has increased involvement that has increased the visibility of the various perspectives, opened out discussions to the masses and better access to information. Consequently, digital communication

technologies have been very instrumental in enabling people and enhancing transparency in governance and policy discourse. Nevertheless, the paper has also found out that the absence of editorial supervision in most online sources finds its direct contribution to the dissemination of fake news and misjudgment. Many online platforms permit users to create and distribute material without proper fact-checking protocols unlike the traditional media houses which execute their professional editorial protocols and verification procedures. In such a climate, there is high probability of false information, rumors and distorted stories disseminating quickly along digital networks. The pace of information going through the internet usually puts the value of engaging and being popular before the value of being accurate, thus making it difficult in upholding ethical standards of communication. Therefore, the false information can affect the general thinking, cause social conflicts, and damage the credibility of the accessible information sources. The next notable finding of the study is that responsible communication practices in the media training of professionals working in the media and those creating online content are essential due to ethical media training. Media ethics and fact-checking skills, digital literacy, and responsible reporting practice training programs can be used to encourage people to comprehend ethical duties related to freedom of speech. Professionals working in media fields after such training would have a higher chance of checking information, observing privacy and diversity, and preventing the spread of harmful or misleading information. Thus, in the study, it is emphasized that further enriching ethical education and professional training of the media industry can play a significant role in achieving a more responsible and balanced digital communication environment.

4.2. Survey Results

Table 1: Survey Results

Ethical Media Issue	Respondents (%)
Concern about misinformation	82%
Support ethical regulation	68%
Concern about censorship	61%
Support platform accountability	74%
Believe media literacy is important	89%

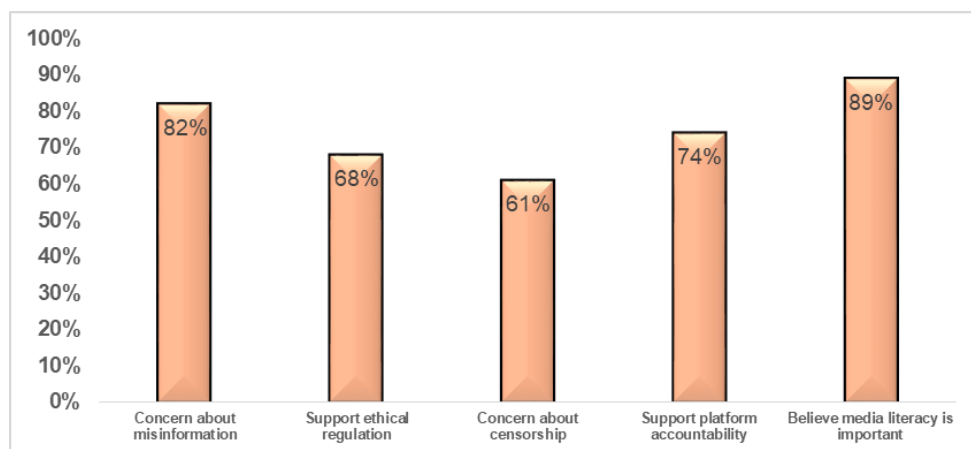


Fig 4 - Survey Results

4.2.1. Concern about Misinformation (82%)

According to the survey findings, it is revealed that 82 percent of participants were highly concerned with the spread of misinformation on digital media setting. The given discovery

demonstrates at least a certain degree of awareness of the negative influence of false or misleading information that is propagated by the media professionals and the users of digital media on the very discourse. The spread of misinformation via the social media, online news outlets, and messaging apps can occur quickly and reach into the hands of masses before it is proven or rectified. Respondents indicated that misinformation might affect the political views, cause social divisions, and decrease the level of trust among people towards the actual media institutions. The large share of concern indicates that the issue of misinformation has become one of the most urgent problems of the contemporary communication systems. It also highlights the importance of having better fact-checking systems, good journalism practices, and better digital literacy among media consumers.

4.2.2. Support for Ethical Regulation (68%)

The results of the survey indicate that two-thirds of the consumers would agree to the application of ethical regulation systems to online media sites. The participants are of the opinion that there are some aspects of regulation that are needed to instigate the idea of responsible communications and avoid propagation of harmful or misleading information. Ethical regulation can consist of content regulation policies, transparency regulations regarding the operation of digital platforms, and responsibility among the media-based organizations that publish misinformed information. The respondents stressed that the regulatory action must serve the common interest of people with respect to freedom of speech. Another proposal agreed by a majority of respondents is the ethical regulation should be an effort by governments, media institutions, and technology companies to cooperate. The outcome means that most of the respondents are aware of the need to have balanced regulatory measures that enhance responsible communication styles without over-limiting the free speech.

4.2.3. Concern about Censorship (61%)

Although big numbers of respondents argued in support of ethical regulation, 61 percent of the respondents also felt that there were chances of censorship in online communication set-ups. The outcome is an indication of the complicated nature of media regulatory and freedom of speech. The respondents admitted that the intrusion of the government or strict policies of the platform-owner might end up restricting free discussion, silencing various forms of opinion, or prohibiting lawful criticism of political or social organizations. Freedom of speech is regarded as a basic right in the democratic societies and any regulation should be done with extreme care not to undermine this principle. The issue of censorship can only imply that respondents would want a moderate form of censorship where the ethical standards are imposed without jeopardizing the autonomy and freedom of media communication systems.

4.2.4. Support for Platform Accountability (74%)

Also indicated in the survey is the fact that 74% of the people adopt the concept of tougher forms of accountability on digital media platforms. The respondents feel that the tech firms and the social media need to be more accountable regarding the content that is disseminated their systems. Platform accountability can involve enhancing content moderation, introducing clear policies of dealing with useful content, and devising measures to curb spreading of misinformation. Respondents noted that the platforms also should invest in the fact-checking partnership and offer effective guidelines to users about the acceptable pattern of communication. The overwhelming backing up of the platform accountability proves that a number of people consider the digital media companies as stakeholders of constituting ethical communication conditions.

4.2.5. *Belief in the Importance of Media Literacy (89%)*

Based on survey findings, 89 percent of the participants are convinced that media literacy would help in ensuring responsible communication and fight misinformation. Media literacy can be defined as the capability of people to analyze information sources critically, confirm facts, and comprehend the manner of the media messages production and broadcast. The respondents said that a clearer media literacy can help the citizens recognize the misleading information, prevent the dissemination of untrue news, and have more intelligent public debates. Educational, training and awareness-raising methods were all found to be effective in empowering the media literacy not only among the media professionals but also the general population. The strong appeal to media literacy indicates that it is an effective intervention to enhance ethical communication in contemporary digital media ecosystems and as it is a long-term solution.

5. CONCLUSION

Freedom of speech is perhaps one of the most essential values of the democratic society, given the fact that it enables individuals, institutions, and communities to express their opinion freely, exchange ideas, and engage in the discourse of the society. Free speech allows voters to judge the political choices, challenge those in authority and it also allows them to emerge in the social and cultural development aspects. Traditional media systems like newspapers, radio and television were historically structured in such a way that this information sharing occurred through their medium, with the exchange being mostly regulated by professional editorial standards and ethical journalism practices. Nevertheless, digital technologies have caused fast changes in the structure of the media systems which have profoundly changed the communication environment. The advent of social media platforms, online news networks, and systems of user-generated content has established a highly connected information environment in different parts of the world with information flowing fast and far. Although this revolution has increased the possibilities of involvement and democratized the use of communication instruments, complex ethical issues which deserve special consideration have also emerged. The characteristics of modern-day media settings include real-time distribution of information, the distribution of content by an algorithm, and vast amounts of user-generated communication. These changes enable people to expose views and interact with a wide range of audiences all over the geographical borders. Meanwhile, the lack of editorial control in most online platforms puts more chances of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and other adverse communication at the same time. Recommendation systems that operate based on algorithms give a decent amount of importance to content that feels like a hook or is sensational and as a result contribute to the further amplification of misleading stories or counter-polarizing opinions. This has made the ethical considerations in digital communication a growing challenge to the media houses, policymakers and technology firms. The results of this research indicate that the balance between freedom of expression and ethical communication levels cannot be successfully preserved without the joint and multi-stakeholder activities. Governments can make a significant contribution in the provision of regulatory mechanisms to secure basic rights and avoid high-value materials. Media organizations should not cease observing the principles of professionalism especially in accuracy, fairness and responsibility in reporting. Technology firms which manage digital communication systems play an important role as well in the creation of transparent algorithms, effective content moderation, and the state of their platforms encouraging misinformation or harmful narratives, this is unintended. Also, the civil society organizations and learning institutions may play a role in supporting the idea of digital literacy and responsible communication among citizens. In solving contemporary communication issues, it is specifically relevant to amplify media literacy and ethical consciousness of the media professionals as well as

ordinary individuals. Those who can critically assess sources of information, fact-check and comprehend the functioning of digital media platforms have fewer opportunities of spreading misleading information and have an increased possibility of having a constructive dialogue. Education, training and campaigning can thus be a very important factor towards creating responsible digital communities.

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