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# The Ethical Responsibility Of Online Journalism In Algeria

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## Abstract

The Algerian media landscape has undergone significant transformations in recent years, with the emergence of electronic journalism as a dominant force. This shift has brought to the forefront the need to address the ethical responsibilities of online media outlets and the journalists who operate them. In response, the Algerian government has taken steps to introduce new legislation and regulatory frameworks to govern the ethical practices of electronic journalism.

## Key Regulatory Developments:

.1 Decree No. 23-05 of February 15, 2023, Amending and Supplementing Decree No. 16-290 of October 3, 2016, on the Creation of the Higher Council for Information and Communication: This decree introduces significant amendments to the mandate and powers of the Higher Council for Information and Communication (HCIC), the independent body tasked with regulating the media sector, including electronic journalism. The amendments aim to strengthen the HCIC's capacity to enforce ethical standards and promote responsible journalism practices.

.2 Charter of Ethical Principles for Electronic Journalism: In 2023, the Ministry of Communication and Culture, in collaboration with the Algerian Press Syndicate (SPA) and other stakeholders, drafted a Charter of Ethical Principles for Electronic Journalism. This charter provides a comprehensive framework for ethical conduct, encompassing aspects such as verification of information, avoidance of conflicts of interest, protection of sources, responsible use of social media, and adherence to professional standards.

## Impact of Regulatory Developments:

These recent regulatory developments signal a renewed commitment from Algerian authorities to upholding ethical standards in electronic journalism. The strengthened mandate of the HCIC and the adoption of a comprehensive Charter of Ethical Principles are expected to have a positive impact on the media landscape, fostering a more responsible and accountable environment.

## Challenges and Future Directions:

Despite these positive steps, challenges remain in ensuring the consistent application and adherence to ethical principles in electronic journalism. Effective implementation of the strengthened HCIC's mandate will be crucial, requiring adequate resources, training, and cooperation with media outlets and journalists. Additionally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the Charter of Ethical Principles will be necessary to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in the ever-evolving digital media landscape.

Moving forward, it is essential to foster a culture of ethical self-regulation within the electronic journalism community, encouraging journalists and media outlets to proactively uphold ethical standards. Ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including civil society organizations, academia, and the public, will be instrumental in shaping a responsible and ethical electronic media landscape in Algeria.

**Keywords:** Online Journalism, Ethical Responsibility, Press Syndicate

### **Introduction :**

In the context of the global digital transformation, electronic journalism has become one of the primary tools for disseminating information and news. The widespread growth of the internet and its increasing use in Algeria has led to rapid developments in electronic media, significantly impacting society and how it receives information. Despite the numerous benefits that electronic journalism has brought, it has also introduced new challenges related to ethical responsibility, especially in the absence of clear regulations at times.

In Algeria, recent years have seen increased efforts by regulatory bodies to establish a legal and regulatory framework governing electronic journalism, aiming to enhance ethical responsibility and ensure journalists adhere to professional standards that respect the rights of individuals and society. However, the question remains about the effectiveness of these regulatory developments in achieving the desired goals.

### **Research Problem :**

Despite the progress Algeria has made in enacting new legislation to regulate electronic journalism, there are ongoing challenges related to the implementation of these laws and their effectiveness in promoting ethical responsibility.

The main problem of this research is: To what extent have recent regulatory developments in Algeria contributed to achieving ethical responsibility in electronic journalism?

### **Research Objectives :**

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Review and analyze recent regulatory developments in Algeria related to electronic journalism, including new laws and regulatory frameworks.
2. Assess the effectiveness of these regulatory developments in enhancing ethical responsibility among electronic journalists.
3. Study the challenges and issues facing the implementation of these laws and regulations, and their impact on the quality and credibility of information in electronic journalism.
4. Provide recommendations for improving the regulatory and legislative framework for electronic journalism in Algeria, contributing to enhanced ethical responsibility and ensuring respect for the rights of individuals and society.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the current state of electronic journalism in Algeria from an ethical and regulatory perspective and contribute to discussions on how to improve this vital field in the digital age.

## **Chapter One: Historical and Regulatory Context of Electronic Journalism in Algeria :**

### **1. Historical Development of Electronic Journalism in Algeria**

#### **1.1 Beginnings and Spread of Electronic Journalism :**

Electronic journalism in Algeria began in the late 1990s and early 2000s, coinciding with the growing use of the internet and information technology. Traditional newspapers like "El Khabar" and "Echorouk" were among the first to adopt online publishing, opening the door for Algeria to enter the digital media world. With the increase in internet penetration during the early 2000s, Algeria experienced a significant surge in the emergence of independent electronic news sites, in addition to blogs that became important sources of news and information.

This period represents the foundational phase of electronic journalism in Algeria, characterized by relatively limited technological capabilities and internet access, which was confined to a specific segment of society. Nevertheless, rapid technological advancements and gradually developing infrastructure contributed to expanding the user base and increasing the popularity of electronic journalism in the country.<sup>1</sup>

### **2. Previous Regulatory Framework :**

#### **2.1 Previous Laws and Regulations Governing Electronic Journalism :**

Initially, electronic journalism in Algeria lacked a clear legal framework regulating its operations, as existing laws were primarily directed at print, broadcast, and television media. The Media Law of 1990 (Law No. 90-07) was the main legal framework addressing media operations in Algeria, but this law did not specifically address electronic journalism as it was not a prominent field at that time.

With the increasing influence of electronic journalism in Algerian society, there arose a need to regulate this field and establish rules governing it, particularly concerning ethical responsibility, transparency, and privacy protection. In this context, there were some attempts to amend existing laws to include electronic journalism, but these amendments were limited and insufficient to cover all aspects imposed by digital development.<sup>2</sup>

One notable amendment occurred in 2009 when some changes were introduced to the Media Law to keep pace with new developments. These amendments primarily focused on the legal responsibilities of electronic publishers and editors, but challenges related to the practical implementation of these laws on the ground remained.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, this period marked the beginning of the Algerian government's recognition of the need to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for electronic journalism, an effort that later evolved into more inclusive new laws.

## **Chapter Two: Recent Regulatory Developments :**

### **1. New Laws and Regulations :**

## 1.1 Overview of New Laws and Regulations Related to Electronic Journalism :

In recent years, Algeria has seen significant developments in the legal framework governing electronic journalism. One of the most notable advancements is the introduction of the New Media Law of 2012 (Law No. 12-05), which represents a comprehensive attempt to regulate all forms of media, including electronic journalism. This law was the first of its kind in Algeria to explicitly recognize electronic journalism as part of the media system and imposes rules related to legal registration, editorial responsibility, and intellectual property rights protection.

Among the important provisions in this law is Article 100, which requires all electronic news sites to register with the relevant authorities, identify editorial responsible parties, and adhere to accuracy and professionalism standards. The law also established a new regulatory body, the National Council for Electronic Journalism, tasked with monitoring and overseeing media practices in the digital space.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2. Decree No. 23-05 of February 15, 2023 :

### A. Background and Importance :

• **Amendment of the Previous Decree:** Decree No. 23-05 updates and amends Decree No. 16-290 issued in October 2016, which established the framework for creating the Higher Council for Media and Communication (HCIC). The new amendments address the need to enhance the effectiveness of media regulation and improve the quality of electronic journalism in Algeria.

### B. Main Amendments :

• **Expansion of Powers:** The amendments grant the Higher Council for Media and Communication broader powers, including enhancing its role in setting and enforcing media ethical standards. This expansion may include:

- **Imposing Penalties:** New powers to impose penalties on those violating ethical laws.
- **Issuing Directives:** The council's ability to issue binding directives to media outlets to ensure compliance with ethical standards.
- **Monitoring and Supervision:** Enhanced mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring adherence to laws.

• **Strengthening the Council's Independence:** The amendments also aim to strengthen the council's independence by ensuring its financing and management are autonomous, reducing potential political influences on its work.

### C. Objectives :

• **Improving Journalism Quality:** The amendments aim to elevate the quality of electronic journalism by ensuring adherence to ethical standards.

• **Enhancing Transparency:** Increasing transparency in media operations through rigorous oversight and effective punitive measures.

## 1.3. Code of Ethical Principles for Electronic Journalism (2023) :

## A. Background and Importance :

- **Collaboration in Drafting the Code:** The code was developed in collaboration between the Ministry of Communication and Culture, the Algerian Journalists' Union, and other concerned parties, reflecting a collective commitment to improving electronic journalism standards.

## B. Core Elements of the Code :

- **Verification of Information:** The code emphasizes the importance of thorough verification of information before publication to reduce the spread of false and misleading news. This requires using multiple sources and ensuring the credibility of information.

- **Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest:** The code requires journalists to avoid situations that could lead to conflicts of interest, such as accepting gifts or funding from parties that may affect the impartiality of reporting.

- **Protection of Sources:** The code places significant importance on protecting journalistic sources, ensuring that journalists maintain the confidentiality of sources providing sensitive or confidential information. • **Responsible Use of Social Media:** The code mandates responsible use of social media, avoiding the dissemination of unverified or misleading information.

- **Adherence to Professional Standards:** Journalists are required to adhere to recognized professional standards, including integrity and objectivity in news reporting.

## C. Objectives :

- **Enhancing Professional Conduct:** The code aims to improve journalists' conduct and enhance their professional practices by providing a clear framework for ethical behavior.

- **Building Trust:** The code seeks to build trust between media outlets and the public by ensuring that journalists adhere to high ethical standards.

Both Decree No. 23-05 and the Code of Ethical Principles for Electronic Journalism represent significant steps toward improving quality and credibility in digital media in Algeria. The amendments to the decree aim to enhance regulatory effectiveness and transparency, while the code provides a detailed framework for ethical behavior that strengthens the quality and integrity of electronic journalism.

### 1.4. Analysis of Main Amendments and Their Rationale :

These amendments are part of the Algerian government's efforts to keep pace with rapid technological changes and their impact on the media sector. There was an urgent need to update laws to include digital media, ensuring more effective regulation of this sector, which now has a broad influence on public opinion. The main reasons for these amendments include:

- **Regulating Media Chaos:** With the proliferation of numerous unlicensed news sites, it became necessary to establish laws governing these platforms to ensure the credibility of the information provided.

- **Protecting Individual Rights:** The amendments addressed the need to protect individuals from defamation and potential violations occurring on digital media platforms.
- **Enhancing Ethical Responsibility:** By imposing new rules on electronic publishing, the government aims to raise the level of adherence to ethical standards in journalism.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. Regulatory Bodies' Efforts:**

### **2.1 Role of Government Bodies and Relevant Institutions in Implementing Laws :**

To ensure effective implementation of the new laws, several regulatory bodies have been established to oversee electronic journalism. Among these bodies is the National Council for Electronic Journalism, which plays a crucial role in monitoring compliance with laws, imposing penalties on violators, and ensuring media practices align with legal and ethical standards.

Additionally, the Ministry of Communication, in collaboration with security and judicial authorities, monitors online content to ensure compliance with new laws and to prevent the spread of false news or incitement to hatred. These efforts contribute to creating a safer and more regulated media environment while maintaining freedom of expression within the legal framework.<sup>6</sup>

### **2.2 Examples of New Initiatives and Projects:**

Among the new initiatives launched to enhance regulation in electronic journalism is the "Digital Media Observatory" project initiated by the Ministry of Communication. This project aims to monitor digital content, provide periodic reports on media content quality, and offer recommendations for improving media performance in the digital space.

The government has also launched a training platform for electronic journalists, focused on providing them with the skills needed to work according to the new ethical and legal standards. These initiatives aim to enhance journalists' ability to handle technological changes responsibly and professionally.<sup>7</sup>

## **Chapter Three: Ethical Responsibility in Electronic Journalism:**

### **1. Concepts of Ethical Responsibility:**

#### **1.1 Definition of Ethical Responsibility in the Context of Electronic Journalism :**

Ethical responsibility in electronic journalism refers to the commitment of journalists and editors to professional and ethical values while performing their work of disseminating news and information online. This responsibility includes respecting individuals' rights, ensuring accuracy in reporting facts, avoiding bias, and maintaining privacy. As the internet has grown and the impact of electronic journalism on public opinion has increased, this responsibility has become crucial for ensuring the credibility of digital media and balancing freedom of expression with mutual respect.<sup>8</sup>

#### **1.2. Fundamental Principles: Accuracy, Objectivity, Privacy:**

- **Accuracy:** This involves ensuring the truthfulness of information before publication and avoiding misinformation or rumors. Accuracy is a cornerstone of ethical responsibility, requiring journalists to verify the reliability of sources and the information published.<sup>9</sup>
- **Objectivity:** This requires presenting news in a neutral manner without bias, separating personal opinions from facts. The goal is to provide impartial information that enables the audience to form opinions based on clear facts.<sup>10</sup>
- **Privacy:** This involves respecting individuals' private lives and not publishing personal information without explicit consent. Respect for privacy is a fundamental principle in electronic journalism, especially given the rapid dissemination of information online.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Application of Ethical Responsibility in Algeria :

### 2.1. How Ethical Principles Are Applied According to New Regulatory Developments :

With the introduction of new laws in Algeria, such as the Media Law of 2012, applications of ethical responsibility have become more regulated. These laws mandate that electronic news sites adhere to ethical and professional standards. For example, the law requires electronic editors to ensure accuracy in news reporting and to avoid publishing any content that might infringe on individuals' rights or be misleading.

The new regulations have also established a legal framework for privacy protection, prohibiting the publication of personal information without individuals' consent, except in cases of public interest. These principles have been reinforced through training programs organized by the Ministry of Communication and media institutions to educate journalists about ethical responsibility and its importance in the online environment.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2 Challenges and Issues Related to Ethical Responsibility :

Despite the new legal and regulatory framework, electronic journalism in Algeria faces several challenges related to ethical responsibility. These challenges include:

- **Weak Oversight:** Although efforts have been made to regulate electronic journalism, effective content oversight remains limited, sometimes leading to the publication of inaccurate or misleading news.<sup>13</sup>
- **Lack of Awareness of Journalism Ethics:** Many electronic journalists lack sufficient training in professional ethics, making them prone to ethical errors in news coverage or handling sensitive information.<sup>14</sup>
- **Technological Challenges:** The rapid spread of information online makes it difficult to control content once it is published, complicating the enforcement of ethical responsibility in this field.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, the application of ethical responsibility in electronic journalism in Algeria requires further efforts to overcome current challenges and ensure that electronic journalists adhere to necessary ethical standards for fair and responsible media.

## Chapter Four: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Regulatory Developments:

## **1. Analysis of the Impact of New Laws and Regulations:**

### **1.1 Examining the Impact of These Developments on Electronic Journalism Practices:**

Recent regulatory developments in Algeria, including the Media Law of 2012 and the accompanying regulations, have significantly impacted electronic journalism practices. In principle, these laws have formalized electronic journalism, prompting many news sites to comply with the new regulations, particularly regarding site registration and legal accountability for published content.

The regulations have been particularly applied in areas such as protecting individual rights and ensuring accuracy in information transmission. For example, some websites have seen improvements in content quality, as they began adhering to higher professional standards due to increased legal and regulatory pressure<sup>16</sup>

### **1.2 Evaluating the Achievement of Desired Objectives :**

Despite the progress made in regulating electronic journalism in Algeria, achieving the desired objectives has been mixed. Some goals, such as organizing the media market and ensuring a minimum standard of professional conduct, have been partially met. However, significant challenges remain, such as the uneven application of the law across all electronic media and ensuring that journalists are not subjected to political or economic pressure.

Some studies have indicated that new legislation has succeeded in enhancing transparency and accountability in certain respects, but it has not fully achieved the broader goal of promoting freedom of expression and widespread adherence to ethical standards.<sup>17</sup>

## **2. Opinions and Criticism :**

### **2.1 Opinions of Journalists, Observers, and the Public on the Effectiveness of the New Regulations :**

Opinions on the effectiveness of the new regulations vary among different stakeholders in the media sector. Many journalists have welcomed the new regulations as a step towards improving the media environment, though some have expressed concern that these laws could be used as tools for pressuring them and restricting freedom of expression. This concern is particularly related to how the laws are implemented on the ground, with some observers believing that enforcement remains uneven and highly dependent on the political context.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, public opinions about the effectiveness of these laws are mixed. Some members of the public believe that the regulations have improved the quality of information available online, while others think significant challenges remain, especially regarding the control of fake news and transparency.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.2 Critique and Analysis of Unresolved Challenges:**

Despite the efforts made, several challenges remain inadequately addressed. Key challenges include:

- **Selective Law Enforcement:** Critics point out that laws are sometimes enforced in a selective or targeted manner, which increases journalists' sense of insecurity and opens the door to legal violations or political abuses.<sup>20</sup>



- **Weak Oversight Mechanisms:** Despite the presence of regulatory bodies, these institutions' ability to monitor all electronic media and ensure compliance with the laws remains limited. This issue is linked to a lack of human and technical resources needed for effective digital content monitoring.<sup>21</sup>

- **Technological Challenges:** Technology continues to evolve rapidly, making it difficult for existing laws to keep pace with these changes. This raises questions about the suitability of current legislation in responding to future challenges.<sup>22</sup>

Recent regulatory developments in electronic journalism in Algeria represent a significant step towards improving the media environment. However, they have not resolved all challenges related to ethical responsibility and freedom of expression. There is still a need for further development in law enforcement and effective oversight, alongside a response to evolving technological and regulatory challenges.

## Chapter Five: Recommendations and Suggestions

### 1. Proposed Improvements:

#### 1.1 Suggesting Enhancements to Legislation and Regulations to Promote Ethical Responsibility:

As electronic journalism continues to evolve in Algeria, there is a need to review and improve legislation and regulations to ensure greater adherence to ethical responsibility. Proposed enhancements include:

- **Enhancing Transparency:** New laws should emphasize the necessity of transparency in editorial and publishing processes. This can be achieved by requiring websites to provide clear information about their sources, news verification processes, and funding sources.<sup>23</sup>

- **Developing Complaint Mechanisms:** Current legislation should develop effective mechanisms for filing complaints related to breaches of ethical responsibility, while providing legal protection for journalists who expose misconduct.<sup>24</sup>

- **Enhancing Ongoing Training:** Mandatory training programs for journalists in media ethics should be included, with regular updates aligned with technological and media developments.<sup>25</sup>

#### 1.2 Strategies for Effective Implementation:

To implement these improvements effectively, the following strategies can be adopted:

- **Strengthening Regulatory Bodies:** Regulatory bodies should be supported with the necessary human and technical resources to effectively monitor the application of laws, including the establishment of dedicated units for electronic journalism.<sup>26</sup>

- **Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration between the government and private media institutions can contribute to better law enforcement and enhanced ethical responsibility. For example, joint committees could be created to develop ethical standards agreed upon by all parties.<sup>27</sup>

- **Leveraging Technology for Oversight:** Artificial intelligence and data analytics can be used to monitor media content and ensure compliance with ethical standards effectively and swiftly.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. The Future of Electronic Journalism in Algeria:

### 2.1 A Vision for Future Regulatory Developments and Addressing Upcoming Challenges:

Given the rapid developments in media technology, electronic journalism in Algeria is expected to continue growing and having an increasing impact on the media landscape. To achieve a responsible and sustainable media environment, it is important to consider the following challenges and how to address them:

- **Adapting to Technological Developments:** As new technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence emerge, laws and regulations must be flexible and capable of adapting to these changes to ensure that electronic journalism remains responsible and ethical.<sup>29</sup>

- **Encouraging Innovation in Media:** Media institutions should be encouraged to adopt innovation in content production and distribution while adhering to ethical standards. This could include supporting emerging media projects focused on investigative and reliable journalism.<sup>30</sup>

- **Ensuring Freedom of Expression:** In the future, maintaining a balance between regulation and freedom will be crucial. Laws should aim to protect freedom of expression while preventing ethical violations by establishing clear standards for opinion expression and legal accountability.<sup>31</sup>

These recommendations and suggestions outline practical steps to improve the effectiveness of regulations in the field of electronic journalism in Algeria. By enhancing transparency, developing complaint mechanisms, and encouraging innovation, Algeria can build a more responsible and ethical media environment that aligns with future challenges.

## Conclusion:

### 1. Summary of Findings:

This study reviewed and analyzed the latest regulatory developments related to ethical responsibility in electronic journalism in Algeria. Key findings include:

- **Impact of New Laws:** New legislation has contributed to improving the regulation of electronic journalism by enhancing ethical responsibility through stricter standards on digital content. However, further improvements are needed to ensure the effective implementation of these laws.

- **Ongoing Challenges:** Despite progress, Algeria faces challenges in the equitable application of laws, particularly amidst rapid technological changes. There remain concerns about the use of legislation as a tool to pressure press freedom.

- **Recommendations:** Recommendations include enhancing transparency mechanisms, developing continuous professional training for journalists, and supporting regulatory institutions with the necessary resources to ensure compliance.

## 2. Importance of the Research:

The importance of this study is highlighted by its potential impact on:

- **Future Research:** This study provides a framework for understanding the relationship between regulation and ethical responsibility in digital media, contributing to future research on improving legislation and enhancing press freedom.
- **Policy Making:** This study can serve as a reference for policymakers in Algeria, emphasizing the need for continuous updates to laws to keep pace with technological challenges and ensure protection of freedom of expression while adhering to ethical responsibility.

## 3. Directions for Future Research:

For researchers interested in continuing this field, new research areas could include:

- **Artificial Intelligence and Ethical Journalism:** Investigating how artificial intelligence can be used to improve content oversight and ensure compliance with ethical standards in digital journalism.
- **Role of Social Media:** Analyzing the impact of social media platforms on electronic journalism practices, especially concerning ethical responsibility.
- **Self-Regulation:** Evaluating the effectiveness of self-regulation in digital media and how to enhance these mechanisms to ensure compliance with ethical standards without excessive government intervention.

By summarizing the findings and recommendations, highlighting the importance of the research, and providing directions for future research, this study aims to enhance understanding and continuous development of electronic journalism in Algeria. The study hopes to contribute to building a responsible and ethical media environment that effectively addresses future challenges.

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