Media Councils in the Digital Age. Survey results

Research report

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Introduction

This report presents the results of a research project aimed to ask the opinion of journalists and other relevant stakeholders about how media councils could adapt to the challenges of the digital age.

The results obtained are based on two survey conducted between August and November 2020 among journalists and members of the board of media councils from nine countries. More specifically, survey to journalists was distributed among network of contacts of the European Federation of Journalists and affiliated journalists’ unions in selected countries: Austria, Belgium (Wallonia and Flanders), Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Spain. Finally, 454 valid questionnaires were received. Number of questionnaires received by country was very irregular and non-valid comparative analysis was possible to carry out.

Survey to members of the board of the media councils was distributed by the research team among the members of boards of the media councils from the same countries except Poland and Italy. Members of the board from Austria, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Finland, Germany, Ireland, and Spain (includes media councils from Spain, Catalonia, and Andalusia) answered the questionnaire. 61 valid questionnaires were received.
A third survey was also distributed among media companies and editors-in-chief from the same targeted countries. Research team selected the three main in terms of audience print newspapers, radio stations, TV stations and online news media from each country. Although the questionnaire was distributed in three different waves in order to obtain as much answers as possible, the number of responses obtained was very low, preventing a valid analysis of the results. Despite the difficulty to interpret the lack of collaboration of media companies, it could be a sign of lack of interest on media councils, at least in some countries. The overall situation with covid-19 outbreak might have also affected the low response level in some of the surveys.

The objective of the research was to analyse how journalists see the job of media councils and self-regulatory bodies, how these bodies are affected by the digital age, and how can they adapt to the new ethical challenges.
This report has three main sections:

• Results from survey among journalists
• Results from survey among members of the board of the media councils
• Comparative analysis and conclusions.
Survey about self-regulation bodies and challenges of digital age

Journalists
Survey.

Results based on a survey to 454 journalists conducted from August to November 2020.

Questionnaire was distributed among EFJ network.

Journalists participants are from: Austria, Belgium (Wallonia and Flanders), Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Spain.
Sociodemographics

GENDER
- Female: 35.2%
- Male: 63.2%
- Prefer Not to Answer: 1.5%

AGE
- 18-25: 3.1%
- 26-35: 15.6%
- 36-45: 17.4%
- 46-55: 25.8%
- >55: 38.1%

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
- <=2: 3.54%
- 3-5: 8.85%
- 6-10: 10.18%
- 11-15: 9.07%
- >15: 68.36%

MEDIA
- Newspaper (print version): 11.1%
- Magazine - periodic press (print version): 14.4%
- Radio: 10.0%
- Television: 14.2%
- News Agency: 5.8%
- Native, online-only news media: 11.9%
- Online news media version of a...: 3.8%
- Traditional media and online version...: 11.3%
- Production company: 0.7%
- Other (specify, please): 17.0%
Media councils - Knowledge

1. Most of the respondents know national media council (68.12%), however, for a relevant number of them media councils are unknown or they think don’t exist.

2. Respondents think that media councils should exist, and only 6% doesn’t.
Ethical dilemmas

1. Consult with superiors is the most frequent practice to face ethical dilemmas, followed by consult colleagues.

2. Refer to media councils have a low importance in facing ethical dilemmas (86), but journalists consult the Code of Ethics (133).

3. No significant differences by gender, age and years of experience

WHEN YOU HAD AN ETHICAL DILEMMA IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, WHAT DID YOU DO?

*More than one answer was possible

- I consulted it with my superiors: 247
- I consulted it with my colleagues: 237
- I referred to relatives or acquaintances: 33
- I consulted the Code of Ethics and/or guidelines of my media: 133
- I referred to other actors of the journalistic field: 86
- I decided individually: 126
- Other (specify, please): 126

*No significant differences by gender, age and years of experience*
Knowledge of the code of ethics

1. Most of the respondents have a medium or high knowledge of the national Code of Ethics.

2. Young journalists have a high level of knowledge of Code of Ethics. Surprisingly, this is also the group of age with the least knowledge.

3. There are not significant differences by gender. However, men have slightly minor knowledge than women.
Only 1 out 3 respondents thinks that Code of Ethics are adapted to respond new ethical challenges arising from digitalization and the emergence of internet.
Code of Ethics and the digital

1. Women journalists consider that Code of Ethics are less adapted to respond new ethical challenges than men are.

2. Journalists with 3-5 years of experience is the group more confident in the Code of Ethics.

CODE OF ETHICS ADAPTED TO DIGITAL ETHICAL CHALLENGES BY GENDER (ANSWER = YES)

CODE OF ETHICS ADAPTED TO DIGITAL ETHICAL CHALLENGES BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Most of the respondents think that digitalisation requires new ethical principles.

2. There are not significant differences by gender and age. However, young journalists assert more frequently than other age groups that digitalisation doesn’t require new ethical principles.

**DO YOU THINK THAT THE INTERNET AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES REQUIRE NEW ETHICAL PRINCIPLES?**

- **Yes; 56.0%**
- **No, but they should be adapted to the new reality; 33.8%**
- **No, it is not necessary because the existing ethical principles work;...**
Daily practices and ethical challenges

1 To check the information before its publication is the practice that media value most from respondents daily work

2 To publish as soon as possible and to attract traffic are two practices valued by media from respondents daily work. Both can pose an ethical challenges in certain circumstances

| WHAT DOES THE EDITORIAL HIERARCHY IN YOUR MEDIA VALUE MOST FROM YOUR DAILY WORK? |
|---------------------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|
|                                 | Not valued| Valued a little bit | Neither agree nor disagree | Valued | Very valued |
| To publish the news as soon as possible | 3,3%      | 11,1%           | 14,8%          | 42,9%    | 27,9%      |
| To attract traffic/audience      | 2,5%      | 7,5%            | 13,4%          | 41,2%    | 35,4%      |
| To check the information before its publication | 1,4%      | 10,3%           | 14,8%          | 32,0%    | 41,5%      |
| To consult all sources involved before publication | 6,7%      | 11,7%           | 16,7%          | 37,6%    | 27,3%      |
| My independence from the editorial line of the firm | 11,4%     | 9,2%            | 26,7%          | 32,0%    | 20,6%      |
Daily practices and ethical challenges

1. Journalists consider that they are responsible for the new content arising from digitalisation.

2. Journalists strongly agree that they must ensure the quality of linked content in their stories.

DO YOU CONSIDER THAT WHEN A JOURNALIST INCLUDES EXTERNAL LINKS (HYPERLINK) IN A PIECE OF NEWS, S/HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy/veracity/credibility of the linked information</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the linked page does not contain illegal content</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That there is no conflict of interest when referring a commercial page</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily practices and ethical challenges

Journalists strongly agree that they must ensure the quality of embedded content in their stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy/veracity/credibility of the embedded information</td>
<td>4,5%</td>
<td>6,4%</td>
<td>10,3%</td>
<td>35,1%</td>
<td>43,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the embedded information does not contain illegal content</td>
<td>3,1%</td>
<td>6,7%</td>
<td>7,5%</td>
<td>32,9%</td>
<td>49,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That there is no conflict of interest when embedding a commercial page</td>
<td>6,1%</td>
<td>11,9%</td>
<td>14,7%</td>
<td>31,4%</td>
<td>35,8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Journalists strongly agree that they must ensure the quality of user generated content used in their stories.

**DO YOU THINK THAT WHEN A JOURNALIST INCLUDES MATERIAL GENERATED BY THE AUDIENCE (PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEOS, TEXTS ...) IN HIS/HER OWN NEWS, HE/SHE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy/veracity/credibility of the UGC included</td>
<td>1,9%</td>
<td>6,1%</td>
<td>6,9%</td>
<td>33,1%</td>
<td>51,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the material included does not contain illegal content</td>
<td>1,7%</td>
<td>6,9%</td>
<td>6,4%</td>
<td>29,4%</td>
<td>55,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the material included does not contain illegal content</td>
<td>1,9%</td>
<td>2,5%</td>
<td>12,8%</td>
<td>28,3%</td>
<td>54,4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Public content available on personal profiles on social networks can be used in a story after requesting authorization (67.2%)

2. Women journalists are more cautious in using public content available on personal profiles than men journalists are

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**DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PUBLIC CONTENT AVAILABLE IN PERSONAL PROFILES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS CAN BE USED DIRECTLY IN A PIECE OF INFORMATION?**

- **Yes, in all cases:** 9.4%
- **Yes, after requesting authorization from the people involved:** 27.1%
- **No, I would not use it:** 76.1%

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**Gender Distribution**

- Female: [Graph Data]
- Male: [Graph Data]

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**Yes, in all cases:** 21.1%

**Yes, after requesting authorization from the people involved:** 67.2%
1. All age groups think that public content available on personal profiles can be used for a story, however older journalists have a greater diversity of opinions.

2. Similarly, more experienced journalist also have a greater diversity of opinion. They are more likely to use that content in all cases.

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**DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PUBLIC CONTENT AVAILABLE IN PERSONAL PROFILES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS CAN BE USED DIRECTLY IN A PIECE OF INFORMATION? YEARS OF EXPERIENCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>18-25</th>
<th>26-35</th>
<th>36-45</th>
<th>46-55</th>
<th>&gt;55</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in all cases</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, after requesting authorization from the people involved</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I would not use it</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PUBLIC CONTENT AVAILABLE IN PERSONAL PROFILES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS CAN BE USED DIRECTLY IN A PIECE OF INFORMATION? YEARS OF EXPERIENCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>&lt;=2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>&gt;15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in all cases</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, after requesting authorization from the people involved</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I would not use it</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Most of the respondents consider they should not identify as a journalists in public conversation on social networks

2. Young journalists are less likely than older ones to identify themselves as journalists on social media

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DO YOU THINK THAT IF A JOURNALIST PARTICIPATES IN A CONVERSATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS OR IN A PUBLIC FORUM, S/HE SHOULD IDENTIFY HERSELF/HIMSELF AS A JOURNALIST?

- Yes: 45.6%
- No: 54.4%
Ethics principles and the digital

1. The use of social networks by journalists generates very diverse opinions, particularly regarding the professional vs private use of them.

2. Journalists consider that they should be able to give their opinion through social networks on any subject, not only on the topics of news they published.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IF A JOURNALIST HAS A PROFILE ON SOCIAL NETWORKS, IN WHICH S/HE IDENTIFIES HERSELF/HIMSELF AS A JOURNALIST, S/HE CAN...</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile to pronounce her/his personal political and ideological positions.</td>
<td>22,8%</td>
<td>23,1%</td>
<td>16,1%</td>
<td>22,5%</td>
<td>15,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile to pronounce his/her opinion on current news.</td>
<td>8,6%</td>
<td>12,8%</td>
<td>16,1%</td>
<td>35,6%</td>
<td>26,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile only for professional purposes in relation to the news that s/he is preparing or has already published and express his/her opinion on it.</td>
<td>16,39%</td>
<td>25,28%</td>
<td>23,06%</td>
<td>23,33%</td>
<td>11,94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile only in relation to the news that s/he is preparing or has already published without expressing his/her opinion on it</td>
<td>19,44%</td>
<td>27,22%</td>
<td>21,39%</td>
<td>18,33%</td>
<td>13,61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethics principles and the digital

1. 41.4% of respondents consider that ensuring comments on news quality is not the responsibility of the journalists, but of the media outlets.

2. Women journalists consider more frequently than men journalists that ensuring the politeness of comments on news is the responsibility of the media outlets.

### DO YOU THINK THAT A JOURNALIST SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE COMMENTS PUBLISHED BY HIS/HER READERS [IN ONE OF HIS/HER PIECE OF NEWS] ARE RESPECTFUL/POLITE? BY GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, the journalist should watch over it.</td>
<td>19.66</td>
<td>17.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but the workload prevents it.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>13.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it is not the responsibility of the journalist.</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>15.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it is the responsibility of the media outlet (social media managers, in-house or outsourced moderation)</td>
<td>50.43</td>
<td>37.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Age and years of experience affect what journalists think about ensuring politeness of comments on news. Younger and less experienced respondents consider that it's media outlets responsibility.
Most of the respondents find acceptable publish relevant information provided by whistleblowers, and both, journalists and whistleblowers, should be protected.

Young and less experienced journalists find more acceptable than other groups publish relevant information provided by whistleblowers, and both, journalists and whistleblowers should be protected.

**DO YOU FIND IT ACCEPTABLE FOR JOURNALISTS TO PUBLISH RELEVANT INFORMATION OF PUBLIC INTEREST PROVIDED BY WHISTLEBLOWERS OR LEAKED ANONYMOUSLY?**

- Yes, and the journalist should be protected from prosecution for it: 36.67%
- Yes, and the journalist and whistleblower should be protected from prosecution for it: 56.94%
- No, they should be prosecuted: 6.39%
Most of the respondents find appropriate to delete stories sanctioned by judicial authorities or by self-regulatory bodies.

There are not significant differences by gender and age and deleted stories is the most frequent answer, however, young and older journalists are more favourable of don’t remove sanctioned stories because it affects the right to information.

**DO YOU CONSIDER APPROPRIATE THAT, IF A PIECE OF NEWS THAT YOU HAVE PUBLISHED IS SANCTIONED BY THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITY OR ETHICALLY CONDEMNED BY A SELF-REGULATORY BODY, IT MUST BE PERMANENTLY DELETED?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Yes, in both circumstances</th>
<th>Yes, if ordered by the judicial authority</th>
<th>Yes, if indicated by a self-regulatory body</th>
<th>No, it should not be removed under any circumstances because it affects the right to information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>45,5%</td>
<td>37,3%</td>
<td>44,8%</td>
<td>44,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>34,0%</td>
<td>20,0%</td>
<td>9,6%</td>
<td>17,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>34,0%</td>
<td>12,0%</td>
<td>13,9%</td>
<td>17,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>44,8%</td>
<td>9,1%</td>
<td>37,1%</td>
<td>32,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;55</td>
<td>34,0%</td>
<td>12,0%</td>
<td>13,9%</td>
<td>17,9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethics principles and the digital**
Ethics principles and the digital

1. 96.7% of the respondents think that content produced by robots should be identified as such.

2. There are not significant difference by gender, age, and years of experience. There are not significant difference by gender.
Ethics principles and the digital

1. 91.1% of the respondents think that content produced by robots should be governed by the same ethical standards applicable to journalists.

2. Women journalists are slightly more favourable to consider that content produced by robots should be governed by the same ethical standards applicable to journalists.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE INFORMATION PRODUCED BY ROBOTS SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY THE SAME ETHICAL STANDARDS APPLICABLE TO JOURNALISTS?

97.4% Yes, because they are published by a news media
88.3% No, because journalists do not produce them
2.6% 11.7%

Female Male
1. Most of the respondents consider that clickbait and web analytics dilute some journalistic principles. Clickbait practices are considered more debatable than web analytics.

2. Women journalists tend to consider these practices more critical than men journalists, particularly web analytics.

3. There are not significant differences by age and years of experience, except for young journalists. 45,5% of them don’t consider web analytics as debatable practice.
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Fact-checkers are considered necessary, and they complement the work of journalists.

2. Fact-checkers are not considered ideologically biased.

RATE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS REGARDING FACT-CHECKERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are unnecessary; checking the information is a function of the journalist.</td>
<td>23,7%</td>
<td>25,6%</td>
<td>14,2%</td>
<td>20,9%</td>
<td>15,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are necessary and complement the work of journalists.</td>
<td>6,7%</td>
<td>7,0%</td>
<td>14,5%</td>
<td>38,7%</td>
<td>33,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are necessary, but they are ideologically biased.</td>
<td>13,6%</td>
<td>17,3%</td>
<td>42,1%</td>
<td>21,4%</td>
<td>5,6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the respondents did not encounter any ethical problem during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Young and less experienced journalists tend to encounter less ethical problems than other age and experienced groups. There are not significant difference by gender.
Survey about self-regulation bodies and challenges of digital age

Media Councils’ members
Survey.

Results based on a survey to 61 members of the boards of media/press councils from 6 European countries: Austria, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Finland, Germany, Ireland, and Spain*.

Survey was conducted from August to November 2020.

* Includes Consell de la Informació de Catalunya, Comisión de Arbitraje, Quejas y Deontologia, and Comisión de Deontología y Garantías del Colegio Profesional de Periodistas de Andalucía
Sociodemographics

**GENDER**
- 50.8% Female
- 47.5% Male
- 1.6% Not listed

**AGE**
- 50.8% 18-25
- 16.4% 26-35
- 11.5% 36-45
- 13.1% 46-55
- 16.4% >55

**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS A MEDIA COUNCIL MEMBERS**
- 11.5% <= 1
- 18.0% 2
- 9.8% 3
- 3.3% 4
- 13.1% 5
- 21.3% 6-10
- 16.4% 11-15
- 6.6% >15

**PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF MEDIA COUNCIL MEMBERS**
- 50.8% Journalist
- 9.8% Lawyer
- 1.6% Sociologist
- 3.3% Doctor
- 16.4% University professor
- 16.4% Others
**Sociodemographics**

**EXPERIENCE AS A JOURNALIST OF MEDIA COUNCILS MEMBERS**

- Yes, traditional media (TV, print media, radio...): 55.7%
- Yes, digital media: 3.3%
- No: 37.7%
- No answer: 3.3%

**MEDIA COUNCILS MEMBERS AS A REPRESENTATIVES OF...**

- Yes, traditional media (TV, print media, radio...): 55.7%
- Yes, digital media: 3.3%
- No: 37.7%
- No answer: 3.3%

1. **Profile.** Members of the board of the media councils are both men and women aged more 65 with professional experience as a journalists in traditional media.
Media councils - Knowledge

1. The level of knowledge of the existence of media councils among journalists is in average 2.5 in a scale from 1 to 5, according to the opinion of the members of the media councils.

| LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG JOURNALISTS OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE MEDIA COUNCILS |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Nothing      | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5. Very much knowledge |
| 7.0%            | 26,3% | 22,8% | 28,1% | 15,8% |

2. There are significant differences between countries. Journalists from Finland and Ireland are those with a higher knowledge of the existence of media councils. Being journalists from Flanders and Spain those with lower level of knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1. Nothing</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5. Very much knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>60,0%</td>
<td>20,0%</td>
<td>20,0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25,0%</td>
<td>75,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>33,3%</td>
<td>33,3%</td>
<td>22,2%</td>
<td>11,1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>37,5%</td>
<td>62,5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25,0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>75,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>54,5%</td>
<td>18,2%</td>
<td>18,2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallonia</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25,0%</td>
<td>33,3%</td>
<td>41,7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Media councils - Knowledge

1. Media councils members consider opinion of journalists regarding media councils to be quite positive. In a scale from 1 to 5, it scores 3.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception about the opinion of journalists regarding press councils</th>
<th>1. Negative</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5. Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>1,8%</td>
<td>42,1%</td>
<td>49,1%</td>
<td>7,0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. There are significant differences between countries. Perception about the opinion is more positive in Finland, Flanders and Ireland. Conversely, journalists from Spain and Wallonia have worse opinion regarding media councils, according to board members’ view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1. Negative</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5. Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>40,0%</td>
<td>60,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>12,5%</td>
<td>62,5%</td>
<td>25,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>22,2%</td>
<td>77,8%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>50,0%</td>
<td>50,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>25,0%</td>
<td>25,0%</td>
<td>50,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>90,9%</td>
<td>9,1%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallonia</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>8,3%</td>
<td>33,3%</td>
<td>58,3%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Media councils members mostly perceive journalists know the national code of ethics and their level of knowledge is medium.

2. Coherently with previous questions, journalists from Finland and Ireland are perceived as those with highest level of knowledge. In Austria, Spain and Wallonia is where journalists would have a limited knowledge of the code of ethics.
Code of Ethics and the digital

1. Most of the respondents consider that national code of ethics responds to new ethical challenges arising from the digitalization.

2. Responders from Flanders, Wallonia, and Germany consider that their codes of ethics are adjusted to respond the new digital ethical challenges.

3. Those responders from Austria, Ireland, and Spain are less confident about usefulness of national codes of ethics.
Code of Ethics and the digital

1. Half of the respondents thinks that digitalization and IT require the adjustment of ethical principles to the new reality.

2. Respondents from Finland, Flanders and Wallonia mainly thinks that new ethical principles are not necessary, but the existing ones need to be adapted.
Daily practices and ethical challenges

1. Media councils members strongly agree that journalists must ensure the quality of linked content in their stories.

2. Avoiding illegal contents and conflict of interest are the main principles that journalists have to ensure.

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**DO YOU CONSIDER THAT WHEN A JOURNALIST INCLUDES EXTERNAL LINKS (HYPERLINK) IN A PIECE OF NEWS, S/HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy/veracity/credibility of the linked information.</td>
<td>7,7%</td>
<td>11,5%</td>
<td>9,6%</td>
<td>38,5%</td>
<td>32,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the linked page does not contain illegal contents</td>
<td>7,7%</td>
<td>7,7%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>25,0%</td>
<td>55,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That there is no conflict of interest when referring to a commercial page</td>
<td>5,8%</td>
<td>7,7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28,8%</td>
<td>57,7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily practices and ethical challenges

Media councils members strongly agree that journalists must ensure the quality of embedded external content included in their stories.

DO YOU CONSIDER THAT WHEN A JOURNALIST INCLUDES “EMBEDDED” EXTERNAL MATERIAL IN HER/HIS OWN PIECE OF INFORMATION, S/HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy/veracity/credibility of the embedded information.</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>13,5%</td>
<td>30,8%</td>
<td>48,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the embedded information does not contain illegal contents</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>5,8%</td>
<td>26,9%</td>
<td>59,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That there is no conflict of interest when embedding a commercial page</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>26,9%</td>
<td>61,5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily practices and ethical challenges

1 Media councils members strongly agree that journalists must ensure the quality of User Generated Content (UGC) included in their stories.

2 UGC used by journalists in their stories must guarantee compliance with deontological standards.

**DO YOU THINK THAT WHEN A JOURNALIST INCLUDES MATERIAL GENERATED BY THE AUDIENCE (PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEOS, TEXTS ...) IN HIS/HER OWN NEWS, HE/SHE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy/veracity/credibility of the included information</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>13,5%</td>
<td>30,8%</td>
<td>48,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the material included does not contain illegal content</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>5,8%</td>
<td>26,9%</td>
<td>59,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the material included does not violate the deontological</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>26,9%</td>
<td>61,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Public content available on personal profiles on social networks can be used in a story after requesting authorization (88.46%).

2. There are not significant differences by countries.

---

**DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PUBLIC CONTENT AVAILABLE IN PERSONAL PROFILES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS CAN BE USED DIRECTLY IN A PIECE OF INFORMATION?**

- Yes, in all cases: 5.77%
- Yes, after requesting authorization from the people involved: 88.46%
- No, I would not use it: 5.77%
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Most of the respondents consider journalists should identify as a journalists in public conversation on social networks.

2. These results are opposite to those obtained in a similar survey with journalists, which consider that they should not identify as a journalists in public conversation on social sites (54,4%).

DO YOU THINK THAT IF A JOURNALIST PARTICIPATES IN A CONVERSATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS OR IN A PUBLIC FORUM, S/HE SHOULD IDENTIFY HERSELF/HIMSELF AS A JOURNALIST?

- Yes, s/he must always identify herself/himself; 61,5%
- No, it is not necessary; 38,5%
Ethics principles and the digital

1. The use of social networks by journalists generates very diverse opinions, particularly regarding the professional vs private use of them.

2. Media councils members consider that journalists should be able to give their opinion through social networks on any subject, not only on the topics of news they published.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IF A JOURNALIST HAS A PROFILE ON SOCIAL NETWORKS, IN WHICH S/HE IDENTIFIES HERSELF/HIMSELF AS A JOURNALIST, S/HE CAN…</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Fairly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Fairly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile to pronounce her/his personal political and ideological positions.</td>
<td>17,31%</td>
<td>19,23%</td>
<td>15,38%</td>
<td>36,54%</td>
<td>11,54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile to pronounce her/his opinion on current news.</td>
<td>11,54%</td>
<td>7,69%</td>
<td>11,54%</td>
<td>51,92%</td>
<td>17,31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile only for professional purposes in relation to the news that s/he is preparing or has already published and express his/her opinion on it.</td>
<td>21,15%</td>
<td>34,62%</td>
<td>17,31%</td>
<td>9,62%</td>
<td>17,31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use that profile only in relation to the news that s/he is preparing or has already published without expressing his/her opinion on it.</td>
<td>21,15%</td>
<td>26,92%</td>
<td>26,92%</td>
<td>13,46%</td>
<td>11,54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
42.3% of respondents consider that ensuring comments on news quality is not the responsibility of the journalists, but of the media outlets.

Results are similar for all countries surveyed, except for Wallonia, when most of the respondents think that journalists should ensure the quality of comments on news, but workload prevents it.
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Most of the respondents find acceptable publish relevant information provided by whistleblowers, and both, journalists and whistleblowers, should be protected.

2. All countries show similar results except Spain, where the most common answer is that only journalists should be protected, and 20% of respondents consider than journalists and whistleblowers should be prosecuted.
There is not a clear position on this topic, averages are similar for those find appropriate to delete stories sanctioned by judicial authorities or by self-regulatory bodies, and those which consider that content should not be removed.

There are significant difference by countries. In Austria and Spain most of respondents find appropriated delete content if it is sanctioned. In Finland, Flanders and Wallonia the most frequent answer is that contents should not be removed because it affects the right of information.
**Ethics principles and the digital**

1. 98.1% of the respondents think that content produced by robots should be identified as such.

2. All the respondents think that content produced by robots should be governed by the same ethical standards applicable to journalists.

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**DO YOU THINK THAT THE INFORMATION PRODUCED BY ROBOTS SHOULD BE IDENTIFIED AS SUCH?**

- Yes, because they are published by a news media; 100%
- No, it is not necessary; 1.9%

**DO YOU THINK THAT THE INFORMATION PRODUCED BY ROBOTS SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY THE SAME ETHICAL STANDARDS APPLICABLE TO JOURNALISTS?**

- Yes; 98.1%
- No, because journalists do not produce them
Ethics principles and the digital

1. Most of the respondents consider that clickbait and web analytics dilute some journalistic principles. Clickbait practices are considered more debatable than web analytics.

2. Media council members from Ireland and Spain consider Clickbait dilutes principle of public interest.

3. Web analytics is mainly considered dilute the journalistic principle of public interest by respondents from Spain and Flanders, being those from Germany, Wallonia and Finland the lest critical with this practice.
Most of the respondents think that fact-checkers must be overseen by media councils, however there is a relevant number of respondents that don’t know.

There are significant differences among countries. Although respondents from Flanders mostly think fact-checkers must be overseen by media councils, in most of the countries this is a question to be solved.
Ethics principles and the pandemic

1. Most of the respondents did not receive more complaints during the Covid-19 pandemic than before.

2. Only in Austria and Wallonia respondents think that media councils received more complaints during the Covid-19 pandemic than before.

HAVE THE PRESS COUNCILS RECEIVED MORE COMPLAINTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THAN BEFORE?

- Yes: 20
- No: 58
- I do not want to answer: 22
Comparative analysis and conclusions
Research results shed light on how journalists see the job of media councils and self-regulatory bodies, how these bodies are affected by the digital age, and how can they adapt to the new ethical challenges. In the following lines, we aims to summarize some of the results obtained from both surveys, as well as from a comparative approach from them.

**Knowledge of media councils**

68.12% of journalists surveyed asserts that they know the existence of their national media council. Interestingly, media councils’ members of the boards have the perception that the level of knowledge among journalists is lower, 2.5 in a scale from 1 to 5, but they opinion about the media councils is quite positive. It’s worth to highlight that for a relevant number of journalists surveyed (30%) media councils are unknown or they think don’t exist.
Knowledge of code of ethics

Most of the journalists consider that they have a medium or high knowledge of the national Code of Ethics. The results contrast with those obtained among the members of the media councils, who consider that journalists have limited or medium level of knowledge of the national codes of ethics. It’s worth to underline that perception of level of knowledge is very different depending the country.

Code of Ethics and digital challenges

Are codes of ethics adapted to respond to new ethical challenges arising from the digitalization and the emergence of the Internet? The answer to this question is quite different depending of the stakeholder surveyed. While members of media councils mostly consider that national code of ethics responds to new ethical challenges arising from the digitalization (70,7%), only 33,18% of journalists surveyed shares this view.
Coherently, there are important differences regarding if the digital requires new ethical principles. While members of the media councils assert that new ethical principles are not necessary, but their adjustment to the new reality, journalists mainly answer that new ethical principles are required.

Insofar as it is acceptable to consider that the members of the media councils have a higher degree of the codes of ethics, it would seem necessary to strengthen the communication related to how the ethical principles should be applied in the digital context.

**Daily practices and ethical challenges**

The questionnaire used for the surveys includes a common set of questions for both groups regarding to ethical challenges in daily professional practices in the digital realm. Among others, respondents were asked about the responsibility for the new content arising from digitalisation (i.e. hyperlinks, embedded content, user generated content, comments on news…) as well as the use of social network sites, and the appearance of new actors like whistle-blowers and fact-checkers.
Both groups, journalists and media councils’ members, show similar results regarding if journalist are responsible for the external content and user generated content used in their stories. They consider that journalists are responsible for this sort of content, they must ensure accuracy, quality and legality of content linked, embedded, and generated by the audience when are used in news stories. In spite of this common view, media councils’ members tend to place greater responsibility on journalists.

Regarding the use of the content obtained from social media sites, results are quite similar. However, media councils’ members mostly defend that if a journalist participates in a conversation on social networks or in a public forum, s/he should identify herself/himself as a journalist. This view is 16 points lower among journalists, who consider it’s not necessary the identifiction.

An interesting point is the private use of social media by journalists. While some media companies, like the BBC, force staff to maintain impartiality on social media, both if they are using social networks professionally or personally, others don’t regulate their use. In this sense, journalists surveyed have very diverse opinions, however
they tend to be more indulgent than media councils’ members in the usage of social media for express a personal opinion on matters of politics and ideological position. Although their use should be not limited to the professional field.

Significant differences have been observed regarding if a piece of news that have been published is sanctioned by the judicial authority or ethically condemned by a self-regulatory body, it must be permanently deleted (right to be forgotten). While journalists mostly consider that in these circumstances the story must be deleted, media councils’ members have more diverse opinion. Those that defend the opposite view arguing that it affects the right of information are similar in percentage than those that defend that the story must be deleted.

Finally, participants were asked for new activities arisen from the digitalization like the use of robots in journalism, clickbait and web analytics. Both groups of participants share similar opinion in this regard. Content produced by robots should be governed by the same ethical standards applicable to journalists. Most of the respondents also
consider that clickbait and web analytics dilute some journalistic principles, and clickbait practices are considered more debatable than web analytics.

* 

The results of the research show a fairly common view among journalists and members of the media councils regarding the ethical challenges arising from digitalization. However, different views are identified in certain aspects that indicate the need to encourage dialogue between the different stakeholders involved, between journalists and the media and between journalists and media councils, on the most controversial issues.

Among the aspects in which there is a greater disparity of opinions, it is worth highlighting those referring to the use of social networks to express political and ideological opinions, the right to be forgotten and ethical responsibility regarding the use of UGC, and the quality of the comments on news. In addition to fostering dialogue around these issues, there is a need to promote a more general debate on what ethical principles should be adapted to the new digital reality and what other principles need to be included. Here ethical concerns arise.
about the use of practices such as clickbait and web analytic, and how they should be developed without diluting journalistic values and the public interest.

In the background of this debate, there is concern about why an important part of journalists considers (or does not know) that deontological codes do not respond to the challenges of digitalization. A frank and open discussion between all parties involved should help answer this and other questions that arise in the light of the results obtained.
This research was carried on thanks to the European Commission through the grant for the project *Media Councils in the Digital Age* funded by DG Connect.