

Original Paper

Defining and Challenging Ethical Responsibilities of News Communication Entities in the Intelligent Era

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1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the proliferation of internet-based news platforms has significantly altered the dynamics of news dissemination, raising complex ethical questions regarding the responsibilities of news communication entities. The introduction of the “Intelligent Era,” characterized by advanced technologies and widespread internet use, has brought forth unprecedented challenges in defining and enforcing ethical standards within the realm of news communication. This paper, titled “Defining and Challenging Ethical Responsibilities of News Communication Entities in the Intelligent Era,” aims to explore the multifaceted ethical responsibilities that news platforms, individual content creators, and media organizations face in today’s digital age. It delves into the intricacies of responsibility evasion, copyright issues, and the implications of disclaimers in an environment where traditional gatekeeping roles have diminished, and everyone has the potential to be a broadcaster of information.

As the boundaries between professional journalists and amateur content creators blur, the paper scrutinizes the “Platform + X” model, where “X” represents the varied actors contributing to news production and dissemination. This model has facilitated a surge in news content but has simultaneously introduced challenges in accountability and ethical responsibility. The absence of traditional gatekeeping mechanisms in internet media has led to a proliferation of misinformation, highlighting the urgent need for clear responsibility demarcation within communication entities to uphold ethical standards.

Furthermore, the paper explores the legal and ethical frameworks existing in different jurisdictions,

such as the UK, USA, and China, which aim to mitigate internet ethical issues through laws and regulations. However, these measures often fall short of addressing the root causes of ethical misconduct due to the lack of explicit responsibility demarcation among news communication entities. Through a detailed analysis of the principles for determining responsibility within these entities, the paper proposes a nuanced approach to ethical responsibility that encompasses behavioral, causal, shared, and high-ranking responsibility principles.

By examining the survival of communication individuals amid professional ethics and the coordinated management by high-level entities, this paper seeks to offer insights into creating a more ethically responsible news ecosystem in the Intelligent Era. The goal is to foster a dialogue on establishing a set of reasonable, feasible, and binding ethical norms that address the unique challenges posed by the digital transformation of news communication, ensuring the integrity and credibility of news in the face of rapidly advancing technologies.

The unclear determination of responsibility is a primary cause of ethical issues among communication Entities. Whether it's social responsibility or core qualities, when it comes to their specific implementation within communication Entities, it heavily depends on the demarcation of responsibilities. If responsibilities are not clearly demarcated, ethical issues can easily occur in the behavior of communication Entities and even in news activities in the Intelligent Era.

2. Responsibility Evasion Caused by the “Platform + X” Model

In the news production methods of the Intelligent Era, the “Platform + X” model is one of the most important modes. Here, the platform refers to the internet news platform, and X refers to individual producers and news media. Individual authors publish news messages on the platform, which then distributes them to recipients, or the platform redistributes news from professional news media. News platforms have created a good development environment for increasing news volume, gaining discourse power, and expressing freedom. However, in this open environment, where everyone can be a reporter, the platform is responsible for a large amount of news content. The platform's employees are not specifically trained professionals working in specialized media, and the role of a “gatekeeper” in traditional media is relatively “absent” in the platform environment.

There are plenty of irrational discourses in the news field, not to mention false information. The main reasons for these phenomena include a lack of sense of responsibility, low moral judgment skills, credibility crisis, and self-centeredness. The appearance of this kind of harmful information undoubtedly has a severe adverse impact on the stable development of society. The discussion of the infringement responsibility of news platforms has always been one of the hotspots in legal research, but legal problems are, after all, a minority. More issues involve ethical misconduct.

The absence of internet media “gatekeepers” is still a problem, as evidenced by the information being disseminated. In the “Platform + X” model, everyone is a gatekeeper, but due to unclear ethical accountability and the fact that most information on the platform is digitalized (existing mainly as

animations, texts, sounds, images, etc.), it's too difficult for an individual to take on the responsibility of a gatekeeper.

Faced with ethical risks, most countries mitigate various internet ethical issues by utilizing existing laws and regulations. For example, the UK has released five information ethics rules; the USA has proposed ten computer commandments. Domestically, China has launched various laws and regulations related to the internet, including the "Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China" and the "Regulations on the Protection of Computer Software." However, these laws and regulations can only standardize management but do not demarcate the responsibility of Entities. This leads to a situation where, despite the norms, ethical misconduct is still rampant.

The main manifestation of ethical responsibility evasion in the "Platform + X" model is the transfer and sharing of copyright. Although copyright is a legal concept, when it comes to ethical accountability outside of self-regulation, because news works belong to copyrighted works, the power and responsibility are shared. Therefore, in the "Platform + X" communication Entity model, it is essential to judge ethical responsibility and determine copyright attribution. Generally, the copyright belongs to the creator. Still, often, the copyright does not accompany the creator from start to end. Instead, it changes due to the change of management rights, resulting in the transfer and sharing of copyright.

3. Disclaimers Leading to Responsibility Evasion

Due to the vast number of individual authors, the large amount of data scraped by programs, and the current ability of programs only to perform simple screening of news content without ethical value judgment, it is unrealistic for internet news platforms to implement comprehensive supervision and gatekeeping for ethical values in news content. Therefore, to avoid bearing a massive amount of ethical responsibility that may arise from news, internet news platforms will establish "disclaimers." Disclaimers can be a guarantee for the platform's normal operation, but should not become a means for the platform to evade moral responsibility.

First, a disclaimer is not a protective talisman. As a specific manifestation of high-ranking Entities and operators of intelligent news, internet news platforms should have obligations to safeguard the rights associated with all Entities related to the platform, including communication Entities and recipients. This obligation cannot be waived by signing a disclaimer agreement.

Second, disclaimers cannot absolve ethical responsibility. As a crucial aggregation platform for various technologies and Entities in the news of the Intelligent Era, the ethical responsibility of internet news platform management is naturally existing and does not disappear due to any signed agreement.

Lastly, providing an external reporting entrance does not equate to transferring the platform's responsibility. In many disclaimer clauses, it is explicitly stated that platforms provide external reporting entrances, welcoming reports of harmful content. Reporting harmful content to relevant management departments is a reasonable and effective measure of ethical management, but it should not confuse external management and internal responsibility. It does not mean that by reporting a

problem to a related department, the platform's ethical responsibility is simultaneously transferred.

4. Implementation of Clear Responsibility Demarcation within Communication Entities

The ultimate goal of analyzing the responsibility within news communication Entities is to achieve a clear demarcation of responsibility within them. However, this issue cannot be resolved by merely elucidating from the perspectives of responsibility quality or problem manifestation. It is also necessary to clarify the principles for determining responsibility within the communication Entities. This includes thoroughly considering how to handle conflicts between the survival of individual communicators and professional ethics, and how high-ranking entities can effectively manage these situations.

4.1 Principles for Determining Responsibility

“The goodness of the system surpasses, precedes, and is more important than the goodness of the individual.” The development of news in the Intelligent Era comes with many ethical issues. Efforts are continually being made to solve these issues, but significant progress is yet to be achieved. The root cause of these issues lies in the lure of interests, which often exceeds the force of punishment. Furthermore, ethical standards are not as strictly enforced as laws, and ethical responsibilities often remain ambiguously assigned, leading to a loophole mentality. Over time, the development of news in the Intelligent Era will always be troubled by ethical misconduct.

Discussions on this issue have always focused on specific problems, such as information cocoons, the right to be forgotten, and infringement of privacy rights. The proposed solutions often revolve around self-regulation and the formulation of standards. Admittedly, self-regulation is critical in addressing ethical issues and is the fundamental solution. However, ethical misconduct is often a byproduct of rapid industry development and quickly expanding interests. Therefore, at this stage, the importance of establishing ethical norms far exceeds the significance of self-regulation for news development in the Intelligent Era.

To develop a set of reasonable, feasible, and binding ethical norms, we must first ensure these norms have a binding force. The key to this force lies in determining responsibility. Generally, responsibility determination is usually applied in the legal field, but ethics sets the baseline for behavior above the law, so we cannot directly apply legal principles for responsibility determination. Moreover, due to the expansion of responsible entities and the application of technology, the principles for determining ethical responsibility have specific peculiarities. I believe that the internal determination of ethical responsibility among news communication Entities in the Intelligent Era should abide by the principles of behavioral responsibility, causal responsibility, shared responsibility, and high-ranking responsibility. Firstly, the principle of behavioral responsibility. This refers to, in determining ethical responsibility, considering not only the results but also whether the ethical Entity could foresee the ethical misconduct outcomes before acting but still decided to proceed with news production for the sake of interest. According to the principle of behavioral responsibility, in determining the ethical responsibility of communication Entities, only if the Entity actively chooses to cause ethical issues for the sake of

interest should they bear ethical responsibility.

In the specific implementation of the principle of behavioral responsibility, there can be two situations: partial action with partial responsibility and partial action with full responsibility. The concept of partial action and partial responsibility is relatively easy to understand - it refers to determining how much responsibility an individual or organization should bear based on the part they played in causing an ethical misconduct issue in news activities, the proportion their part played in the total activities, and how much responsibility their part holds for the resulting ethical issues. However, in the Intelligent Era, due to the involvement of computers, interactions between various Entities and computers are often relatively independent. The independent interactions can cause ethical misconduct issues, but when these independent interactions are linked together to form a complete news production activity, they can cause ethical issues. In this case, although each Entity's activities are only part of the reason for the result of ethical misconduct, the ethical responsibility should still be borne by the Entity who combines the independent activities of each Entity into a news production activity.

Second, the principle of causal responsibility. As the most common judgment principle in responsibility attribution, it is generally believed that as long as the results of a Entity's behavior cause adverse effects, the responsibility should be borne by the actor. This is true in law and in traditional journalism. However, in the era of intelligence, due to the changing background of the news industry, whether it is news platforms or news media, a large amount of news production is the result of the joint work of many individuals. For the assumption of ethical responsibility, I believe that the cause and effect here is different from the general understanding. In terms of causality, it is usually the direct actor who bears all or most of the ethical responsibility. But in the era of intelligence, the principle of causal responsibility refers to: in the news co-produced by multiple Entities, the ethical responsibility should be borne by the main beneficiary, or the main beneficiary and the direct communication Entity who can judge and decide the behavior. For those communication Entities who do not have the ability to judge values or cannot decide whether to act, they should not bear ethical responsibility.

When discussing the issue of news ethics deviation in the era of intelligence, we often overemphasize the responsibility of individual editors, platform operators, and engineers, and the most common treatment for similar problems is individual treatment, using individual treatment to calm the situation. For issues involving core interests, such as algorithm recommendations, it has been unable to push for resolution, making it a common problem. It is undeniable that there is a connection between the individual producers in the news production and the ethical deviation issues, but in the delineation of ethical responsibility, individual producers should not be directly connected with the results of the deviation issue as "cause and effect". The core of ethics is "good", and the practice of "good" should not be based on the sacrifice of individual practitioners. Every individual practitioner is also a social unit. In the "involution" market, the survival of the social unit is based on reality. The news communication Entities in the era of intelligence, from a real dimension, is also a job that social individuals rely on for survival. Ethics believes that "if there is a certain cause, there must be a result,

and if there is no certain cause, there will be no result.” The fundamental reason for the ethical deviation of news in the era of intelligence is the temptation of interests, and the main body of decision-making behavior is also the main beneficiary of interests. The ethical deviation of news in the era of intelligence should fundamentally link cause and effect, divide responsibilities, and should not require individual producers to sacrifice personal interests to refuse the decisions of superiors. Moreover, the sacrifice of personal interests cannot fundamentally solve the “cause” of ethical deviation, and the “effect” will continue to exist.

Third, the principle of high responsibility. Within the communication Entity, the high-position Entity has the power to determine the behavior of the communication Entity, and is also responsible for the behavior of the communication Entity. The basis of the principle of high responsibility is also dependent on this management model. Whether it is the media or the company-run Internet news platform, when ethical deviation issues occur, regardless of whether the high-position Entity is the beneficiary, they should bear the responsibility. If they are the beneficiaries, they should bear all the responsibilities, otherwise they should bear part of the responsibility. Unlike the principle of causal responsibility, the high-position Entity only assumes all responsibilities when enjoying benefits and deciding on the behavior of the communication Entity. The principle of high responsibility emphasizes that regardless of whether the high-position Entity is the beneficiary, because they bear management responsibilities, the high-position Entity always bears certain responsibilities in the ethical deviation of news in the era of intelligence.

In the traditional news era, the management of the communication Entity to: AI Assistant<|im_sep|>Second, the principle of causation responsibility. As the most common principle in the assignment of responsibility, it is generally believed that as long as the results of the Entity’s behavior have caused adverse effects, the responsibility should be borne by the Entity of the action. This is the case in law and in the traditional news industry. However, in the intelligent era, due to the changing background of the development of the news industry, both news platforms and news media produce a large amount of news as a result of the collective work of numerous individuals. In terms of ethical responsibility, the author believes that the causal relationship here is different from the general understanding. Normally, the causal relationship means that the direct actor bears all or most of the ethical responsibility. But in the intelligent era, the principle of causation responsibility refers to: in the news produced by multiple Entities, the ethical responsibility should be borne by the main beneficiary, or the main beneficiary and the direct disseminator who can judge and decide actions. For disseminators who do not have the ability to judge value or cannot decide whether to act, they should not bear ethical responsibility.

When discussing the ethical misconduct in the news of the intelligent era, the individual responsibilities of editors, platform operators, and engineers are often overemphasized. The most common approach in handling such issues is to deal with individuals to appease the problem. Moreover, issues like algorithmic recommendations that involve core interests have always been unable to be resolved,

making them recurrent topics. While there is a connection between individual producers in the news production Entity and ethical misconduct, in the assignment of ethical responsibility, individual producers should not be directly linked to the results of misconduct as “cause and effect”. The core of ethics is “goodness”, and the practice of “goodness” should not be based on the sacrifice of individual practitioners. Every individual practitioner is also a social unit. In the “involution” market, the survival of social units is based on reality. The news disseminator in the intelligent era is also a job that social individuals rely on for survival from a realistic perspective. Ethics believes that “if there is a certain cause, there will be a result, and vice versa, if there is no certain cause, there will be no result.” The root cause of ethical misconduct in news in the intelligent era is the temptation of interests, and the decision-making Entity is also the main beneficiary. The issue of ethical misconduct in the news of the intelligent era should be fundamentally linked to cause and effect, divided responsibilities, and individual producers should not be asked to sacrifice personal interests to reject the decisions of superiors. Furthermore, the sacrifice of personal interests cannot fundamentally solve the “cause” of ethical misconduct, and the “effect” will continue to exist.

Third, the principle of high-level responsibility. Within the communication Entity, high-level Entities have the decisive power over the behavior of the communication Entity and are also responsible for the behavior of the communication Entity. The basis of the principle of high-level responsibility also depends on this management model. Whether it is media or a corporate Internet news platform, when ethical misconduct occurs, no matter whether the high-level Entity is a beneficiary, they should bear the responsibility. If they are beneficiaries, they bear all the responsibility, otherwise they bear part of the responsibility. Unlike the principle of causation responsibility, the high-level Entity only bears all responsibility when enjoying benefits and deciding on the behavior of the communication Entity. The principle of high-level responsibility emphasizes that regardless of whether the high-level Entity is a beneficiary, they always bear certain responsibilities in the ethical misconduct of news in the intelligent era due to their management responsibilities.

In the traditional news era, the management of high-level Entities for communication Entities was basically limited to editors and reporters. Most of the managers of high-level Entities were also professional practitioners trained through relevant systems, so their control over the behavior of communication Entities was relatively comprehensive and unified. However, in the intelligent era, high-level Entities need to manage not only editors and reporters, but also platform operators and engineers. The expansion and diversification of production Entities significantly increase the difficulty of management for high-level Entities, making it challenging to fully understand the correctness of all production Entities’ behaviors professionally. Yet, if ethical misconduct issues arise due to certain Entities violating ethical rules, even if the high-level Entity is unaware, it should be determined in ethical responsibility judgment that the communication Entity bears the primary ethical responsibility, while the high-level Entity bears the secondary responsibility.

Fourth, the principle of shared responsibility. Besides the principle of high-level responsibility, news

ethical responsibility in the intelligent era should also adhere to the principle of shared responsibility. This principle implies that in news activities, if various Entities are interconnected in their participation, regardless of where the main responsibility for ethical misconduct lies, all Entities involved in news production should bear a portion of the ethical responsibility. While the principle of high-level responsibility emphasizes management, the principle of shared responsibility underscores that each communication Entity should uphold their professional ethics during joint news production activities, oversee the entire news activity, supervise other parts in their own section, and avoid a situation where knowing that other Entities' behavior may lead to ethical misconduct, they don't supervise because they don't need to bear the responsibility.

4.2 The Survival of Communication Individuals and Professional Ethics

As independent individuals in the communication Entity, they simultaneously belong to three relationships in news activities: the social survival relationship, employment relationship, and professional relationship. Each of these relationships demands differently from the individual. In the social survival relationship, the requirement for the individual is to be responsible for their social roles, which includes citizen and family roles. This responsibility manifests as civic morality, where everyone belongs to a state and their family, and they need to fulfill their civic duties. In the employment relationship, the standard for the individual is the employment contract and contract ethics, where the individual needs to abide by the contract stipulations and obey the employer's arrangement during employment. In the professional relationship, professional ethics regulate the individual's behavior, requiring practitioners to adhere to professional norms when working.

From a single perspective, regardless of what role the individual plays, its standards are normative. But in reality, when several roles are imposed on a specific individual simultaneously, conflicts may arise among various ethical standards. When an individual is employed by a platform operation company in the capacity of a communication Entity, when the business they handle has ethical risks, we often require practitioners to regulate their behavior and avoid ethical misconduct issues but fail to propose an effective solution. As an employee, the practitioner works according to the employer's request. When the work content involves ethical risks, we should not ask the practitioner to sacrifice their personal interest to try to prevent the problem from occurring. If the practitioner is aware of the problem but cannot prevent its occurrence due to their family responsibilities and employment relationship, we should not require the practitioner, as an employee, to bear all the responsibility. However, the current handling of such problems often involves dealing with frontline practitioners.

As mentioned earlier, high-level Entities, as managers, decision-makers, and beneficiaries, should always bear the primary responsibility. Otherwise, ethical constraints will only remain on paper and can't fundamentally constrain. However, this does not mean that individual practitioners bear no responsibility. Whether they are professional journalists, professional operators, or computer engineers, they should comply with their professional ethics. Here, compliance manifests as an obligation and responsibility to use their professional knowledge to judge whether the work they handle carries ethical

risks. If there are risks, they have the responsibility to alert the managers.

4.3 Coordinated Management by High-Level Entities

Within communication Entities, whether it's the platform's evasion of responsibility or the evasion of liability through disclaimers, the core issue is that high-level Entities have not assumed the primary responsibility. As managers within the communication Entities, it's crucial for high-level Entities to coordinate the management of responsibilities, bear the main responsibilities, clarify the platform's obligation to warn, and adopt various modes of co-management.

First, platforms have an obligation to warn. Internet news platforms have always touted themselves as merely intermediaries for news, not producers of news, which often leads to individual producers being blamed for any ethical responsibility. Although platforms are regulated by relevant departments, penalties often occur when legal issues arise or in cases of serious ethical issues. For less severe ethical problems, platforms usually do not assume responsibility but only deal with individual authors. Plus, under the "platform + individual author publishing" model, a large part of the news ethical responsibility is shouldered by individual authors. This has given internet news platforms the illusion that they have "no ethical responsibility." However, this is not the case. As crucial intermediaries in news activities, internet news platforms shoulder important responsibilities in collecting and distributing news.

Whether the news displayed on the internet news platform is actively published by individual authors, or the platform automatically scrapes it through a system, the platform has an inalienable management responsibility. This management responsibility isn't just about dealing with individual authors or news content in a simplistic sense, but the platform has the duty to warn individual authors and news media to avoid ethical misconduct before news publication and during news media scraping, and clearly inform them of potential punishment methods.

Secondly, establish the coexistence of multiple management models. Regardless of how the platform acquires news, it cannot evade its management responsibilities. Even when ethical responsibility is borne by individual authors or news media, internet news platforms still need to manage news producers. Internally, internet news platforms are responsible for managing individual authors who publish news on their platforms, contract-signed authors, and the news content published on their platforms. Externally, internet news platforms themselves do not establish norms; instead, they rely on industry norms established by the state to regulate communication Entities and news content. In the external management model, although the platform does not establish norms, it still bears the responsibility for management. It needs to declare that communication Entities must comply with industry norms established by the relevant state departments, call on communication Entities to voluntarily comply, and provide links for reporting to the relevant departments. It's worth noting that while some platforms independently use internal or external management, currently, for most large-scale internet news platforms, a combination of internal and external management is safer.

5. Conclusion

The rapid evolution of digital news platforms in the Intelligent Era has significantly reshaped the landscape of news dissemination, challenging traditional notions of ethical responsibility among news communication entities. This exploration has delved into the complexities of the “Platform + X” model, the use of disclaimers, and the critical need for clearly demarcated responsibilities to address ethical concerns effectively. As the boundaries between professional journalists and amateur content creators become increasingly blurred, the responsibility to uphold the integrity and credibility of news content has never been more paramount.

The democratization of news production, facilitated by internet platforms, while enriching the media landscape with diverse voices, also introduces a fertile ground for misinformation and ethical lapses. The absence of traditional gatekeeping roles has underscored the urgent necessity for a robust framework that clearly defines the ethical obligations of all actors within the news ecosystem. Our analysis suggests that establishing such a framework requires a nuanced approach that transcends legal compliance to embrace higher ethical standards.

Moreover, the discussion around disclaimers has highlighted a prevalent trend towards responsibility evasion, underscoring the need for news platforms to foster a culture of accountability. It is evident that disclaimers should not serve as a loophole for ethical responsibility but rather as a component of a comprehensive strategy to ensure the ethical dissemination of news. In this context, the principles of behavioral, causal, shared, and high-ranking responsibility offer a foundational guide for delineating ethical obligations in a manner that aligns with the dynamic and interconnected nature of modern news production and distribution.

The challenges posed by the Intelligent Era call for a collective effort to redefine ethical standards in the news industry. This entails not only a commitment from individual content creators and platforms to uphold these standards but also a coordinated approach to manage ethical responsibilities effectively. As technology continues to advance, the ethical frameworks governing news communication must also evolve, ensuring that they remain relevant and effective in promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity.

In light of these considerations, the path forward for news communication entities is marked by the imperative to navigate the ethical complexities of the digital age with foresight and responsibility. By fostering an environment where ethical norms are clearly defined and actively upheld, the news industry can continue to serve its critical role in society as a reliable source of information and a pillar of democratic engagement. Achieving this balance between technological innovation and ethical integrity will be crucial in maintaining the trust and credibility of news in the face of rapidly advancing technologies.

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