



JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN INTERNSHIP AND ETHICS IN BELGIUM, FRANCE, AND SPAIN

RESEARCH REPORT

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MEDIA COUNCILS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



THIS REPORT PRESENTS THE RESULTS OF A COLLECTIVE RESEARCH STUDY carried out by 5 universities from Belgium - French and Dutch speaking universities -, France, and Spain. It details the relationship that journalism students from Belgium, France and Spain have with journalism professional ethics. Questioning the representations and experiences that the students have with ethics is of particular interest as they are in the process of discovering and adapting to the professional world and the resulting professional practices. We opted for a qualitative perspective for the study, and focus groups were organized in Belgium, France, and Spain, with journalism students having done at least one internship. Five main themes emerged from the focus groups and are analyzed in this report: (1) Representations about professional ethics (2) Negotiations arising from the practical application of theoretical learning, (3) Tensions emerging when ethics conflicts with other issues, (4) Judgements expressing when talking about ethics (5) Contemporary issues related to the current media environment.

The analysis of these topics portrays the daily ethical reflections of the Belgian, French, and Spanish students as well as the changing representations of the ethics these reflections convey. The main factors that shape these changing representations are identified, such as the editorial identity of the media, its economic environment, its managerial organization, the collective dynamics within the editorial offices, and the way in which the individual sees his/her career.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS RESEARCH HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE MCDA PROJECT, supported by the European Commission (DG Connect). The overall objective of the MCDA project is to increase the visibility of media self-regulation bodies in Europe, candidate countries and beyond to ensure they play a significant role in addressing the new challenges of the digital age. The project aims to support the European model of media self-regulation as a major part of a general strategy to protect media freedom, encourage professionalism in journalistic content and gain a better understanding of the consequences and challenges of digital developments for press and media councils. It will do so by integrating major stakeholders such as journalists, media outlets, media and freedom of expression NGO's, associations and unions of journalists as well as other civil society groups at the heart of self-regulation to improve its effectiveness and visibility within the profession and outside.

This research started from a study made in 2019 by Belgian researchers dedicated to the French Belgian community (Tixier, Fierens, Le Cam, Domingo, Grevisse, Standart, Krywicki, Degand, 2019) then extended to (1) the Flemish part of Belgium, (2) France and (3) Spain. The three were chosen because of their specificities and similarities. (1) In Belgium, because of the institutional political structure, higher education as well as press councils are organized autonomously by three different political bodies: the Flemish, the French and the German communities. The media and consequently the instruments of media accountability and ethics are divided along language lines (Raeymaeckers & Heinderyckx, 2018). The main self-regulatory body in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium is the Council for Journalism (Raad voor de Journalistiek) which was founded in 2002. It involves representatives from the publishers and media companies, journalists, and external experts. Its ethical framework was formalized in 2010 in the Code of the Council for Journalism. Since then, the code has been supplemented and updated several times (2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2019). The Council for Journalism is widely accepted among professional journalists as an authority on ethics (Van Leuven et al., 2019, p. 37). Professional journalistic ethics in Flanders, therefore, largely 'equals' the Code of the Council for Journalism as well as the accompanying guidelines. In the French speaking part of Belgium, the Council of Journalistic Ethics (Conseil de déontologie journalistique, CDJ) created in 2009, for both French and German-speaking media. It involves representatives from the publishers and media companies, journalists, and external experts. The [CDJ's Code of Journalistic Ethics](#) was first approved in 2013. (2) In France, the creation of a press council has been a matter of debate for many years because of the opposition of many professionals who thought it represented an attempt to bring the press into line. The [Conseil de déontologie journalistique et de médiation](#) was finally founded in late 2019 as an independent association, bringing together three types of representatives actors of the media : journalists, editors and the public (30 members), similar to the configuration of the Belgian press councils. (3). In Spain there is no national organization. However, three organizations are part of the [Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe](#) (AIPCE). On the one hand, there is the Commission of Ethics and Guarantees of the Professional Journalists Corporation of Andalusia ([CPPA](#)). On the other hand, there is the Information Council of Catalonia (ICC), a not-for-profit organization that was fostered by the Catalan Journalists' College (CJC) in 1997. Finally, it is important to highlight the case of the Journalism Arbitration and Ethics Committee. The CPPA was established in 2015 as an independent organization responsible for ensuring compliance with

the ethical codes that govern the profession. This happens especially with the codes of the Council of Europe and FAPE, which the CPPA has adopted as its own, in order to guarantee the right to citizenship information. It is necessary to also point out the role of the Journalism Arbitration and Ethics Committee, whose main objective is to promote ethical journalism from independent and responsible self-regulation, through mediation and understanding. Nonetheless, there is a prevailing need in at least two key aspects. On the one hand, the press councils must offer new channels of communication to gain visibility through social networks and with younger journalists and audiences. This would be very useful to offer a more renewed image. On the other hand, the press councils should take advantage of the current era of disinformation to offer the most concerned citizens an emphasis on how to proceed through complaints, for example. Dissemination through traditional and new media is essential to make this work visible and increase connectivity with citizens.

Hungary should have been included in the research. But despite many attempts from local academia to mobilize students from the University of Szeged, the University of Debrecen and the Elte Institute for Art Theory and Media Studies, it proved impossible to gather enough young journalists to constitute any focus groups. The reasons for this lack of participation are not known. But two hypotheses could be advanced: first, there are very few Hungarian students interested in Journalism; much more in Communication. Second, the national political environment in Hungary doesn't favor freedom of expression and could thus prevent students from showing interest in the focus groups.

The specific objective of this research is to find out how Belgian, French and Spanish journalism students, during/after their first internship experience, think about ethics in/and journalism and how they experience ethics in their first professional jobs. Young journalists are a crucial stakeholder for the evolution of the self-regulation of the profession and the activity of media councils. They usually learn to appreciate the ethical codes and principles during their training in higher education institutions, and these values are put to test for the first time most often during their internships in media companies. These initial professional experiences confront them with the current work conditions in the media sector and the challenges they pose to ethical principles. At the same time, they are digital natives, with their own set of values and experiences about online life that may lead them to question existing professional values. Their reflections can therefore offer relevant insights that contribute to developing a set of suggestions of best practices for the media councils.

METHOD

Adherence to ethical principles is often included in surveys among journalists worldwide (e.g., Weaver et al., 2007; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Students in journalism have also been the object of study in countries as divergent as Great Britain (Ball, Hanna & Sanders, 2006), USA (Reinardy & Moore, 2007; Conway & Groshek, 2009), Nigeria (Alemoh, Ukwela & Ogoshi, 2018) or Singapore (Detenber et al., 2012). Comparative works have also been realized. Yang and Arant (2014), for example, compared how American and Chinese journalism students view ethical dilemmas faced by journalists. Alonso, Calderon and Pérez (2019) compared perceptions of students about ethics and journalism practices in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela. Concerning Belgium, adherence to ethical principles is included in the five-yearly surveys among journalists of the country, the last of which was in 2018 (Van Leuven et al., 2019). While the single-country studies and the comparative studies almost exclusively – with the exception of de Cock et al. (2013) – make use of surveys (Ball, Hanna & Sanders, 2006; Reinardy & Moore, 2007; Conway & Groshek, 2009; Detenber et al., 2012; Opgenhaffen, d’Haenens & Corten, 2013; Garcia, Monjas-Eleta & Gil-Torres, 2018; Yang & Arant, 2014; Alemoh, Ukwela & Ogoshi, 2018; Alonso, Calderon & Pérez, 2019; Van Leuven et al., 2019) to measure the degree of the journalists’ or students’ ethical concern or the degree of permissiveness towards controversial journalistic practices (e.g., undercover practice, accepting presents or payments as a journalist, using confidential information), this research makes use of focus groups, a qualitative in-depth method particularly adapted to make collective representations emerging (Evans, 2001).

24 focus groups were organized in total, 103 students from the main journalism trainings in Dutch-speaking Belgium, French-speaking Belgium, France and Spain. Students were interviewed after having received at least one year of journalism training and having completed at least one internship in a media company. The focus groups were conducted between September 2019 and July 2021. They involved 3 to 7 students and the average duration of the discussions was 75 minutes (ranging between 45 minutes and 95 minutes). They all were recorded, transcribed into verbatims and then coded and analyzed. The interview guide used for all the focus groups invited the students to discuss journalistic professional ethics according to two aspects: their conceptions of ethics and their experiences of ethics. The focus group facilitator asked them open-ended questions on these two sub-themes and, if necessary, asked them to illustrate their comments with situations that they had experienced or that had been reported to them, to discuss them collectively. All the focus groups were moderated by people from outside the students’ training course, so that no hierarchical bias would be present to guarantee that the context was one of discussion, and by no means a test. All exchanges were recorded and fully transcribed in an extensive manner¹. Although the impossibility of organizing the focus groups according to the “usual” face-to-face methods had initially worried the researchers from Belgium, France and Spain, the practice and the results show that the transposition of this methodology online did not pose any major problem for the collection of data and their analysis during the study. It should also be noted that in each country, it was difficult to recruit participants for the various focus groups (our investigation showed a lack of time and interest in ethics-related issues). However, at the end of several focus groups, the students expressed their satisfaction for having the

¹ We are grateful for the assistance of the following names for the gathering of the data for this study: Ann Braeckman conducted and transcribed the Flemish focus groups; Alexia Cappuccio and Catherine Quiroga collaborated in the conduction of the focus groups in France; and Emmanuelle Lecerf and Charly Pohnu also did a remarkable work in a very short time for the transcription of the French focus groups.

opportunity to debate professional ethical issues, and the dense discussions recorded testify to this interest. Focus groups were carried out with some specificities in each country:

In Dutch-speaking Belgium, a total of 26 students from three journalism training programs (VUB, KU Leuven - campus Brussels, UGent) took part in five focus groups of four to seven students each. All five groups were organized between 1 and 8 June 2021. They had an average duration of 75 minutes. Focus groups were organized online for two reasons. First, the corona safety measures did not allow a lot of physical group activity. Second, because of the divergent working circumstances and working places of the interns an online meeting was more achievable for them.

In French-speaking Belgium, eight focus groups with an average duration of 75 minutes were organized with a total of 33 students from the main journalism trainings in French-speaking Belgium (the master's programs at UCLouvain, ULB, ULiege and IHECS). Each one involved four to five students. They all were conducted onsite between September and November 2019.

In France, seven focus groups were conducted between June and September 2021 with 28 students from five French journalism schools offering a master's degree in journalism: four schools acknowledged by the professional bodies (*'reconnues par la profession'*): EJCAM, EJdG, ESJ Lille, IJBA; and a specialized master's degree (Master's degree in «Journalism: reporting and investigation» at Sciences Po Rennes). For practical reasons related to the students' and researchers' schedules and the corona crisis, most of the focus groups were organized online. Only one focus group was conducted in person. In some cases, the students were gathered in the same room and the researcher was online; in other cases, all the participants were at home and connected online. A total of 28 students (between 21 and 35 years old) took part in seven focus groups with three to five participants each, for an average duration of 75 minutes (duration of 60 to 90 minutes approximately). As mentioned earlier, four of the five institutions belong to the 14 journalism courses acknowledged by the *Commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi des journalistes (CPNEJ)*, an organization that gathers representatives of publishers' organizations and journalists' unions. We conducted one focus group in Bordeaux, two in Grenoble, one in Lille and two in Marseille. The fifth course is a master's degree in journalism in Rennes, where we conducted one focus group. All the courses offer a Master's degree (120 ECTS). At the time of the focus groups, all the students had had at least one year of training and had completed at least one internship in a media company (several in the vast majority of cases).

In Spain, between 16 June and 7 July 2021, four focus groups were organized with master's students from two different universities: Ramon Llull University, privately owned (Barcelona), and Miguel Hernández University, publicly owned (Elche). Each focus group was composed by 4 students and lasted 90 minutes. Given the pandemic context they have been carried out online. It is also important to note that many of the universities contacted that offered master's degrees in journalism did not have agreements or internships in associated companies or media for students.

To consider the specificities of each country and set the national contexts in terms of training programs and internship's organization, a **questionnaire** has also been sent out to the journalism trainings managers of most institutions in each country, especially asking them whether they have specific courses related to journalism ethics before the first internship as well as the number and duration done by their students. We received 9 answers from Dutch-speaking Belgian institutions; 4 answers from French-speaking Belgian institutions; 3 from French institutions; 2 from Spanish institutions and one from a Hungarian institution. These responses help us to describe the landscape of journalism education in Belgium, France, and Spain.

In the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, a professional bachelor's degree of Journalism can be obtained at seven university colleges in Flanders. Two universities (VUB – Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and KU Leuven – Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) organize a Master of Journalism while a third university (UGent – Universiteit Gent) offers the possibility to choose a specialization in journalism within the Master of Communication Sciences. The KU Leuven and VUB programmes offer a one-year program (60 ects) that students can follow after another academic master (for example history, political sciences or languages) or an academic bachelor (for example in languages or communication science). There is no direct flow from a professional bachelor to the academic master. Students must follow an additional 'bridge year' in between. The master consequently attracts a 'mature' profile of students. Ages typically range between 21 and 26, and occasionally up to +30 years old with the median and modus of 22 years. The master's program combines journalism as a subject of study (journalism studies) and as a field of practice (vocational training). The double profile is reflected in the combination of theoretical courses and practical workshops, an (unpaid) internship of six to ten weeks and a master's thesis. Among the general courses is also an introduction to journalism ethics and regulations. The UGent program builds on a bachelor's program in social sciences/communication sciences. Although a relatively strong group of students come to the academic master programs via bridge programs. In the master program in journalism, the academic courses relate to journalism studies, politics and media, business modeling and media ethics while the more practical courses follow a vocational track, including an option to integrate an internship in the curriculum. All three programs offer 60 ECTS, combining theoretical courses and practical workshops, an (unpaid) internship of six to ten weeks and a master's thesis. Among the general courses is also an introduction to journalism ethics and regulations.

In the French speaking part of Belgium, four institutions offer two-years masters of journalism: École de journalisme de Louvain (UCLouvain), Université de Liège (ULiege), Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Institut des Hautes Études des Communications Sociales (IHECS). They all have mandatory courses dedicated to ethics. The French-speaking students do internships during the second year of the master, except those from Université de Liège who also take an internship during the first year of the master. Students from the Francophone universities must complete internships at two to three media newsrooms during four to twelve weeks. The four institutions offer a compulsory course on journalism ethics before the students take their internship. Three of them demand the students to take the initiative to find the media company in which they will do the internship, even if in most cases there is a collaboration agreement already in place to host the students.

In France, journalism education is divided into several poles, each of which enjoys varying degrees of legitimacy and recognition by the profession. At the top of the list are the journalism schools acknowledged by the profession ("reconnues par la profession"), which have structured the institutionalization of journalism education since the beginning of the 19th century (Chupin, 2018). In order to achieve this recognition, they must follow a general pedagogical reference framework for journalism schools that outlines the organization of courses. In the introduction to the document, it is stated: "The exercise of the profession imposes a strict respect for ethical rules transposed into ethics practices: verification of information, cross-checking of sources, letting aside personal opinions, taking into account the impact on others of non-essential statements..." The teaching of ethics and the practice of ethics are thus part of the fundamentals to be transmitted to the students within the specific module "Ethics and press law" and is done in the form of theoretical courses with practical applications. Ethics courses are taught both transversally throughout the curriculum (in the practical exercises) and are part of the (theoretical) fundamentals that all students should have seen by the first year of their Master's degree. This is the case in all the courses in which we conducted focus

groups, including the Sciences Po Rennes Master's program, which also follows the CPNEJ's reference framework. For the practical part, ethics is taught by professional and academic teachers, and for the theoretical part, it is lecturers who give the courses based on academic presentations, reflections on these issues and practical case studies. As for the internships, they are also governed by the CPNEJ reference framework (from 16 to 28 weeks) and start for the most part during the summer holidays in the regional daily press media (PQR) with which the schools acknowledged by the profession have an agreement. At Sciences Po Rennes, the ethics course takes place after a first internship period of one month under observation conditions during the first year of the master, but before the compulsory internship period of at least three months of the second year of the master. Thus, the students identify the field of questions during their first internship, while they are supervised closely by professional journalists, and understand more easily and more practically the issues raised during the more substantial course of the second year of the master, before returning to the internship. Due to the fact that the curriculum of acknowledged journalism schools includes compulsory internships in the regional daily press (PQR), the vast majority of the students interviewed had had two months' experience in a PQR title. Many of them also had other pre-professional experiences in other media, at national or regional levels.

In Spain, the first university schools' centers for Journalism and Communication started in 1971 (Barrera, 2022). The first subjects on digital journalism were incorporated in the mid-1990s. Currently, the number of subjects in this specialty exceeds one hundred. (Masip et al., 2022). Recent studies highlight some results that reveal a greater offering at the national level but a wide dispersion of the higher education offering in terms of type, location, type of university, and territorial distribution (Álvarez-Nobell, et al., 2022). Two institutions which offer master's degree studies have been surveyed, Open University of Catalonia (Barcelona) and Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid): Master degree in Journalism and Digital Communication and Master in Economic Journalism, respectively. As for whether these degrees have specific courses related to journalism ethics, one of the cases responded negatively, while the other option contemplates a total of 100 hours (4ECTS). In this last case, the university is an online model and students decide when they apply for this subject. Regarding whom is in charge of finding the internship(s), there are usually three options: online internship, students finding the media and the department finding the media. These internships are preferably carried out in the first year, during the second semester. Although the usual option is for students to do only one internship in different media, there may be the possibility of doing more than one. The duration of internships also varies considerably, from approximately 4 to 8 weeks. In this line, there is no prior preparation for these practices. Furthermore, in some cases the press media interview the students and choose the ones they consider most appropriate.

The English word “**ethics**” is used in this report, often in the phrase “professional ethics”. It is meanwhile important to note that the focus groups have been animated in the language used in the country where they took place. In French (for French-speaking Belgium and France), the term *déontologie* is preferred, and we have kept it in the quotes and when it is relevant for the discussion of the results. Similarly, in Spanish students mostly used *deontología*, and we have eventually also kept it for clarity. It most often has the meaning of the set of codes and rules that guide a certain profession, in contrast with *éthique*, which is attached to individual values. In Dutch (for Dutch-speaking Belgium), the word *déontologie* is sometimes also used in this sense, but in The Netherlands the meaning of the word resembles more that of the English *deontology*: the set of codes and rules that guide human behavior in general. In Standard Dutch (the version of Dutch which is common for Flanders and The Netherlands) the term *journalistieke (beroeps)ethiek* (journalistic (professional) ethics) is more appropriate.

RESULTS

Five main themes emerged from the focus groups and are analyzed in this report: (1) Representations about professional ethics (2) Negotiations arising from the practical application of theoretical learning, (3) Tensions emerging when ethics conflicts with other issues, (4) Judgements expressing when talking about ethics (5) Contemporary issues related to the current media environment.

1. Representations

The analysis of these topics emerges from the daily ethical reflections of the Belgian, French, and Spanish students as well as the changing representations of ethics these reflections convey. The main factors that ground these changing representations are identified, such as the editorial identity of the media, its economic environment, its managerial organization, the collective dynamics within the editorial offices, and the way in which the individual sees his/her career. The analysis of this first theme aims to understand better how students in journalism training represent for themselves, conceive, and define professional ethics from a more theoretical point of view.

1.1 Dutch-speaking Belgian students

We looked for the definitions the students gave of journalistic ethics and for the representations they gave of the concept as the focus group developed. Words that were used to describe ethics in journalism are 'principle', 'rules', 'norms', '(moral) codes' and 'guidelines' (in Dutch: *principes, regels, normen, (morele) codes, richtlijnen*). Students referred to both 'written' and 'unwritten' rules underlying professional behaviour, which should be 'decent' (*fatsoenlijk*). A phrase that came up several times is 'the interest of society': journalistic behaviour should be steered by what is important for society. The students referred to journalistic ethics as the rules in themselves – predominantly embodied in the Code of the Council for Journalism; the implementation of these rules in journalism practice; and rules and practices that are linked to the profession and that may collide with personal ethics and convictions. Journalistic ethics, therefore, can be both abstract (as in the Code) and concrete (as in the daily practice).

Four essential elements for further definition and representation had been derived from the examples the students gave.

The first has to do with **journalistic routines** in processing the news like checking (the right quantity of) sources, respecting privacy (in publishing names or images), handling confidential information and securing confidential sources (professional confidentiality), making sure that all parties involved are heard and are given the opportunity to give feedback, and quoting with permission.

The second element often referred to is the **quality** of the journalistic work. The students find it important that journalists pass on correct information. The information should not be taken out of

context. It should be brought in a precise, accurate and impartial way and in correct language, taking care of nuance. The societal impact and importance of the news must be considered critically, or as one student puts it ‘it’s not because it’s on social media that we have to bring it’. Quotes and titles should not just make the story ‘juicy’; they must be consistent with the content of the news.

The third element concerns journalistic **behaviour towards others**: journalists ‘have the right or even the duty to report about what goes on in society’ but they must treat others in a respectful way. ‘Ordinary people’ should be treated with more care than sources who are used to working with the media, like politicians and experts. Examples of respectful behaviour are: making clear arrangements about the publication of interviews or data, giving interviewees the chance to read or view the interview before publishing it, taking into account that certain information can be detrimental to certain parties and that certain topics are delicate for some people.

The fourth element relates to **personal attitude** on the job. Here we saw some differences in opinion. For some students, showing their own feelings or at least empathy with the people involved in the news is part of a ‘decent’ approach in carrying out their jobs. Others report that they have grown harder during their internships, they have learned to ‘dig deeper’ and they think a certain indifference is characteristic of the journalistic identity. One student says she ‘wouldn’t like to be the politician or spokesperson having to answer those questions’, but she still asks them. In all of these four elements constituting journalistic ethics, students show an awareness of certain ‘borders that cannot be crossed’ and of a continuum for many of the norms and values referred to.

1.2 French-speaking Belgian students

“Framework”, “set of rules”, “beacon”, “guide”, “tool”, “path”, “moral code” ... the terms used by students to define professional ethics are numerous. Among them, the word “norm” is the one that comes up most often in the speeches analyzed. Its use could reflect the integration, by students, of the vocabulary used in their (future) professional field, since it is also the term “norm” that is found in the first sentences of the code of journalistic ethics adopted by the *Conseil de déontologie journalistique* (CDJ) in 2013. When it came to defining professional ethics, many respondents also mention the notion of respect, in various forms (respect for information, respect for the journalist in his/her work, respect for the witness, for the person questioned, for the public, etc.). Four statements emerge from the discussion.

Déontologie and ethics are often mixed up. A few participants used the term “ethics” to define *déontologie* which could lead to confusion on their part. It appears that not all respondents seemed aware that their personal ethics might be more restrictive, or different, than professional ethical standards. One respondent said that he could take liberties regarding professional ethics and build his own ethical framework. In so doing, he reintroduced a confusion between personal ethics, which is the responsibility of the individual, and *déontologie*, which is the responsibility of a given professional group. Along this line, some people saw professional ethics as a tool for reflection, and more precisely, they would describe it as a normative tool and a support for ethical reflection.

Professional ethics is seen as a framework that can (or cannot) be respected. Should we always respect ethical norms? The question was debated by some respondents. One of them believed that it is not compulsory to always respect professional ethics norms. Another said that

it is not always possible to respect it in the practice of the trade. These interventions can be interpreted as a reflection of a so-called objectivist or structuralist vision of professional practices (Accardo, Abou, Balastre, Marine, 1995), calling for negotiations on the respect of ethical standards, even more in a context where commercial logic dominates within media companies.

Professional ethics: a constraint as well as a protection. If professional ethics can be seen as a barrier or a limitation, it can also be seen as a protection, a tool for defending journalistic values (informing in a truthful and independent way...). Some people compared it in this sense to a “parental presence”. Professional ethics can thus embody a defense tool vis-à-vis a source or a person who is the subject of a journalistic production. It can also protect journalists from certain requests that they would consider illegitimate, and that may come from their superiors, for example.

Professional ethics is useful because it gives credibility. According to the respondents, professional ethics gave them credibility in the exercise of their work, to the eyes of their peers and those of the public. It also enabled them to distinguish themselves from other actors in the spread of information, to position themselves as professionals, with their own “specific ethics” (Ruellan, 2011). For some respondents, without journalistic ethics, everyone could be a journalist. However, access to the journalistic profession is not conditional on obtaining a diploma or signing a code of ethics. We can see that they engaged in a “boundary work” in order to define the contours of legitimate journalism, i.e. journalists who know and apply the code of ethics (Carlson, 2016), referring in a normative way to the existence of a profession. All these conceptions and definitions reveal plural visions of professional ethics based on various presuppositions (tool, standard, value, ...) and a certain confusion with personal ethics.

1.3 French journalism students

Four statements also emerge from the discussion with the French students, very similar to those retrieved from the focus groups with the French-speaking Belgian students.

Professional ethics as a normative framework that is both constraining and protecting. First, professional ethics is seen as a general framework within which to practice journalism, and in that sense, it is a set of rules, compared to the scientific or legal framework most of the time, that determine what to do, but especially what not to do.

“For me, déontologie represents almost scientific rules of journalism. You have to know how to go out and find sources, how to protect them, how to write a story within certain rules of ‘you can’t say that or not like that.’” (FG1)

Definitions of professional ethics are thus related to production routines (verification of facts, cross-checking of sources, place of the adversary) but also to values (honesty, objectivity, truth, independence, dignity, general interest) associated with journalism.

“And the limits we set for ourselves in the case of our activity, what we forbid ourselves to do or not to do, which in relation to this principle, I put questions of transparency, independence, questions of integrity, honesty in what we do, and honesty in relation to ourselves and our own a priori, to question one’s place, our place in the subject, in order to do so transparently, and this allows us to get rid of the idea of militant/not militant,

committed/not committed, and to start with the idea that in fact all content is committed, just there are some who assume it, and there are some who don't, and that's the difference. (FG4)

While it provides a framework and limits that can constrain professional practice, professional ethics also provides protection, in that by following the rules, journalists prove their integrity and remain within a well-defined framework. It also helps to prevent deviant behaviour and attacks on journalism (judgement by peers and distrust by the public).

"I was thinking in particular of the notion of a safeguard too, a little bit, it also frames our practice in the field, because we have a responsibility too as journalists, with regard to the perception of the profession, with regard to this professional side and here it is also a safeguard against certain behaviour, if we can say it in a very vague way, and then it is something that also protects us, there is really this double aspect I think and it is an important issue also in terms of credibility too [...]" (FG5)

Confusions about ethics. Since it is associated with a set of rules and standards, professional ethics is often compared, more or less extensively, to law. For many students, it is thus part of a legal framework.

"Déontologie for me is related to law. [Hesitation] It's what as a journalist you can do and what you can't do." (FG5)

One of the reference texts in France, the Munich Charter, is often mentioned (more or less precisely) by students, who also often admit they do not really know it. They associate professional ethics with a set of laws that must be respected, while recognizing their moral character. On many occasions, the term ethics was also used by the participants, who gave a personal dimension to *déontologie* and show that there can be differences of interpretation between individuals.

"[...] for me, déontologie is like the ethical principles that we adopt in the context of our activity. It goes back to the idea that it is notably variable geometry." (FG4)

From this point of view, professional ethics is compared to moral values and is specific to each person, following one's "convictions" (FG6). As one of the interviewees said, "there is not a *single* *déontologie*, each person has *his or her own one*" (FG6). There is thus an amalgam between *déontologie*, which is the responsibility of the professional group, and ethics, which is the responsibility of the individual. And in doing so, the students often express a very normative and more restrictive vision of professional ethics than it really is, which leads them to make judgements about the practices of their peers (cf. part 4). It is therefore an "accommodating" professional ethics that respondents often define, with a possible gradation according to individuals: one can place the cursor in different places according to one's ethics and moral values, but also according to one's own experience.

Theory vs. practice: confrontation with the field. The students generally recognize that journalistic ethics is made up of major principles that are taught to them as part of their training. But for them, it is difficult to apprehend and to understand professional ethics without field practice. Therefore, they largely value field practice and news format related to information gathering rather than analysis.

“There’s always a difference between theory and practice. We’re here with big rules and so on. In the field, the rules ... We are always told that the field is always right, so the rules you can have, you can have them in your head, etc. The field is the field, it’s the field that decides.” (FG3)

There is a recurring opposition between theory and practice: what they learn in class is insufficient when they find themselves in the field, where they have to deal with an entirely different reality. They often find it difficult, if not impossible, to follow punctiliously ethics on a daily basis in a professional setting. To a certain extent, they emphasize that the professional ethics they learned in school is not grounded.

*“When we study *déontologie* in class, it seems simple, clear, obvious, it’s a bit like Human Rights, it’s clear, it’s neat, that’s how it should be. And then finally on the ground it’s different, there are actors who must be respected, taken into account, you have to keep the newspaper on track, to fill the pages, there are many things that... And in the end I realized that *déontologie* is adaptable according to this.” (FG2)*

This experience gained over time, in the field, can be ambivalent: while some learn professional ethics “as you go along”, and it is by practicing journalism that one can master it, others point out that some of their older colleagues have a looser approach and respect less those ethical guidelines. This bears the implicit idea that professional ethics must adapt to the conditions under which journalism is produced.

*“In school they are very present, but they are a bit uprooted in the professional environment, when we refer to *déontologie* we seem a bit like bookworms, who have their heads in the charts, and there is a real contrast, therefore, between the two.” (FG5)*

Finally, the use of numerous anecdotes on specific cases (asking before recording people, image reproduction rights, respect for anonymity, etc.) makes it possible to explain by example, according to the interviewees, what professional ethics refers to.

“It makes me think directly of sources, respect for sources, particularly in terms of anonymity, etc. It is the first thing I think of [...]. I couldn’t define it, but I know that it is ‘essential’ in the profession of journalism, it’s a bit of a common thread we’ll say.” (FG7)

The issue of professionalism: building credibility. Respecting professional ethics means not taking the easy way out and trying to achieve a certain ideal of journalistic professionalism. In this sense, *déontologie* means doing a balanced and complex job: it requires time and reflection and cannot be done under pressure and in a hurry. These are also rules that the profession must impose to maintain a certain credibility.

*“For me *déontologie* refers to all the rules that are applied to journalists, so both the rules that are imposed on him, but also the rules that they must impose on themselves.” (FG1)*

References to the notion of professionalism make it possible to draw a line between the professionals and the others, the “good” journalists, and the others, and thus to delimit their professional competence and to enhance the skills acknowledged by their (future) diploma. In this

way, professional ethics is often associated with an idealized vision of journalism, particularly in terms of investigative reporting. In the end, it is not a positive definition of professional ethics that is given by the students (what it is) but rather a negative one (what it is not or what it should not be). The vagueness around these questions also seems useful, and to some extent maintained: it allows them to make a more “adapted” and “nuanced” use of the professional ethics, and not to be blocked in their work. It could even be argued that, as a cardinal tool of the professional journalist, ethics in a way represents the hazy professionalism (Ruellan, 2007) which is characteristic of journalism.

1.4 Spanish students

Spanish students appear not to have a clear idea about the concepts of “professional ethics” or “journalistic ethics”. Doubts arise when conceptualizing what in Spanish is called “deontología”, like the French use of the word. Spanish students find it difficult to understand the relationship between professional ethics and standards; regulations; and Style Books. Some participants mention the need for flexibility applied to professional ethics.

“[...] Basically, it is the good practice of the profession and respecting ethical standards. Well, the thing is ... It’s as [been] said, that they are not rules, but in a certain sense, they are. In the end, it is something to aspire to and we must consider from exercising the profession.” (FG1)

When talking about professional ethics, students used words such as “conduct”, “codes”, “morals” and “good practice”. Conversations also addressed the notions of honesty and respect and depicted professional ethics as oriented to each one performance, even as a personal decision.

“They always told me in college about dealing with sources of information. Well, if there is an off the record, the source is not failing you. You can continue with your work, pulling the thread and always maintaining respect for your source and yourself. It is also important to know where you are because I see that the concept or what most clashes with honesty and deontología is also the editorial line. It weighs a lot what to publish or not. For example, on ABC they praised Feijóo [Spanish politician from the right-wing Partido Popular].” (FG3)

Ethics’ is not at the core of the training Spanish journalism students. They express their feeling about this relative absence.

“I do not remember any Ethics subject, or at least that it was treated with enough consistency to name it as a subject. But it is true that I have the feeling that all these values, or modus operandi of how to behave in society, or how to act in some cases, are established in other subjects. It is as if it was already assumed through other lines, such as History or Philosophy.” (FG2)

Other participants share the same idea: it is through debates and practical cases, mainly current events, that they learn the most.

“I am remembering a subject: Opinion Journalism. The subject was based on each week writing an opinion column. I reflected a lot about this. Then I had another subject,

*Sociology, which was influenced more by the professor, because we had many ethical debates. I missed seeing more practical examples. For example, last year I saw *The Alcàsser Murders* documentary on Netflix and I saw atrocities. So, I would have liked them to teach me that in the degree and see that this was a bad example and it was seen on TV from the 90s.” (FG 3)*

Examples, concrete cases, seem to be the best way to approach professional ethics, according to the Spanish students.

Seeing how other people make mistakes helps you internalize it and you say: “okay, I’m seeing this from another person who is wrong, I’m not going to do it.” (FG1)

Another essential topic that flourishes in focus groups has been oriented to the knowledge and functions of media councils. Most of the participants are not clear about what a media council is. They confuse these bodies with other regulatory bodies such as the *Consell de l’Audiovisual de Catalunya* (CAC), in charge of applying the law, not professional ethics.

“They [the media councils] are not very present in my life. In the best case, they have been for the last year because I have a friend who came to do an internship in a place like that and then I understood a little more how they work. They look at specific cases and make reports. And I say to him, “but who reads this?” I had never read a report from these, from the CAC, or from anywhere. I mean, I know the CAC, not much else. I don’t really know what it’s for. I understand its role but I don’t know who it is addressed to or if it really reaches journalists. Not in my experience.” (FG1)

Students provide subjective views on the image that “press council” reflects, such as: “old men with ties.” This implies a relationship with a certain obsolescence or disconnection of media with respect to journalistic reality.

“I make it up. I had never heard of this concept [press council]. But taking into account the focus group line, I think it can be the council that analyzes press’ ethics in any territory. It is in charge of verifying if this ethics, those values, these ethical codes are really being complied with. I do not know.” (FG4)

Another student explains:

“I do not know. It is not very familiar to me. It does come to mind that there is a council of editors and publishers in Spain, who are like representatives of the media, something very modern and very diverse [irony] because they are all men 50 years or older. The photograph that I imagine is that of the typical journalist: a man with a tie. Every time I see them, I think: “Do these people represent us? My goodness!” The first thing that comes to me with media council is a body or an agent that regulates and establishes rules on different journalism areas.” (FG4)

2. Negotiations

The second theme retrieved from the focus groups shows how journalistic ethics is seen as a space for negotiation in the journalist's professional relations with their sources, peers and public. Negotiations precisely concern the application of ethics in a professional context. They refer to one of the main tensions underlying the different conceptions of professional ethics mentioned by the participants, opposing an application on a case-by-case basis, and justifying the taking into account of circumstances, to its application in the strict sense, most often independently of the context. During their internships, the respondents confronted for the first time their knowledge of professional ethics with a context of professional production, according to the specific characteristics of each media. It is therefore no longer an option for the interns to isolate the question of ethics from others, but on the contrary, they experience for the first time how it is negotiated jointly with all the other dimensions of journalism (economical, socio-professional, cultural, technological...) in a specific context (a newsroom).

2.1 Dutch-speaking Belgian students

Dutch-speaking Belgian students specify that journalists 'strive for' the ethical principles but that they are not always necessarily attained, for a variety of reasons. They consider the whole set of norms to be 'flexible', and adaptable to specific situations. The application of ethics in a professional context is not an automated process but is characterized by negotiations. For most of the students, the internship is their first professional experience. During their studies, they become familiar with ethics as a 'knowledge field', admittedly with lots of examples and concrete cases, and they get a simulation of practice at best. During internship, students begin or continue their socialization process into a journalistic career. They become familiar with work routines, media organizations and colleagues. The domain of ethics is no longer isolated from other dimensions of journalism (economical, technological,..) but is integrated into specific contexts. Ethical principles, consequently, are 'negotiated' in relation with journalists' sources, peers and public. All students are painfully aware of the difference between theory (courses, codes) and practice (actual implementation). While the theory is considered as rather 'black and white', the practice is often called 'grey' by the students. They have learned that 'in practice it is more difficult than it looks on paper'. The main evolution in their understanding, therefore, is away from the 'strict' nature of ethics towards its 'flexible' nature. Students in Flanders seem to accept the case-by-case basis of journalism ethics, considering the concrete circumstances. The Code is not a Law book, but the application of the particular principles is being weighed against other elements in specific situations or indeed 'negotiated'.

Three aspects were particularly mentioned by the students. According to them, **journalistic ethics sets boundaries**. In essence, the ethical Code outlines the 'big lines', also described as 'a base to fall back on'. Students even literally refer to this base as 'the booklet' by which they mean the Code of the Council for Journalism in Flanders, published in a brochure they all receive during their studies. Students seem to accept certain borders that cannot be crossed. 'It is just normal that as a journalist you have to take them ("the rules") into account'. In their eyes, **journalistic ethics is also flexible**. Indeed, within the borders detailed above, there is some 'leeway', 'room for consultation', and even a 'grey zone'. By 'negotiation', students try to find a balance between sometimes conflicting interests such as the right of the public to be informed, the editorial line, personal judgements, or status as well as external circumstances.

Students report that they ‘learn by doing.’ ‘Experience’ is deemed crucial. But sometimes ‘it’s also just using common sense.’ Students realize they have to ‘think about situations.’ They expect to find their personal position vis-à-vis ethics by gaining experience. Making mistakes is part of that and is even considered to be useful to master ethics. In this negotiation and learning process, students report the importance of consultation of the editor-in-chief or the internship supervisor in the newsroom. Rather than consulting the Code in itself, they tend to consult their colleagues and supervisors. Most of the students testify about deliberation and discussion among coworkers. Sometimes it’s the ‘boss’ who points out mistakes to the intern but interns also raise certain matters. A student, for example, went against her boss about using conditional wording in a news article and was able to convince him. It shows that students are aware of ethics, but also that media ultimately leave room for discussion and accept ethical arguments as well. Some ethical principles are more open to discussion than others and more often the subject of negotiation. While a principle such as depicting people with their permission is rather straight-forward, principles such as ‘fairness’ or ‘fair play’ allow more room for discussion. It is striking that several students reported the use of undercover techniques, already so early in their careers, which took place only after serious deliberation.

Finally, students also consider the **deliberative nature of journalistic ethics**. For everyone, journalistic ethics takes on a deliberative dimension. Ethics, and thinking about ethics, becomes a tool to justify choices (for oneself or for others, mainly the news managers) or to distance oneself from others (most often from non-professional journalism). Students frequently reflect on their own journalistic work. They question their own journalistic behavior (‘did I not push that man too much?’, ‘do I take the strongest quotes or do I render the tone of the whole conversation?’, ‘afterwards I thought: should I have done that so fiercely?’, ‘is that really necessary?’, ‘really looking for a balance between not being too pushy and still wanting to tell your story, with respect and all’) and they question the end product (‘does it have added value?’, ‘I really try to make sure it’s as neutral as possible’). Even though there is one student who admits: ‘I follow the instructions of my editor-in-chief. I wouldn’t have thought about that [making people unrecognizable in images] myself, but the editors are working on those ethical standards.’ Some students attest to an interaction between the university training and the internship. The internship surely is an eye opener (‘Once you’re working as an intern, you think about that’). Students get more insight in ‘what is allowed and what is not’ by doing it, they learn from making mistakes and receiving feedback. But others also point to the education they received in the first place (‘because of the training you are more involved’, ‘glad that I learned the rules before in order to be stronger in practice’). One student contributed that the experiences during the internship made her better prepared for the exam and enabled her to reflect critically on the course materials.

2.2 French-speaking Belgian students

Similar themes arose when discussing with the French-speaking Belgian students. They also see **professional ethics as flexible**. Ethics is considered by the participants as a field of knowledge (consisting essentially, or even exclusively, of graduate or postgraduate courses in almost all cases) in which understanding and application are arranged and negotiated according to different parameters and circumstances: the editorial line, technical and production constraints, the personal judgment of a journalist, circumstances linked to the subject matter or sources used, the imperatives of profitability and productivity, or even the position of the trainee itself.. Students tend to find it difficult to accommodate or justify their practical experience in connection to the theoretical knowledge they acquired. These negotiations on ethical issues are either presented in negative (“we

shouldn't have done it this way", "we have to fit a circle into a square") or in reassuring ways, in the sense that they reinforce certain visions of ethics, forged a priori or constructed during the training. Thus, the theme of negotiation seems important in the eyes of the interviewees because it introduces the need to position oneself (within the framework of the FG and amongst others) regarding those principles. But these principles are also very rarely named explicitly by the respondents. In fact, the different aspects of self-regulation mechanisms (codes, standards, ethics council, internal authorities) are almost never used in the interviews. As a result, the flexible nature of the application of the code of ethics refers as much to its intrinsic complexity as to the respondents' random knowledge of this code and their limited professional experience.

Students also talk about **the deliberative nature of their professional ethics**. The focus groups highlight the importance of invoking professional standards as an individual within professional spaces, in which ethics can be mobilized in a wide variety of ways. As such, it can be seen as a deliberative tool that can be used to protect oneself, to justify one's actions and to engage in a form of reflexivity and exchange with colleagues. For each individual, journalistic ethics takes on a deliberative dimension: it can be summoned to justify choices (sometimes undertaken quickly and without prior consultation), to distance oneself from those of others, and thus serve as a strategic tool from the point of view of professional interactions. Professional ethics seems to oscillate between these two poles, individual and collective, like in many cases in journalism, and it is in this respect that it is often 'negotiated' rather than applied as a process that arbitrates schematically all possible scenarios.

2.3 French students

The blurring of the boundaries of the journalistic profession is also expressed by the French students when it comes to mobilizing ethical standards in the field. Indeed, while professional ethics is described by students as a guide to good practice, as the element that differentiates 'good' journalists from others, its perceived shifting nature gives rise to negotiation, and even accommodation, when practicing journalism in a professional context. This leads to reflections on the ethical training they receive as part of their course, on the constraints of the field and their professional experiences, and on how they can articulate the two. Students readily acknowledge the need for training in journalistic ethics, which they perceive as a guideline for good practice, and which they are, on the whole, not very familiar with. But they seem to feel a real gap with the field work they have had to deal with: indeed, ethics seems to them to be constrained by journalistic working conditions. Respecting the material and temporal conditions of production of journalistic content seems to the students to be incompatible with the application "as is" of the ethical standards they know. This is why they point to certain external elements that can lead to an adaptability of professional ethics according to various factors stemming from the professional context. The negotiation between the gap felt and expressed by the students between their training in journalistic ethics and their professional practice and the conditions of the latter is based on the subjective, **interpretative and malleable dimension of ethical standards**. Some students describe ethical standards as precise, clear, but open to different interpretations in different situations. For others, the very reading of the ethical charters can lead to variable individual questions and interpretations.

"There are also terms where we have not paid too much attention, we are told to be honest, but with regard to what? The editorial line? The truth? The facts? [...]. Perhaps it comes from the profession itself, which is built on a case-by-case basis. There is no recipe for writing an article, it depends on each situation [...]" (FG2)

The subjective and individual dimension of ethics is thus particularly highlighted to justify its malleable and changing nature. This interpretation of standards can also be guided by external factors, which stem from the students' perception of their professional practice but also from their mastery of ethical standards. The medium in which the students carried out their various placements seems to be a crucial variable for them when it comes to mobilizing ethics.

“I think they [ethical standards] can be translated differently depending on the media, because already we can talk about the type of media, in radio, TV, or written press, the techniques for collecting a testimony or writing an article are not the same, the needs are not the same, so in radio we can use ways of approaching people or dealing with a subject that we would not use with another subject. [...] I think that everyone adapts the rules to their media and editorial line, to the way they investigate, to their contacts, etc.” (FG2)

Television seems to be the medium which, in the eyes of the interviewees, requires the most work to adapt professional ethics to its specific constraints (especially technical), and which requires the most effort from students in terms of negotiating between their vision of ethics and their professional practice. Apart from the medium of practice, journalists' perceptions of their sources may also prompt them to negotiate their ethical conduct. On the subject of an article about a book that the student found to be of poor quality, but whose author had seemed sympathetic, the interviewee said:

“[...] I did something a bit neutral, without trashing her but without going her way.” (FG1)

Norms can also be negotiated according to the attitude of sources towards students, which leads them to rethink their ethical posture. Journalistic ethics is thus perceived as being applicable on a case-by-case basis, whether it is a function of the student's individual representations, the conditions imposed by the medium of practice or the relationship with the sources.

This subjective and interpretative dimension of ethics has sometimes led them, during their professional experiences, to more or less deliberately fail to respect these rules, to a kind of **negligence and other breaches to professional ethics**. Students indeed set their own limits and judge for themselves what is and is not acceptable in terms of transgression of ethical standards. While some students refer to ethics as a guide and use it to be more demanding of themselves (FG5), others have determined how far they are able to go without, in their opinion, compromising their integrity or the quality of their work.

“(...) in my internship at [media] I have sometimes, not changed things, but for example not asked someone's age or first name, and said that she would make a very good 'Beatrice'. And so she'll be called Beatrice and she'll be 42. Or I don't say the age, or I say 'that woman who was with ...' so we work it out.” (FG1)

The gradation in the evaluation of the seriousness of the breaches of journalistic ethics that the students were led to make is supported by the subjective and interpretative dimension of the standards. If the practice of immersion and hidden camera are among the accepted and even valued breaches (FG3), certain limits vary from one respondent to another, particularly with regard to relations with sources and in the case of gifts offered by the latter to journalists: if the limit is not to be crossed for some...

“For example, I was in the Aude region, so there are only winegrowers and we’re going to do stories, and they offer a bottle, or serve a glass... I refuse, systematically, because it’s a gift and everything. There are other colleagues who accept [...]” (FG4)

It is more easily negotiable for others.

“It depends on the gift. A book offered, which will be the basis of the article, is a bit more legitimate than the bikes at the end just to please, which is a form of influence, we may not talk about corruption, but it is still an important influence. For books, it seems more normal to be offered a book to write about than to be offered a piece of clothing or a console, because the book has a bit of a legitimate, intellectual, interesting culture, you learn things.” (FG1)

All these failures and infringements are ultimately part of a wider reflection and confrontation of their ethics with their professional practice, whether it is a question of reconciling their personal and political opinions with their work, or of taking it upon themselves to produce a promotional item. But it can also come from external constraints, for example, requests from peers or hierarchy, which lead them to transgress ethical standards against their will:

“I was told ‘Here you are, you say you are a journalist for France 3, you prepare the programme, it hasn’t been accepted by the channel yet but we are going to pretend that it has been accepted’. [...] I was told: ‘You’re lying, you say you’re a journalist for France Télé. That way, you’ll get testimonials.’” (FG3)

Time constraints may also force students to bend the rules of journalistic ethics.

“[Media] (...) had done a paper on an anti-vax radio station, and in fact, when this information came out, it was in the evening at 7pm, we were getting ready to leave, and we said to ourselves: ‘we must write a paper anyway’. And in fact, I didn’t realize it at the time, but I had heard this anti-vax radio on my way back from a report: ‘yes, I heard that radio’. So we were looking for testimonies, so we went looking for testimonies of people who had heard it or listened to it on the networks, but we also inserted my testimony in the paper, because I had witnessed it and I thought about things while listening to it. Instead of putting ‘the colleague’ or something else, we put ‘holidaymaker returning from a report’ and so we were: ‘how far can we accommodate [hesitation], how far can we distort reality?’” (FG4)

Respondents also consider that the relationship between the media (especially regional or specialized media, such as the sports press) and sources can lead to a redefinition and adaptation of their ethical stance. These considerations lead to a negotiation between the benefits and risks of transgressing ethical standards.

“I find that in these questions of deontology there is a cost-benefit calculation to be made, the media will say to themselves, ‘it’s worth it, it’s not worth it’. (...) So there is this little calculation in fact.” (FG1)

The malleability of professional ethics therefore sometimes gives rise to exchanges of various kinds of ethics with different actors, such as the hierarchy or peers.

Journalistic ethics is thus generally considered by the students as a flexible material that leads to exchanges and discussions in various contexts, what we call the **deliberative nature of ethics**. For example, with their hierarchy or peers to clarify a confusion about a norm:

“I know that the first article I wrote was on the conspiracy lists for the regional and departmental elections (...) and there was the question of names, in fact. (...) it was people who didn’t have a political career for the most part, but who displayed themselves publicly, who put their names on the leaflets, so there was really a real debate about whether their names were put on the leaflets, in fact. And that was the first debate I remember, that was the first article I wrote and I didn’t know what to do. In the end we put the names of the heads of lists in each region and we didn’t go into detail about the other people who were on the list.” (FG7)

These deliberations can also sometimes lead to disagreement and negotiation between the student and his/her interlocutor over the mobilization of a norm, and sometimes even lead to a conflictual relationship within the editorial staff. Despite the numerous situations of tension they report, some participants acknowledge that on certain occasions the outcome of these situations has been “constructive”. For example, some of them mentioned exchanges with editors-in-chief that went as far as questioning.

“But it was interesting, it was constructive because I think he also asked himself questions, and then he came back to me and told me that it had made him think, you know, it was really constructive, which you don’t necessarily have with everyone” (FG6)

Exchanges are also brought about when students need guidance or support, when they have questions of an ethical nature, and in particular when the negotiation concerns the relationship with sources or the positioning vis-à-vis the field of communication.

“I was invited to a town hall event, they said: ‘it’s a consultation meeting,’ in fact it was communication, I made a short statement to say: ‘a consultation that is not a consultation.’ I asked my colleagues what they thought, whether they supported me. They supported me, we thought about the consequences it could have, and we published it. [...] I wanted to be sure that my colleague would support me if there were consequences. It’s a way of being supported and protected and knowing you’re doing your job well.” (FG4)

The support of their peers is particularly important in making decisions related to ethics, an importance linked to their precarious position and hierarchical status in the newsroom. Journalistic ethics is generally perceived by students as a set of rules that have no real normative power in France and is therefore seen as malleable and adaptable. This allows students to take it on board and create their own codes to govern their individual practices. This returns professional ethics to its condition of journalistic ‘myth’, which does not allow it to govern the profession, but does initiate reflections and exchanges within the journalistic field on good or bad professional practices, and thus, in fact, to position journalism vis-à-vis other fields (Le Bohec, 2000).

2.4 Spanish students

“Must the journalists or media that violate professional ethics be sanctioned?” was the question that generated the most discussions and disagreements among the participants. Some consider this as an option.

“[...] In the end you are doing malpractice in your job, and as in all other jobs, if you do it wrong you will have a sanction, or a fine, or whatever. In journalism it has to be the same. Also accentuated because consequences go beyond you. They have an impact on public opinion and on the rest of the citizenry.” (FG2)

For others, these sanctions would change the current dynamics of journalism, although there is no consensus on whether to apply these measures to journalists or media. Some students offer their doubts.

“Of course, it is complicated because as it is an unwritten code, so... Who establishes jurisprudence? If you could put fines, for example, I'd go for the media. And if the media considers that it is an independent practice of a journalist, then the media take action. I have seen trials by individuals against media that had violated their honor, etc. for very dubious ethical practices. And of course, in the end you go against the media. Journalist is an employee who has been sent to do that.” (FG3)

3. Tensions

Far from being merely a set of norms for socializing practices, or the expression of negotiations of real-life situations, professional ethics is also, for journalism students, an object of tension because it is embodied in logics that are not all consensual (right to privacy vs. logics of profitability and productivity, for example). It is even an area of tension when the interns are confronted with their peers and sources, for example, and must justify certain choices. Thus, while a rather normative discourse has developed on the general expression of the definition of ethics as a norm, once it is used in the interns' day to day practice, and therefore "negotiated", it sometimes can be perceived differently: as interactions that can be tense. In what follows, the main 'fields of tension' are identified and discussed.

3.1 Dutch-speaking Belgian students

The dependence on the media company appears as the most important 'source' of relativism for professional ethics in Flanders. Both the **structural and identity specificities of the media** – linked to the business model of the media – as well as the organizational modalities are frequently touched upon. Regarding the first aspect, the students seem to recognize a certain hierarchy in media about their adherence to ethics. VRT, the public service broadcaster in Dutch-speaking Belgium, appears as the media outlet that should set the standard and that works closest to professional ethical norms. VRT has an ombudsperson that supervises the journalistic work and intervenes when there are violations. Television ('always black and white, not grey', 'short items') as a medium is perceived as 'worse' by the students when compared to newspapers (characterized by more nuances and 'longer items'), but far worse is the internet where 'it's all about speed' and 'quantity is put above quality'. At the very bottom of the hierarchy are the social media, where there seem to be no rules at all. The organizational modalities are largely linked to the type of medium. Students who work for an online medium, or for television, report more **time pressure** than students who work for documentaries, podcasts or weeklies. And time pressure is by far the most frequently cited factor that threatens compliance with ethics: "Then it goes through your head: "it has to be finished", not: "we have to follow the rules and it has to be right", "so yes, then I did something that wasn't really allowed, but that was because it had to go so fast." A tension between speed and quality is irrefutable. An **editor-in-chief** who pays attention to ethics and leaves room for **consultation** is an important organizational modality to stimulate ethical journalism. Students working at public service broadcaster VRT feel themselves better surrounded than students working as video journalists for local broadcasters or as online editors. Strikingly, some students tend to speak about "we" ("we think about it, we speak about it..") while others speak about "I did, I asked..". Students can clash with their supervisors on ethical topics, but when there is room for discussion, the tension is noticeably lower.

With the exception – to a certain extent – of public service broadcaster VRT, all media are recognized to be '**commercial**': 'it has to pay off'. Students refer to competition as 'the battle to be the first', and report a tendency towards sensational news. Especially titles are pointed out as weak spots in ethical journalism. Online news articles have to be 'simple and short', up until a point that 'it is not right anymore'. Students experience the commercial pressure of their media institution as a 'difficult balance'.

Not only the characteristics of the news organization, but also the **characteristics of the news and the sources** involved play their role. Certain **topics** such as politics and societal issues (“the topics that ‘buzz’ in society”, e.g. the rape of a 14-year old girl was a frequently mentioned topic at the time of the research) ask for more attention to ethics. When the perceived news value is higher, the attention paid to ethics is higher as well. The relativity of the ethic code is also recognized in the different treatment of “known” and “unknown” **people**. Students seem to be unanimous in their judgement that principles such as the protection of privacy are weighted as more important in the latter case (unknown people) than in the former (known people, e.g., experts and politicians).

Another frequent source of news is the **world of PR** at large. In Flanders students do not have that many concerns about promotional content. They respond understandingly to companies that send out a press release as “everyone does” and see it as their task as journalists to react critically and to bring a “good story” without turning it into a “promotional talk”. The students show great self-confidence (“it’s up to us then”) that they can resist promotional content and that “there is no danger there” because “too obvious”. Maybe we should also consider the fact that no parties or trips went on because of corona. Many students saw themselves limited to desk journalism only. The deeper connection between information subsidies and how to handle them critically did not surface.

The students’ status of interns – “you are only the intern” – popped up in the discussions now and then. Being an intern equals being “young and inexperienced”, with some margin for error. Students admit that they often get the easier assignments without ethical complications. If the topic is more comprehensive, they often have no control over the whole process, for example they are involved in research, pre-interviews, scenarios, but not in final editing and finishing the piece. More than one student referred to that lack of control: “But I wasn’t or I am not the one who has to make a final decision about that. Others do.” And they ask: “what is my responsibility now?”, “How do you handle your position as an intern?”. There are some indications that students sometimes are more “ethically aware” than the others on the news floor. One student points out that as an intern, you are still strongly connected to the educational institution and the lessons you have learned, while as a working journalist you become more dependent on the media institution as you have to receive your income from that organization. On the other hand, students sometimes miss the courage to speak up against experienced journalists (“I don’t know how to react yet”) although there are examples of students who did raise their point and where the chefs followed them.

Not only the status of interns is mentioned, but also the **status of journalists** in general. Some students report negative reactions to their work as a journalist when they changed their status on LinkedIn to ‘journalist’ or when they mentioned it in face-to-face conversations. These negative reactions seem to express that all journalists without exception seek sensation, spread fake news, and thus behave unethically. “You often run into distrust”, according to a student. Students feel hurt by these reproaches as these touch the heart of professional journalism according to them, which essentially is the ethical dimension of journalism. At the same time, students admit that mistakes are made also by professional journalists and that professional media should not be exempt from scrutiny (check and double check) either when they are referred to in the reporting.

The role of the intern, or of the journalist, could finally be complemented with **the role of the individual person** with individual convictions and beliefs. A field of tension, therefore, can also be the own conviction. For example, two students mentioned that they have a clear opinion about the situation in Israël-Palestina but they were not allowed to let it influence their news reporting because of the requirement of impartiality. That was not an easy task. Next to convictions, also the individual

character plays its part. This was expressed, for example in a tension between one's own feelings and the feelings of those involved, or between the demands of (good) journalism ("to dig deeper") and the feelings of those involved ("to spare them"). A few students said they had the impression that they became "harder" as a journalist. Others made the distinction between "your capacity as a journalist and your capacity as a person: as a journalist you think differently". Students try "to find a balance" between the journalistic job and themselves as a person.

3.2 French-speaking Belgian students

Students deploy a form of relativism about the design and application of ethical principles, considering it as a framework that they may or may not respect. This relativism is above all linked to the identity of the media company and their personal way of conceiving journalistic ethics. To illustrate this fact, students point out structural and identity specificities, but also organizational modalities of the media and their format which contribute to very diversified representations and applications of ethics. The **structural and identity** specificities concern in particular the differences linked to the business model of the media, and notably to its financing. The question of the medium also becomes a discriminating factor. Thus, some media are considered less conducive to a rigorous application of professional ethics. This is the case of the Internet, which has been presented, on several occasions, as a less standardized space, where practices would be less subject to careful verification and systematic proofreading. The web is also presented as a workspace where the youngest, and therefore the least experienced, professionals generally work.

Organizational modalities are also an argument used by students to better understand this relativity. The organization of the editorial staff, its size, but above all its operating methods and the role of the editor-in-chief are of paramount importance. The working conditions of journalists, the time they have at their disposal and the relationships they have with their colleagues are also important. Moreover, certain topics, such as local news, sport or culture, would imply specific interpretation ethics. Therefore, professional ethics seems to be perceived as a flexible framework, a tool, a reflection that is dependent on the media company, but also on the topics and working conditions. The credibility of the media is often invoked as a safeguard which implies that some media pay more attention to ethics than others; but some students testify to difficulties in making these questions collective. Rather, they are faced with very individual issues that can lead to an avoidance of concern and forms of self-censorship.

Our focus groups participants with French-speaking Belgian students often mention the link between **Journalism and public relations** and the difficulty of producing information without leaning towards a form of promotional content. This appears specific to the exercise of certain types of specialized journalism (sport, music, women's press) or to certain types of media (size and type of structure, relationship to sources). Practices that contribute to confusion between public relations and journalism are analyzed through the prism of ethics by some participants. And many respondents become aware of the equivocal nature of the content they are supposed to produce during their internships, especially when they are confronted with sources who want the media to publish the content they offer. The insistence of some PR services also confronts interns with the difference between information and promotion: they would like to clearly define it but sometimes they find it difficult to do so. The confusion is said to be reinforced by the nature of the subjects entrusted to them, which in turn depends on their status as interns and the period during which some of them carry out their internships, i.e. the summer holidays.

Because of their **intern status** and inexperience, some participants stated that they did not engage themselves with questioning, from an ethical point of view, the practices of colleagues who have been working in the media for a long time. Others claim to have detected ethical ambiguities but kept their questions unvoiced because of their status of interns, the short (unpaid) time they spend in the newsroom or a lack of self-confidence. There are thus many silences surrounding ethical issues understood by young journalists. These silences could also be explained by their willingness, as “newcomers”, to make a good impression on the editorial staff. Hence, they would not jeopardize their chances of eventually being hired at the end of their internship, or simply secure to be positively evaluated by the media and their training institution. Most of the participants agreed that their status of interns puts them in front of many ethical challenges and even tricky situations. Some of them mention the difficulty of presenting themselves as journalists, interns or members of the editorial staff of a media organization to the sources they are asked to work with. Indeed, in order to obtain certain information, they have to present themselves as journalists and not as interns, which constitutes an ethical problem for them. Others simply refer to their inexperience, which pushes them to follow guidelines without questioning them. Finally, the stories to cover, suggested or even imposed by the managers, could be very difficult to deal with in an informational and non-communicative way. However, one of the participants tempered this observation by stating that the nature of the subjects proposed to interns does not expose them to important “ethical risks”.

3.3 French students

In the eyes of the French respondents, the malleability of journalistic ethics goes beyond the individual level. The adaptation of codes also takes place at a more general level and affects the **media structure** itself. The identity of the media and its editorial line, its journalistic culture and the professional values that stem from it, or its economic model are all factors that influence the application of ethics.

“But the real constraint is the media, in fact, the media for which we work, i.e. the ethics practices of [media] will not be the same as those of [media], for example, I think that our real constraint will be with our employer. It is he who will lay down the basics of how they work and it is up to us to adapt to that in fact”. (FG3)

Tensions arise when the identity of the media as perceived by the students and the practices of the editorial staff are in dissonance. For example, a news agency, positioned at the beginning of the news production and dissemination chain, must, in the eyes of some respondents, be particularly meticulous in checking facts. One participant who completed an internship in this type of structure testifies to his discomfort when he was unable to verify information that the editorial staff wanted to publish anyway.

“We were sure that this person was dead, but not 100%, we had no concrete proof. And the bureau editor [...] had told me to confirm it anyway, and I was a bit embarrassed to confirm a death without being sure.” (FG1)

The political orientation of the editorial line can also influence the adaptation of codes of ethics in some media. Some students testify to the discomfort this generates for them, like this participant who admits that she doesn’t know how to position herself.

“When I spoke to the person in charge on the phone, he gave me his shopping list of what he wanted to appear in the article, and then I realized the affiliations between certain newspapers and parties, particularly left-wing ones, given that [media] is communist, and that at the deontology level I didn’t really check if it was OK.” (FG2)

Some formats also lend themselves to ethical circumventions. This is the case, for example, with continuous news, particularly that broadcast on the audiovisual media and the Internet. One respondent mentions, for example, the “bastardisation of news”, which would prevent the respect of principles such as the verification of information or the respect of the anonymity of sources.

Faced with the structural malleability of professional ethics, trainees, who lack experience, feel they have little room for maneuver. This status is one of the main sources of tension revealed during the discussions. Tensions arise when students are confronted with what they consider to be “bad journalistic practices” from an ethical point of view. However, lack of experience or self-confidence, coupled with a preoccupation with employment, often prevents students from expressing their disagreements. Students report that constructive exchanges can still occur when they dare to express their views. The discussions highlight the illegitimacy felt by the vast majority of respondents in relation to their superiors or more experienced journalists. This feeling prevents them from questioning certain requests made by the hierarchy or the practices of colleagues that they feel go against their own representations of codes of ethics.

“When we are trainees, we do what we are asked without asking too many questions, because we are not yet journalists, we are not legitimate to say what we want to do or not.” (FG2)

In addition to this feeling of illegitimacy, there is the issue of professional integration. For many students, the internships they complete represent a first step in building a career in the professional world to which they aspire. Accommodating the “ways of doing things” of the editorial offices where they do their internships seems to be a prerequisite for finding a place in the industry. Even if this means sometimes having to deviate from the codes of ethics as they see them.

“I think that experience and our age play a role, because it is also, at a complicated time, professionally, to insert oneself professionally. I think there are also people who might go against their own déontologie and ethics to keep their job for example.” (FG6)

The feeling of illegitimacy also seems to be a problem with sources. Many participants say that they disguise their trainee status or present themselves outright as journalists when they have to meet sources in order to avoid jeopardizing their chances of getting answers. But the use of such practices raises questions for those who consider them contrary to codes of ethics

“I had to say that I was a journalist to advance my investigation. If I said I was on an internship, I wasn’t going to get testimonies that I was a journalist for [media]. [...] Yeah, you have to deal with it but I was a bit confused, I didn’t dare.” (FG3)

Only one participant admitted to presenting himself as a journalist. He considers that this practice is totally legitimate and does not represent any departure from journalistic ethics. However, he acknowledges that the acquisition of this legitimacy is strictly linked to the work environment, to the trust and autonomy granted by his superiors.

“No, in any case I did not present myself as an intern, I am a journalist, and then it is the case, ok my contract is an internship, but the fact is that we replace journalists in post, and we have the same missions as journalists, so I was a journalist.” (FG6)

A source of tension that emerges from the focus groups is the often-shifting boundary between **journalism and communication**. While most participants consider that communication “is not journalistic work”, the discussions reveal that the design of content assimilated to communication or advertising is very often part of the editorial missions entrusted to the interns. They are thus faced with a contradiction between what is expected, both by the hierarchy and by the sources, and the representation they have of the codes of ethics. Having to distinguish between the two is even more difficult given the blurring of the line between communication and journalism for some respondents. For example, one student wonders where the line between “propaganda” and “opinion journalism” lies. Another questioned the supposed emptiness of communicative content, wondering whether it was not, in some cases, a “service to the person”.

“It’s really this proximity sometimes between journalism and communication, [hesitation] the border is very porous [...] the problem is not that the communicator is doing her job and wants to make me say things, the problem is that if I copy and paste, I’m doing communication and not journalism.” (FG5)

The use of communication and/or advertising content is very closely linked to the economic balance of the media in which the students work. This content appears to them almost as an inevitability, something that is indispensable to guarantee the economic stability of the media. This is particularly true for emerging media, specialized media or media in great economic difficulty, for which “there is not always a choice” even if it is “sad” or even “frightening”. The use of these practices nevertheless raises many questions of ethics.

“There were journalists who did nothing but that, only relaying publicity stuff, and that’s also where the money came from to keep the paper going, so I’m not saying that it was bad in itself, but it bothered me in any case to have such a large share for communication when we claimed to be a newspaper.” (FG1)

Tense situations also arise when students must meet with communication professionals or sources who see media coverage as an advertising opportunity. One participant explains this conflation of information and communication by the fact that the interests of sources and journalists are “divergent by nature”.

“There are already two activities in the same newspaper, a commercial aspect and a journalistic aspect, and people don’t distinguish between them, and in fact we are taken for advertisers most of the time by people, and then people say: ‘I’m not going to put any advertisement in [media] because people take me apart.’” (FG4)

Even if they can be problematic, relations with communication officers or advertisers are nevertheless necessary in the eyes of some respondents. The difficulty they face is even more important: they have to carry out their journalistic work while taking care not to offend these people, particularly insofar as they can block access to certain information later on, as one participant testified. The evocation of situations of tension experienced in the field reveals a set of value judgments made by the participants, based on their conception of deontology. However, these judgments are not limited to isolated experiences. They are often aimed at journalism and the media world in general.

3.4 Spanish students

Spanish students show a kind of **unawareness of the tensions** they experience. At the beginning of the discussion, they affirm with some certainty that they did not experience moments of tension or ethical conflicts. However, later, they begin to talk about experiences that fit within an ethical conflict conception. Some students tend to naturalize this type of situation. Despite detecting certain irregularities or injustices, they adopt an attitude where they accept and assimilate consequences. This type of ethical conflict usually occurs in current news topics, such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement in USA or political conflicts such as the independence of Catalonia. One student explains.

“La Vanguardia headlines publish on press are generally debated. There are cases in which there is an ethical debate. I remember a recent case in which every two days there was a murder by a police officer of a black person in USA: ‘How do we entitle this? Because it is the third news that we have in a week. We cannot entitle another black man killed by a policeman. What do we use? We call it by name, we do not call it by name...’ It was a great debate and we couldn’t find a solution. The good thing is that there was that debate and at least we were concerned about not discriminating against victims. In that sense, it is cool. Cases of journalistic malpractice... is that they forced me to do a topic. I was totally free to do it but it was like... I didn’t feel very comfortable doing it.” (FG1)

As one interviewee explains, **students’ status** during their internship also influences a certain weaker ability to raise any ethical conflict with their superiors.

“Seen in perspective, perhaps there have been things that you have seen that have squeaked at you at that moment. But you have seen that it is something minimal. Or maybe you did not comment because of your position in practice. You go over it.” (FG2)

One of the topics discussed has been the concern over alleged **self-censorship**, both in professional practices and in personal use of social networks. Students do not seem to have the feeling to practice self-censorship in the exercise of their profession during internship. However, there is some unanimity on a differentiated use of their profiles on social networks. Participants assume a normalization when accepting certain changes over years, where their personal accounts tend to become corporatized. This relates to a feeling of being watched by a potential future employer. Students draw a certain relationship between professional independence with respect to self-censorship and ethics.

“In professional practice I have never censored myself. In social networks I try not to see it or it is not so easy to see what my political opinion is. Although from time to time I have to say that I tweet. I have never messed with anyone directly, not a journalist or a politician. I try to be much more observant than participant in social networks. I mean, yes. I do exercise self-censorship on social media.” (FG1)

4. Judgements

Although the students surveyed generally have rather fluctuating representations of ethics, they do not hesitate to make references to it to assess the quality of their productions and guide their practices. Thus, they have a fairly normative vision of what they consider to be “good journalism”, i.e. journalism that follows ethical norms, even if these norms are sometimes perceived as outdated and not fit to meet the contemporary challenges of information production. They see ethics as an important part of their professional identity and deplore the fact that there are journalists who admit not having read (all of) the code of ethics, which knowledge and understanding appear rather essential to them. However, the imprecise definitions of ethics do not prevent it from playing a dynamic role as a set of reference for students, who mobilize certain elements of it (sometimes in a confusing way) on many occasions. In their eyes, therefore, ethics constitutes a rather heterogeneous corpus but is nonetheless significant as a way of assessing their journalistic productions and those of others.

4.1 Dutch-speaking Belgian students

Dutch-speaking Belgian students express judgements on the values of journalism and find it important to reflect critically on their own work. They mention several rules for good journalism, but they also indicate that exceptions to these rules should be possible in specific situations. As far as the content of the news is concerned, according to the students, journalists should have access to all information available. If going undercover and lying about their own identity is the only way to attain the information, this is allowed. Journalists should also sketch the full story, but the students acknowledge that there are time and space limitations. For every story holds: if societal interest is larger than personal interest, the story should be published, but the students reflect carefully and consciously on the added value of revealing names or pictures. The journalistic productions should be accurate and correct, but still understandable for a wide audience. Some students acknowledge that there is a need for accessible and easy-to-read news stories but add that they do not want to make that kind of news themselves. Language use is also mentioned: the language use should be sufficiently nuanced, especially when reporting on delicate matters (e.g. a crime in which the suspect has not been found guilty yet). As for the **approach of sources and interviewees**, journalists should behave in a respectful and decent way but at the same time hold people accountable for their words and deeds. Some students feel less compassionate than before, they have learned to insist when questioning interviewees and to make people say on camera what they first said off camera. At the same time, they have learned that they should be careful, for example in crime cases, not to pass on information on victims which is not yet known by the family. Another example given is where interviewees could not be held accountable for what they said due to their mental state, and where the quotes had to be handled carefully. For some students, **emotions** (their own emotions as well as those of the people involved) are important in journalism, because without them the tone of the stories would be too detached and there would be no appeal to the audience. Again, others indicate that this kind of journalism is valid, but that they do not want to practice it themselves. The students all agree on what journalism should NOT be, i.e. activism like a call for action or for protest, or a mere mirror of what goes on on social media, with all the drama and unchecked information involved. Journalists should not take sides, they should not defend people under attack on social media. Neither should journalists advertise certain brands or products, but the students still think it possible to write critically about new information on commercial products. If the news cannot be brought in a way which sufficiently meets their criteria, the students would prefer not to bring it.

Student also express judgements on the work environment/the media companies. In their internships, some students found themselves in situations they were not comfortable with. News managers or supervisors would ask for more sensational stories, focusing on the misery of people or highlighting quotes which were not representative for the story. Another example was a case where the face of an interviewee was blurred, but the student thought the interviewee was still recognizable. They had to carry out the assignment, but they evaluate the way journalism was practiced in these newsrooms negatively. Other negative evaluations had to do with an instance where students did not receive sufficient coaching in reporting on delicate matters, like suicide, or received it too late and with an instance where students made the preparations for news projects, but saw the project taken out of their hands and developed in another way than they had intended it to. Some students felt they had to follow the instructions of their supervisors, even if they were uncomfortable with the situation. For others, the final responsibility for what is published, is with the journalist who makes the story. They formulate it as ‘you always have a choice.’ These students gave a few examples of situations where they argued with their supervisors and succeeded to convince them.

Some students report that they have felt very bad when interviewees accused them of not rendering the interviewee’s words correctly, while they themselves were convinced they had quoted in the proper way. They do care about the **judgements by others**. Also, the students know journalism is often represented unfavorably. People react in a negative way when they hear the students study journalism or want to be journalists. They are aware of this stigma on journalism, but it does not keep most of them from being enthusiastic about the job.

4.2 French-speaking Belgian students

The French speaking Belgian students express judgements on the values of journalism and on the media companies. They are convinced that ethics is a necessary instrument to defend the value of journalistic independence, considered central to their profession, and, more specifically, to gain and cultivate public trust, seen as the essential goal of journalism. One of the speakers regretted that only a minority of the journalists he met during his internship defended independence. The judgments on the quality of the information produced by the media company in which the respondents did their internships show a strong adherence to the ethical rules, which serve as a point of reference for students. The tensions identified in the previous section, seen as threats to the respect of ethical rules, lead the participants to hold very critical discourses on the journalistic cultures in which they have been immersed.

Professional ethics is also mobilized to criticize commercial pressure, especially in a context of economic crisis that forces the media to maximize their production at a lower cost. Tensions linked to marketing or advertising communication practices are pointed out, but also the predilection for sensationalist subjects which will encourage Internet users to click on the story. Students are quite reluctant to write articles that promote products, but at the same time, they seem to think that ethics is not strong enough to oppose the pressures of economic “power” (advertisers and media owners) on the work of journalists.

Despite the general stance of defending codes of ethics, as mentioned in judgements towards media companies, young journalists sometimes show **judgements on norms**, by taking a critical view of the relevance of those very norms, most of the time in relation to the effectiveness of self-regulatory

bodies. One of the respondents considered that journalistic ethics should be «flexible» and adaptable according to the democratic relevance of the information to be collected, so as not to become a barrier to the work of journalists. Another considers that norms are sometimes obsolete, even if some “major principles” are not going to change. Students also consider that, more than the journalists themselves, it is the media companies that should be sanctioned, as they are the ones who create the working conditions that can allow or prevent the respect of ethics. Participants also mentioned the need for more media education to facilitate public knowledge and understanding of the ethical rules of journalism.

4.3 French students

French respondents express judgment of the media and their professional values. The economic constraints experienced by the entire media ecosystem are pointed out by most participants as responsible for the ethics breaches observed in many newsrooms. Many of them consider that the choices made by certain structures to alleviate their economic difficulties can influence the editorial line or even journalistic practices. The question of the funding model, especially in the specialized media, comes up several times. The points of view converge on the infringement of independence represented by the financing by actors from the sector covered by the media, especially in fields such as sport, fashion or economy. And this is true regardless of the size of the structure.

“I find it complicated to talk about a sector if you are financed by it. [...] This is a problem for the general press, but even more so for the specialist press. It poses a problem in terms of conflict of trust.” (FG1)

Others mention a daily work routine marked by the injunction to be productive and point to the infringement of ethical codes that this can cause. Many agree that the lack of time prevents journalists from thinking about ethics issues and looking critically at their own practices. Strong criticisms were also made of practices associated with time constraints, such as “news bastardisation”, “micro-trotters” and “ambiance”. The testimonies of some students reveal that these can introduce bias in the treatment of news. Journalists who do not have the time to go to the sources then risk producing news content based on their own point of view.

“And, it happened during an anti-pass protest [...], where there are firemen who arrived, and the journalist didn't do her job. That is to say, she just made a catastrophic portrait of the firemen, but at no time did she go to see them. At no point did she go and talk to them, it was just a mood piece and it looked like she was writing her article from a balcony. It wasn't right at all. But there you have it, it's a lot of things that we observe too, especially on the web and in the regional daily press (Presse quotidienne régionale, PQR).” (FG6)

Value judgements also vary according to the type of content and the derogations from ethics codes to which they may be subject. The tensions felt regarding continuous audiovisual information and the practices specific to it bring out negative judgements. On the contrary, the investigative work is, in the eyes of some respondents, more in line with ethical standards. In this sense, one student also highlights the work of public radio. The relationship with sources as envisaged in some newsrooms or by some journalists also raises many criticisms. Some consider that collusion with sources is also an obstacle to media independence. This was particularly highlighted by participants who had done an internship in local structures, and age also seemed to influence the nature of the relationship.

“On the local I find that there is still something that remains, of the journalist who did not have the favors, but a quality of life, and yes for him it was normal. In my local there was a journalist of 80 years old, he thought it was quite normal that they came to offer me things to write the article.” (FG1)

Professional ethics also serves as a normative support for students who are led to question the status of local press correspondent (a special status for the regional and departmental press which designates an activity of producing information that is carried out as an accessory to another professional activity). One student recognizes the centrality of these actors in the news production process: “They are the ones who make the newspaper”. But many associate this status with “bad practices” in terms of ethics. For example, one student referred to the failure of local correspondents to verify information: “we had huge catalogues of information, which are not necessarily verified”. Another student sums up the complexity of this status of non-professional information: “Their place is also special, because they are neither journalists nor advertisers, it is a status that I find special, especially in terms of deontologie”.

French students also express judgment on **ethical standards**. Ethics, which is also used by students to defend “good journalistic practice”, is also subject to normative evaluation. Many of them stress the need to bring ethics back to the center of the concerns of aspiring journalists.

“We really need to get back into it and finally talk about it again, to put it back at the center of our future profession.” (FG3)

Others think that it is important to push the reflection on ethics beyond the academic framework. For example, one student points out the interest for professional journalists to follow “in-company training”. Another considers it important to integrate actors from outside the journalistic world so that the profession is better understood by all, especially the readers “who are the first ones concerned: it is for them that we work.” Strong opinions appear when the question of adapting ethics codes to the contemporary context is raised. One student feared that adapting to current journalistic practices could “impoverish the quality of the journalist’s work [...] since we would be adapting to the time constraints and economic constraints that the profession is experiencing”. Other participants, on the contrary, felt that ethics codes should be changed. One participant even proposed that the codes be redefined collectively, on an international scale.

“Why shouldn’t the charter of déontologie be changed too, at least a few articles, I don’t know ... We take editors, not from the whole world, but something a bit selective, from the main world newspapers, we sit around a table and discuss: ‘is this obsolete?’, ‘wouldn’t we change a word there?’ it changes everything in a sentence, so wouldn’t we change a word that makes it... I don’t know.” (FG3)

Finally, some students make judgments about the way ethics is taught in journalism schools. The most common criticism is that it is given very little space in the curriculum. The speed with which these issues are addressed helps to explain the “omissions”. For example, the teaching of journalistic ethics appears to be a mere formality.

“No, it’s just that the master’s degree in journalism is so dense that you can’t look at deontologie for months and months. It’s an important thing, though, like everything else, we’re given some marbles and it’s up to us to dig. So this point is not necessarily very well developed.” (FG2)

A second criticism shared by several students was the very theoretical nature of the teaching. It seems difficult for them to build bridges with their practices in the field.

“It is at the beginning of the year, it is very theoretical, it is not associated with a practice, with a particular case. [...] And also the person who teaches it to us at school is not a journalist, even he doesn’t realize I think what he is teaching us.” (FG2)

Even though students are confronted with practical exercises as part of their training, some deplore the fact that no link is made with ethics courses. These exercises, which often take place in a context very similar to that of the professional world, do not allow for collective reflection on related ethics issues.

“I can perhaps add something to this, that I think that at school there is perhaps not enough room for déontologie, where for a TV subject for example we are sent in one day, we have to find the subject at 9.30am, we have to hand it in at 5pm, and so in this time we have very little time to do a subject.” (FG1)

Despite the blurred representations of professional ethics, and a practice in the field that leads to adjustments, journalists in training quite spontaneously denounce numerous practices, of which they have been actors or witnesses, and which go against ethics. They make judgements on ‘problematic’ situations, with more or less justified references to ethics to denounce certain problems or limits. However unclear it may be to respondents, ethics often serves to mark the difference between professional journalists and those who are not.

4.4 Spanish students

Participants show certain resignation to the situation detected in the labor environment.

“I think we see journalism in a biased way. Being from the inside we like a specific type of journalism that I really don’t know if it is the one that arrives to the rest of society. I read media such as 5W or El Orden Mundial, but people don’t read that. It’s super ugly to say that because we infantilize the public but I have written 4, 5 or 6 news items in one day because that’s what the media need to sell. The subscription model is very good, and we should aspire to that, but it is not our reality. We are not The New York Times with millions of subscribers and who can afford subscriptions of two euros a month. We have not reached that point and, for now, what is being sold is clickbait.” (FG1)

In this concern for digitization and its relationship with compliance with ethical standards, the participants affirm that the current communicative landscape has become blurred.

“I believe that there has also been a mediatization of society in which some compartments such as work or leisure have blurred the lines. When the president of TV3 makes a tweet, we don’t know if he is doing it in his capacity as president of TV3 or in his capacity as a person. All this also makes this job difficult.” (FG2)

They suggest that influencers now have as much or more power than professionals or the media, but they do not play with the same ethical codes. All this leads them to mention an absence of

discursive pluralism in the media. The fight of ideology and interests that propitiate the current polarization and creation of information bubbles.

“We have already seen that this aspiration for the media to be objective is a bit difficult. In the end, reality is interpretable. Also, I don’t even consider it as “bad” that they are not objective. It is normal that they are not.” (FG2)

5. Contemporary issues

This theme concerns students' perception of professional ethics as adapted or not to the current professional context, whether from a socio-economic or professional point of view, particularly in terms of what is at stake and professional recognition and differentiation. It also shows many questions from respondents about the use of social networks by journalists, which is regularly seen as a threat to deontology, or making it even more necessary than before, in terms of the protection of sources, for example, or the ease of traceability of online connections.

5.1 Dutch-speaking Belgian students

Dutch-speaking Belgian students know the current guidelines are often not suitable for contemporary media. Media law in Flanders still is about “the press”, and has not even integrated the audiovisual press fully, let alone all distribution channels that are created by contemporary (social) media. In almost all interviews' students state that in their opinion the ethical code is predominantly applicable to the traditional legacy media. Working practices to report and to act according to ethical standards are said to be well elaborated for the printed press and specific elements in the codes were designed for the audiovisual media as well. But students experienced that in the digital media sphere, ethical issues got another dimension and that the Code did not offer sufficient supporting guidelines for internet, digital legacy media and social network sites. Students note that the “reality” that is presented in social media feeds the content of legacy media, and that this relationship poses difficult situations regarding ethics. The abundant flow of “news” on social media poses a challenge for the legacy media, students state. The ethical codes and editorial guidelines to act according to professional standards are struggling with this new reality as they are not yet adapted to this situation. Some students referred to this status as “the legacy media are lagging behind”. Students recognize the fact that there are so many types of journalism that one regulatory framework that fits them all is impossible to achieve. Equally, the intertwining of legacy media adapting to ethical codes with the vast array of ‘news’ items in the digital world without any normative boundaries is an issue that cannot be easily solved. The students' observations as expressed in the focus groups relate to different aspects:

Use of images by journalists: people share a lot of personal content in the digital sphere. They also share a lot of photographic materials that can be retrieved later by third persons (recruiters, competitors, police, and many other groups and individuals but also by journalists). In the interviews two specific examples were cited. Firstly, the use of personal data retrieved from social media to give victims a face. The cited example was about an accident in an Italian funicular. Students learned that the family of the little boy that survived the crash gave permission to publish these pictures, but students expressed ethical reflections on this use. Secondly, students referred to the case of a fugitive man whose picture was used in the media to track him down. In the case of an official/police request for information, the journalistic use of photographs is less restricted. The students noticed that while legacy media acted upon ethical codes and agreements of good practice with police authorities, messages on social media did not consider the necessary precautions. In the social media “news” there were no restrictions and there was a need felt to display as many details as possible.

Social media as newsfeed for legacy media: one student gave an example of a situation where social media news was the origin of an interesting news topic, which resulted in a scoop for the medium that was first in finding the message on Facebook. Students refer to social media as a powerful source for journalists to discover interesting topics and news facts, but they also have reservations about the impact of these social platforms that leave legacy media little other choice than to go with the hypes and sensationalist news stories. Students gave some examples of news or situations that popped up in social media and that went viral in a split second. One example quoted in different focus groups was the story of an ordinary man who was filmed without his approval while shouting out his frustration about the fact that a specific product was not available in the supermarket. The images went viral on social media, memes were produced, and the legacy media picked up the story soon after. A second example to demonstrate the power of viral distribution on social media was the newsfeed on sexting of three ‘famous’ Flemish personalities. Students were critical of the so-called news value of these stories and reflected on the dilemma for legacy media whether or not to bring this type of sensationalist news. On the one hand, they raised questions about whether it was appropriate to bring the story that had gone viral and that was already in the open. On the other hand, they reflected on the way the story finally was presented: without the full names of the persons involved, although most of the audience knew the names from social media content. Some of the students assumed that legacy media had to fulfill their role with more restrictions than social media thus reducing the value of interest for their audiences. Some students even contended that the more ‘conservative’ (read: ethical) attitude of legacy media might harm the credibility of these media as audiences might suspect journalists to protect certain groups in society and to give them a preferential approach, while social media, in contrast, can provide the audience with the whole story and without any content limitations. Some focus groups went further in reflecting on this difficult situation: should professional journalism be playing in another league? Should legacy media bring these topics with more background information, or with more reflection? Should they give information on the detrimental outcomes of some social media stories? The overarching line of these reflections was that students expected a more ethical approach from legacy media than from social media.

Social media and ethical behavior: regarding viral news originating from social media, the use of images was discussed as well by the students. Reflecting again on the news story on the angry citizen who lost his temper in the supermarket, students agree that this man’s reputation was severely harmed. On the one hand, by social media using footage without his consent. On the other hand, because social media used his image without any “blurring”. Students recognized that, once the legacy media picked up the story, they “blurred” the pictures to protect the man’s identity. At the same time, the students were critical saying that blurring did not help since the image was widely spread already by the social media. They agree, however, that legacy media had to continue to blur images because – as legacy media – they have a responsibility towards society. In this respect, they show a qualitative normative framing of legacy media (regardless of whether it is print, broadcast or online). So, they strongly believe that legacy media can tap from the newsfeed of social media but likewise that ethical professional standards of legacy media should remain on the forefront. An interesting quote in this respect is that of a student saying: “we, as journalists in the classical definition, are perhaps no longer the first who report specific news stories, but we make a selection in the endless stream of meaningful and less meaningful news items, we have to inform and to contextualize, we do not have to follow in the direction of shaming and blaming, in the direction of mere sensationalism”. This quality driven approach is also mirrored in a quote that refers to the newsroom practice of the Instagram platform of the public broadcaster aiming at young audiences. According to the intern, this platform brings news that is accompanied with “good advice” with regard to ethical audience behavior. On the

sensitive topic of sexting, the newsroom added information hinting to the fact that this type of social news messages should not be shared because of their viral character and the excessively detrimental consequences for the people involved. In line with this, the intern holds a plea for the inclusion of educational elements in the news for specific audiences, for example for children and early teens.

5.2 French-speaking Belgian students

For French-speaking Belgian journalism students, despite the existence of the code, professional ethics remains impalpable and constantly changing. For some, the current context is characterized by a **period of rupture**, of reinvention, which is still far from being over. For others, the ability of journalists to rethink their professional ethics has been immutably delayed, which casts **doubt on the potential for concrete professional renewal**. From a personal point of view, some students are struggling to develop a true ownership of ethical standards, and thus to decide on their current relevance. Others, on the other hand, concede that they have incorporated them. In any case, students tend to suggest that they are discovering a kind of “new code” of ethics in the field, that practice induces a laxer way of applying theoretical principles. Social networks and their implied imperative of immediacy of information, are regularly mentioned as causes of the circumvention of norms. The relatively recent digital developments in the sector suggest the **need for a “modernization” of ethics**. It would seem that, in the eyes of students, journalism has remained in a bubble of idealistic ethical purity. Most students clearly feel that ethics do not sufficiently frame online behavior, which can cause anxiety. They struggle to define their role in a circumscribed way, especially with regard to the role of the community manager, which they occasionally have to assume, without having the skills or the time to do so properly. Social networks also blur the boundaries between private and public places: is it possible to use images published publicly on social networks? Most students seem to be aware of questions regarding privacy, on which they find it difficult to decide, arguing that this is a grey zone and that there is still a legal void around these issues.

5.3 French students

Journalistic ethics, the Web and digital social networks: in order to meet the demands of the immediacy of the Internet, French students feel that they have to work faster and faster, and that they have to put aside the normative basis of ethics in order to meet these demands of speed. Indeed, the Internet has caused an overall acceleration of the temporality of the media (both for the gathering and dissemination of information), leading journalists to be increasingly fast in the execution of their tasks, even if it means sacrificing, at times, ethics in order to be able to keep up with these new temporal constraints.

“There was a small case in [city], it made the buzz, it was a mother who accused an Uber driver of racism etc., because she had thrown her out of her car. And this journalist did this story only with the Twitter and telephone testimony of the person who complained about the driver, but she had not called Uber, so there was a big problem from the start, and there were many things like that. (...) it’s serious if it’s not adapted anymore [deontologie] indeed for the conditions and I’m wondering about it, maybe it is. On the web, when you have 4 articles a day...” (FG6)

Some deliberate breaches of ethics are even identified as serving the purposes of digital journalism

and the “dictatorship of the click” (FG5). A particular concern emerges from the discourse of the students interviewed, who identify the problem not in terms of ethics, but in terms of the objectives of immediacy and sensationalism.

“It is these practices that are completely wrong, that are quick, where you have to create a buzz etc., and that is what is wrong. (...) Well yes, that’s what’s wrong, it’s not the déontologie that’s wrong. It’s the practice, and what’s more, it’s a practice that doesn’t even have time to ask itself this kind of question.” (FG6)

Other respondents invoke the need to better apply ethics to web-based journalistic media, which would not prevent “good results on the digital”, affirming the possible reconciliation of web-based practices and the normative base that frames them. However, some advocate a re-adaptation, a re-actualization of ethics rules in the light of these new challenges.

“But in any case, digitization has transformed the profession so much that there must be texts that also provide a framework for all this. I don’t know if I have any very concrete examples, but obviously the Internet has changed everything, and digital technology has changed everything, and we need to... I don’t have enough of the texts in my head to say: “this, for example, is crazy”. But what is certain is that we no longer work... This job is no longer the same, and so necessarily it has to be readjusted, that’s it.” (FG5)

The students also produced a specific reflection on the relationship between journalism, ethics and social networks. Indeed, questions were raised about the personal stance taken by journalists on their own social networks (in particular Twitter), which could fuel confusion between journalistic discourse and the personal opinions of journalists (especially among people who are skeptical about the media and their honesty).

“And in the end I thought this sort of immediacy that is on Twitter... Because yes there are journalists on Twitter who completely break the rules of déontologie when they tweet, and it also serves to make that distinction...” (FG1)

The presence of journalists on social networks also questions the border between the world of journalism and the world of influence.

“I’m interested in fashion journalism, I don’t think I’d do that, but there’s a journalist I like a lot, who is also a bit of an influencer, and he’s more and more of an influencer and less of a journalist.” (FG1)

Beyond the presence and personal use of social networks by professional journalists, students also questioned the responsibility of social networks in relation to ethics. Whether it was the deletion of Donald Trump’s Twitter account or the blocking of other content that might be considered offensive, the respondents reflected on the appropriation of journalistic ethics by platforms and more particularly social networks. In addition to raising ethics issues, these new media seem to constrain and increase the workload of student interns. Respondents see their editors requiring them to be increasingly versatile and fast. Respondents described an increasingly precarious environment that sometimes prevents them from respecting ethics in their daily practices.

The intensification of the work rhythm and the precariousness of the

profession: the intensification of the pace of work sometimes leads students to feel that they are rushing their work, even though the charters of ethics require the media to offer working conditions that allow journalists to exercise their profession in compliance with ethical standards.

“To do a good job, you have to be able to do it in good conditions and at some point, when you start to have such a long day, you feel like you’re in the thick of it. There are certain papers that I feel I did badly, but because I was at the end of my rope. Physically, I was at the end of my rope. I couldn’t take it anymore, and so we forget... Perhaps we won’t forget to seek out the contradictory, but we will be much less square in our work, and for me that poses a real problem in the production, in the quality of the work, in the legitimacy we have in relation to our public, that’s all. All that makes for an extremely complex system, and déontologie is also a weapon to be used in relation to the labor code, to our rights.”
(FG5)

The students also point to the injunction to multi-task and its impact on their use of ethics in their professional practice. This injunction comes from the reduction in the number of staff and the resources allocated to newsrooms. There are fewer and fewer of us and we all have to know how to do everything, and at some point there is clearly a budgetary issue behind this multitasking as well. That’s for sure that we do everything, and I’ve heard it from former photographers and editors: staff cuts = pressure on those who remain. The specific challenges of the Web and the global casualization of the journalistic profession thus hinder students’ recourse to ethics. Recent social movements in France, such as the yellow waistcoats movement or, more recently, the anti-sanitary pass movement, have also marked their professional experiences and fed their ethics reflections.

The global context of mistrust and distrust of the media... an ethics issue?

The recent nature of the students’ journalistic experiences contributed to their early exposure to media coverage of social movements marked by a strong tendency to skepticism towards the media. The respondents also had to work around the health crisis, which also fueled the general mistrust of the press. As a result, the coverage of these issues has been difficult for some, who have been insulted or even threatened. Moreover, the fact that journalism has been “put under the microscope” since the resurgence of the crisis of public confidence (associated with the yellow waistcoats movement in particular) towards the journalistic profession and the media makes the ethics issues more prevalent. The students were thus led to question in particular the contribution of contradictory speech in journalistic content, but also the objectivity and neutrality of journalists in the face of opinions that they do not share, concerning divisive social subjects in the public debate.

“I didn’t want to discredit this [anti-sanitary pass] movement from the outset, but we are also here to report on reality, and so I chose to highlight these irrational arguments [...] because it is also my role to show this reality, that there were conspiracists. And I find that sometimes they are hidden, they are hidden on that side, they just show the rational arguments and they don’t show that there is a big part that is violent, that are conspiracy theorists. And that was the whole problem with that treatment”. (FG6)

5.4 Spanish students

Regarding whether the participants believe that ethical or deontological codes respond to new challenges derived from digitization and new platforms, some participants' comments evidence a generalized confusion: ethical principles are the same; in any case, what varies is its needed application to new situations.

"It is not only a problem in Spain. Nobody is prepared because we have just learned of real potentialities of social networks, especially after COVID. Before of that there was very little perception for such an implemented theme. On the other hand, now it is an activity that needs to be regulated much more. That is why we know that people in charge have to make decisions to regulate it." (FG1)

In this line, clickbait, informational saturation and other types of information disorders appear as the main defining elements of the new journalistic reality. These types of circumstances are reflected in a kind of journalistic dichotomy that differentiates between traditional journalism and new narratives led by influencers.

"I believe that today it is like: 'the more you publish, the better'. 'The faster, the better'. I am a faithful defender of leisurely journalism. To contrast. Uncheck a bit of what everyone does. In the end, if everyone does the same, it is the same news for all media and the first one to launch is the one who gets the credit, the crumbs [By crumbs the student refers to, in this case, a small part of the profits]. I think it is very important to give it another approach, another point of view. But right now, business model doesn't allow it. We are very focused on monetization, which is obviously the way to sustain media, but I think we should also bet on other things. At what price are we selling information? We should be more aware of what we do and not go so fast, or with so much volume. The paradigm of journalism in Spain must change so that ethics is more present." (FG4)

Following the previous example, different participants point the business model and corporate communication of media as the main counterpoints with respect to ethics. In other words, interests of the company itself replace public interest.

"I don't think so either because in the end we have gone to the easy, to the precarious and to a business model that is exhausted in which only visits and breaking news is worth it. All efforts have been put into that part of digitization instead of actually producing things that are worthwhile and that are novel and powerful on a journalistic level. Good digital products are not made." (FG3)

OVERVIEW

Asking journalism students about ethics involves questioning their relationship to the media professional identity and their political conception of journalism, in a professional world undergoing a process of disorganization/restructuring (Demers, 2007). Each of the ethical points of view must be questioned to try to perceive which conception of journalism is deployed in the transition between the period of training and the discovery of professional realities, through individual trajectories. It is in this perspective that the present research tried to determine whether the ethical framework plays an important role, and according to what modalities it possibly does so, in the process of defining the professional trajectories and identities of these (future) journalists. This section presents the main findings of this report, case by case, and discusses the link between them and the specificities of the press councils of Dutch-speaking Belgium, French-speaking part of Belgium, France and Spain.

1. Representations

The Belgian Dutch-speaking students consider ethics as a set of rules that are defined abstractly, which must nevertheless be applied concretely. They view ethics as structuring the journalistic routines; defining the quality of the journalistic work, enabling appropriate behavior towards others; guiding personal attitude as well as borders that cannot be crossed.

The Belgian French-speaking students seem to confuse “*déontologie*” and “*éthique*”; highlight the normative dimension of ethics; question the obligation to respect it; and consider it as a way to gain credibility towards peers and the public see it as a constraint as well as a protection.

Like them, the French students also speak about a framework that is both a constraint and a protection; confuse “*déontologie*” with “*éthique*” and say that ethics is a gauge of professionalism that ensures their credibility. They also mention the confrontation they experienced as trainees as well as the recurring opposition between theory and practice they had to face.

The Spanish students express their doubts when conceptualizing professional ethics and link their vague knowledge with their academic training that would not offer enough case studies. Media councils do not have a concrete meaning for them and, in their eyes, is a disconnected instance.

2. Negotiations

The Belgian Dutch-speaking students specify that they “strive for” the ethical principles, without always attaining them. They repeat that, in any case, there are some borders that cannot be crossed. Nevertheless, they argue that there is often room for consultation and flexibility and highlight the importance of learning by doing. According to them, ethics has a fundamental deliberative nature and is a tool to justify choices or to distance themselves from others.

The Belgian French-speaking students also put forward the flexibility as well as the deliberative aspect of ethics.

For the French students the negotiation process leads to reflections about the ethical training they received and express that they felt a gap between this training and fieldwork. To them, ethics is constrained by the working conditions and is thus applied according to the adjustments every individual makes to these conditions. This interpretive and deliberative dimension of ethics may lead to negligence and other breaches to ethics.

The Spanish students show confusion regarding the concept of professional ethics itself. According to them, ethical principles can be applied flexibly. This could be related to an attitude of acceptance and even understanding in terms of praxis and a business model based on the attention economy.

3. Tensions

The Belgian Dutch-speaking students speak about the opposing interests and value the tentative application of ethics leads to, according to the media company (the hierarchy in the media, and the organizational modalities); the nature of news and the sources; their status of intern, their position of journalist and their own personality.

The Belgian French-speaking students and the French students identify similar parameters that influence the emergence of tensions.

The Spanish students, on their side, affirm that they do not feel tensions and affirm that they haven't questions about ethics. But further discussions make some doubts arise, showing that the reason why they seem more self-confident is that they are probably less reflexive about ethics than their Belgian and French colleagues.

4. Judgments

The Belgian Dutch-speaking students as well as the Belgian French-speaking students have a fairly normative vision of what “good journalism” (journalism that follows ethical norms) is. They consider ethics as an important part of their professional identity and

express judgements on the value of journalism; on the work environment and on media companies; and pay attention to the way they are considered by others.

The French students also judge the media and their professional values. In addition, they express the need to bring ethics back to the center of the concerns of aspiring journalists. They finally question their training courses which, according to them, give too little space for practical cases and collective reflection.

The Spanish students acknowledge that professional ethics is a fundamental aspect for journalistic practice. However, young journalists in Spain consider that partisan interests make it impossible to properly apply ethical standards, as an employee. They consider that freelance journalists are more able to respect these standards.

5. Contemporary issues

For the Belgian Dutch-speaking students the current ethical guidelines are often not suitable for contemporary media as it is difficult for a single regulatory framework to fit all the media and all the different aspects of information. They question the way the images must be used; the use of social media as news feed for legacy media; and the (non-)ethical behavior of social media.

The Belgian French-speaking students consider social media as a threat to ethics. According to them, there are continuous changes in the information sphere that force constant reinventions and even rupture, from an ethical point of view. They say that they discover a new kind of ethics on the field and claim for a “modernization” of ethics.

The French students put forward that the online presence of media rises the demand for speed – sometimes incompatible with ethics; they also underline the intensification of work rhythm and the precariousness of the (young) journalists, which undermine the application of the ethical standards; they also point out the mistrust and distrust of the public towards media that the emergence of social media lead to.

For the Spanish students, the ethical principles remain the same in the digital era. What changes is its needed application to new contexts such as the massive use of social networks and the situation of pandemic. Some of them specifically ask for a media business model that puts ethics at the center of its concerns.

PERSPECTIVES

This report shows that all the interviewed students share concerns about the education regarding ethics they received; the confrontation of their theoretical knowledge with the field, during their internship; the tension between the normative and deliberative nature of ethics as well as about the current ethical challenges they have to tackle. It could also be noticed that students from the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium; the French-speaking part of Belgium and France express similar – even if not same – views regarding ethics. The relationship that journalism students have with professional ethics is twofold and, in a way, paradoxical. On the one hand, they consider it in an abstract way and offer rather vague definitions, confusing it with personal ethics and law; on the other hand, they are quick to embody it in a very concrete way in their field experiences and to invoke it to make judgements on journalistic practices. But even when applied concretely, ethics and the interactions it implies – with peers, sources and the public – are rarely free of tensions and even problems. Journalistic ethics is thus defined as a set of rules that constitute a normative framework that includes many restrictions (what not to do) but also allows them to practice journalism within a reassuring, even protective, framework (how to do it well). It leads to a lot of questioning and necessary adjustments between theory and practice, through negotiations with oneself and with others. Often, these negotiations take place in the context of more or less strong tensions around certain themes such as the specific characteristics of the media of practice, their status as trainees or the porous border between journalism and communication. On the whole, journalism students feel little confidence in deontology and already feel the pressure of the working conditions of journalistic practice, which they believe runs counter to the proper application of deontology. The representations of deontology are those of a theoretical ideal towards which to strive, but often unattainable in practice. They thus express a rather disillusioned and disenchanted vision of deontology, and of journalism more generally, which in a way reflects a form of internalization of their future professional insecurity. Ethics thus becomes a way of talking about the journalistic profession in general and its problems in particular (working conditions, sexism, discrimination), without necessarily having a direct link with it.

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ANNEX

Two sections are structuring this annex.

Annex I: Regional and national reports

This report is based on regional and national reports specifically dedicated to the situation in (1) French and (2) Dutch speaking universities, (3) France, and (4) Spain, that can be found in this section.

Annex II: Codes of journalistic ethics

The third section of the annex refers to the codes of journalistic ethics of the (1) French and (2) Dutch speaking journalists, (3) French journalists, and (5) the Spanish, journalists.

Annex I: Régional and national reports

1. JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN INTERNSHIP AND ETHICS IN FRENCH SPEAKING BELGIUM

Tixier, F., Fierens, M., Le Cam, F., Domingo, D., Grevisse, B., Standaert, O., Krywicki, B., & Degand, A. (2019). *Journalism students in internship and deontology in French-speaking Belgium*.

<https://presscouncils.eu>

2. JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN INTERNSHIP AND ETHICS IN DUTCH SPEAKING BELGIUM

de Smaele, H., Raeymaeckers, K., Temmerman, M (2021). *Journalism students in internship and journalistic ethics in Dutch-speaking Belgium*.

Introduction

This report presents the results of the focus groups research on the relationship to professional ethics among journalism students in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Flanders).

As the research in Flanders fits into the larger Belgian and even larger European project, the objective of the research is evidently the same as in the study that already took place in the French-speaking part of Belgium. We wanted to find out how journalism students, in/after their first internship experience, *think about* ethics in/and journalism and how they *experience* ethics in their first professional jobs. How are journalism interns confronted with professional ethics? How do they apprehend these issues and how do they deal with ‘the rules’, deviate from them or adjust them?

In Belgium, the media and consequently the instruments of media accountability and ethics are divided along language lines (Raeymaeckers & Heinderyckx, 2018). The main self-regulatory body in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium is the Council for Journalism (*Raad voor de Journalistiek*) which was founded in 2002. It involves representatives from the publishers and media companies, journalists and external experts. Its ethical framework was formalized in 2010 in the Code of the Council for Journalism (<https://www.rvdj.be/code-raad-voor-de-journalistiek>). Since then, the code has been supplemented and updated several times (2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2019). Subjects of amendments were, for example, the journalistic use of images from personal websites and social networking sites in 2012, or the perceived need to distinguish journalistic reporting from native advertising in 2016. The council also produced specific publications, such as, for example, in 2005 on how the press should deal with victims. The Council for Journalism is widely accepted among professional journalists as an authority on ethics (Van Leuven, 2019, p. 37). Professional journalistic ethics in Flanders, therefore, largely ‘equals’ the Code of the Council for Journalism as well as the accompanying guidelines.

Adherence to ethical principles is often included in surveys among journalists worldwide (e.g., Weaver et al., 2007; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Also students in journalism have been the object of study in countries as divergent as Great Britain (Ball, Hanna & Sanders, 2006), USA (Reinardy & Moore, 2007; Conway & Groshek, 2009), Nigeria (Alemoh, Ukwela & Ogoshi, 2018) or Singapore (Detenber et al., 2012). Yang and Arant (2014) compared how American and Chinese journalism students view ethical dilemmas faced by journalists. Alonso, Calderon and Pérez (2019) compared perceptions of students about ethics and journalism practices in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela.

Adherence to ethical principles is also included in the five-yearly surveys among journalists in Belgium, the last of which was in 2018 (Van Leuven et al., 2019). More specifically, ethics in the context of reporting about victims was analysed by de Cock and colleagues (2013) as they interviewed professional journalists in Flanders about their ethical considerations in this matter. Opgenhaffen, d'Haenens and Corten (2013), in their turn, surveyed professional journalists about the competences – including ethical thinking – they feel to be required for the job. In addition, they analysed the degree of congruence between the professional field and the educational programmes on offer in Flanders. Students in journalism were not included in any of these studies.

Methodologically, both the single-country studies and the comparative studies almost exclusively – with the exception of de Cock et al. (2013) – make use of surveys (Ball, Hanna & Sanders, 2006; Reinardy & Moore, 2007; Conway & Groshek, 2009; Detenber et al., 2012; Opgenhaffen, d'Haenens & Corten, 2013; Yang & Arant, 2014; Alemoh, Ukwela & Ogoshi, 2018; Alonso, Calderon & Pérez, 2019; Van Leuven et al., 2019). The surveys measure the degree of the journalists' or students' ethical concern or the degree of permissiveness towards controversial journalistic practices (e.g., undercover practice, accepting presents or payments as a journalist, using confidential information).

This study, in contrast, makes use of a qualitative in-depth method. Students were asked open questions about their representations of ethics and their experiences with ethical problems. They were encouraged to give concrete examples and to discuss their experiences with other students. In this way, we could not only describe their concerns and the degree of their concern, but we could also begin to understand how their concerns came into place and what influences played their part in that process.

A total of 26 students from three journalism training programmes in Flanders (VUB, KU Leuven - campus Brussels, UGent) took part in five focus groups of four to seven students each. All five groups were organized between 1 and 8 June 2021. They had an average duration of 75 minutes. We opted for online focus groups for two reasons. First, the corona safety measures in June did not allow a lot of physical group activity. Second, because of the divergent working circumstances and working places of the interns – with some of them working from home, others in the newsroom – an online meeting was more achievable for them. A freelance journalist, with experience in academic work as well, acted as the moderator of all five groups. In this way, the group conversations did not resemble a school context but rather a conversation of journalists among themselves. The conversations were recorded and transcribed by the moderator. Consequently, they were coded and analysed by the three programme directors involved: Hedwig de Smaele (KU Leuven – campus Brussels), Karin Raeymaeckers (Ghent University) and Martina Temmerman (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). All three programmes offer 60 ECTS, combining theoretical courses and practical workshops, an (unpaid) internship of six to ten weeks and a master's thesis. Among the general courses is also an introduction to journalism ethics and regulations. The focus groups took place after or during the internships of the students. A minority of them already finished their internships, but for the majority the internship was still ongoing. Some had experience with freelance journalistic work or student jobs as well.

This report follows the five main themes that were identified in the report on French-speaking

Belgium, namely 1. Definitions and representations, 2. Negotiations, 3. Tensions, 4. Value judgements and 5. Contemporary issues, in order to enable comparison between the two regions of Belgium. The division within these five themes does not always strictly follow the division of the report for French-speaking Belgium, as it reflects the tenor of the group discussions of the Dutch-speaking students.

Before we embark on our analysis, we want to make a short terminological note. In French, the term *déontologie* most often has the meaning of the set of codes and rules that guide a certain profession. The Dutch word *deontologie* is sometimes also used in this sense in Flanders, but in The Netherlands the meaning of the word resembles more that of the English *deontology*: the set of codes and rules that guide human behaviour in general. In Standard Dutch (the version of Dutch which is common for Flanders and The Netherlands) the term *journalistieke (beroeps)ethiek* (journalistic (professional) ethics) is more appropriate. Within the scope of this report, we will therefore use the term ‘journalistic ethics’.

1. Definitions and representations

Just like in the report for the French-speaking part of Belgium, the first section of this report focuses on the representations of professional ethics the students discern. We looked for the definitions the students gave of journalistic ethics and for the representations they gave of the concept as the group conversations developed.

In a first round, we scanned the group conversations in order to derive the students’ own definitions of journalistic ethics from their contributions. We listed the synonyms the students used to refer to journalistic ethics and we also screened the illustrations and examples they gave in order to identify the essential elements that represent journalistic ethics in their view.

Words that are used to describe ethics in journalism are ‘principle’, ‘rules’, ‘norms’, ‘(moral) codes’ and ‘guidelines’ (in Dutch: *principes, regels, normen, (morele) codes, richtlijnen*). Students refer to both ‘written’ and ‘unwritten’ rules underlying professional behaviour, which should be ‘decent’ (*fatsoenlijk*). They also specify that journalists ‘strive for’ these principles but that they are not always necessarily attained, for a variety of reasons. They consider the whole set of norms to be ‘flexible’, and adaptable to specific situations. Regarding what information can be made public, the students believe that ‘everything which is news’ can be published, and journalists are allowed to decide what is newsworthy. And a last term that comes up a number of times is ‘the interest of society’: journalistic behaviour should be steered by what is important for society as a whole.

The students are aware of the fact that the current guidelines are often not suitable for contemporary media. Media law in Flanders still is about ‘the press’, and has not even integrated the audiovisual press fully, let alone all distribution channels that are created by contemporary (social) media (cf. section 5).

In their approach of the topic, the students refer to journalistic ethics as (1) the rules in themselves – predominantly embodied in the Code of the Council for Journalism, (2) the implementation of these rules in journalism practice and (3) rules and practices that are linked to the profession and that may collide with personal ethics and convictions. Journalistic ethics, therefore, can be both abstract (as in the Code) and concrete (as in the daily practice) but is always professional.

In a second round, from the examples and the illustrations the students gave, we derived four essential elements for further definition and representation.

The first has to do with journalistic routines in processing the news like checking (the right quantity of) sources, respecting privacy (in publishing names or images), handling confidential information and securing confidential sources (professional confidentiality), making sure that all parties involved are heard and are given the opportunity to give feedback, and quoting with permission.

A second element often referred to is the quality of the journalistic work. The students find it important that journalists pass on correct information. The information should not be taken out of context. It should be brought in a precise, accurate and impartial way and in correct language, taking care of nuance. The societal impact and importance of the news have to be considered critically, or as one student puts it ‘it’s not because it’s on social media that we have to bring it’. Quotes and titles should not just make the story ‘juicy’, they have to be consistent with the content of the news.

The third element concerns journalistic behaviour towards others: journalists ‘have the right or even the duty to report about what goes on in society’ but they have to treat others in a respectful way. ‘Ordinary people’ should be treated with more care than sources who are used to working with the media, like politicians and experts. Examples of respectful behaviour are: making clear arrangements about the publication of interviews or data, giving interviewees the chance to read or view the interview before publishing it, taking into account that certain information can be detrimental to certain parties and that certain topics are delicate for some people.

The fourth element relates to personal attitude on the job. Here we saw some differences in opinion. For some students, showing their own feelings or at least empathy with the people involved in the news is part of a ‘decent’ approach in carrying out their jobs. Others report that they have grown harder during their internships, they have learned to ‘dig deeper’ and they think a certain indifference is characteristic of the journalistic identity. One student says she ‘wouldn’t like to be the politician or spokesperson having to answer those questions’, but she still asks them.

In all of these elements constituting journalistic ethics, students show an awareness of certain ‘borders that cannot be crossed’ and of a continuum for many of the norms and values referred to. In their internships and other experiences, they have been confronted with tensions between the ideals of the journalistic code and the reality of implementing it. We will elaborate on these tensions in section 3.

2. Negotiations

The application of ethics in a professional context is not an automated process, but is characterized by a process of negotiations.

For most of the students, the internship is their first professional experience. During their studies, they become familiar with ethics as a ‘knowledge field’ in itself, admittedly with lots of examples and concrete cases, and they get a simulation of practice at best. During internship, students begin or continue their socialization process into a journalistic career. They become familiar with work routines, media organizations and colleagues. The domain of ethics is no longer isolated from other dimensions of journalism (economical, technological,..) but is integrated into specific contexts. Ethical principles, consequently, are ‘negotiated’ in relation with journalists’ sources, peers and public.

All students are painfully aware of the difference between theory (courses, codes) and practice (actual implementation). While the theory is considered as rather ‘black and white’, the practice is often called ‘grey’ by the students. They have learned that ‘in practice it is more difficult than it looks on paper’.

The main evolution in their understanding, therefore, is away from the ‘strict’ nature of ethics towards its ‘flexible’ nature. Students in Flanders seem to accept the case-by-case basis of journalism ethics, taking into account the concrete circumstances. The Code is not a Law book, but the application of the particular principles is being weighed against other elements in specific situations or indeed ‘negotiated’.

Journalistic ethics sets boundaries

In essence, the ethical Code outlines the ‘big lines’, also described as ‘a base to fall back on’. Students even literally refer to this base as ‘the booklet’ by which they mean the Code of the Council for Journalism in Flanders, published in a brochure they all receive during their studies. Students seem to accept certain borders that cannot be crossed. ‘It is just normal that as a journalist you have to take them (“the rules”) into account’.

Journalistic ethics is flexible

But within these borders there is some ‘leeway’, ‘room for consultation’, and even a ‘grey zone’. By ‘negotiation’, students try to find a balance between sometimes conflicting interests such as the right of the public to be informed, the editorial line, personal judgements or status as well as external circumstances (cf. section 3).

Students report that they ‘learn by doing’. ‘Experience’ is deemed crucial. But sometimes ‘it’s also just using common sense’. Students realize they have to ‘think about situations’. Students expect to find their personal position vis-à-vis ethics by gaining experience. Making mistakes is part of that and is even considered to be useful to master ethics.

In this negotiation and learning process, students report the importance of consultation of the editor-in-chief or the internship supervisor in the newsroom. Rather than consulting the Code in itself, they tend to consult their colleagues and supervisors. Most of the students testify about deliberation and discussion among coworkers. Sometimes it’s the ‘boss’ who points out mistakes to the intern, but interns also raise certain matters. A student, for example, went against her boss about using conditional wording in a news article and was able to convince him. It shows that students are aware of ethics, but also that media ultimately leave room for discussion and accept ethical arguments as well.

Some ethical principles are more open to discussion than others and more often the subject of negotiation. While a principle such as depicting people with their permission is rather straightforward, principles such as ‘fairness’ or ‘fair play’ allow more room for discussion. It is striking that several students reported the use of undercover techniques, already so early in their careers, which took place only after serious deliberation.

Deliberative nature of journalistic ethics

For each individual, journalistic ethics takes on a deliberative dimension. Ethics, and thinking about ethics, becomes a tool to justify choices (for oneself or for others, mainly the news managers) or to distance oneself from others (most often from non-professional journalism).

Students frequently reflect on their own journalistic work. They question their own journalistic behaviour ('did I not push that man too much?', 'do I take the strongest quotes or do I render the tone of the whole conversation?', 'afterwards I thought: should I have done that so fiercely?', 'is that really necessary?', 'really looking for a balance between not being too pushy and still wanting to tell your story, with respect and all') and they question the end product ('does it have added value?', 'I really try to make sure it's as neutral as possible'). Even though there is one student who admits: 'I follow the instructions of my editor-in-chief. I wouldn't have thought about that [making people unrecognizable in images] myself, but the editors are working on those ethical standards.'

Some students attest to an interaction between the university training and the internship. The internship surely is an eye opener ('Once you're working as an intern, you think about that'). Students get more insight in 'what is allowed and what is not' by doing it, they learn from making mistakes and receiving feedback. But others also point to the education they received in the first place ('because of the training you are more involved', 'glad that I learned the rules before in order to be stronger in practice'). One student contributed that the experiences during the internship made her better prepared for the exam and enabled her to reflect critically on the course materials.

3. Tensions

The process of negotiation leads to tensions felt by the students because of opposing interests or values. In what follows, the main 'fields of tension' are identified and discussed.

Dependence on the media company

The dependence on the media company, recognized in the French-speaking part of Belgium, also appears as the most important 'source' of relativism for professional ethics in Flanders.

Both the structural and identity specificities of the media – linked to the business model of the media – as well as the organisational modalities are frequently touched upon.

With regard to the first aspect, the students seem to recognize a certain **hierarchy** in media with regard to their adherence to ethics.

VRT, the public service broadcaster in Dutch-speaking Belgium, appears as the media outlet that should set the standard and that works closest to professional ethical norms. VRT has an ombudsperson that supervises the journalistic work and intervenes when there are violations.

Television ('always black and white, not grey', 'short items') as a medium is perceived as 'worse' by the students when compared to newspapers (characterized by more nuances and 'longer items'), but far more worse is the internet where 'it's all about speed' and 'quantity is put above quality'. At the very bottom of the hierarchy are the social media, where there seem to be no rules at all.

The organizational modalities are largely linked to the type of medium. Students who work for an online medium, or for television, report more **time pressure** than students who work for documentaries, podcasts or weeklies. And time pressure is by far the most frequently cited factor that threatens compliance with ethics: ‘Then it goes through your head: “it has to be finished”, not: “we have to follow the rules and it has to be right”’, ‘so yes, then I did something that wasn’t really allowed, but that was because it had to go so fast.’ A tension between speed and quality is irrefutable.

An **editor-in-chief** who pays attention to ethics and leaves room for **consultation** is an important organizational modality to stimulate ethical journalism. Students working at public service broadcaster VRT feel themselves better surrounded than students working as videojournalists for local broadcasters or as online editors. Strikingly, some students tend to speak about ‘we’ (‘we think about it, we speak about it..’) while others speak about ‘I did, I asked..’ Students can clash with their supervisors on ethical topics, but when there is room for discussion, the tension is noticeably lower.

With the exception – to a certain extent – of public service broadcaster VRT, all media are recognized to be **‘commercial’**: ‘it has to pay off’. Students refer to competition as ‘the battle to be the first’, and report a tendency towards sensational news. Especially titles are pointed out as weak spots in ethical journalism. Online news articles have to be ‘simple and short’, up until a point that ‘it is not right anymore’. Students experience the commercial pressure of their media institution as a ‘difficult balance’.

Characteristics of news and sources

Not only the characteristics of the news organization, but also the characteristics of the news itself and the sources involved play their role. Certain **topics** such as politics and societal issues (‘the topics that “buzz” in society’, e.g. the rape of a 14-year old girl was a frequently mentioned topic at the time of the research) ask for more attention to ethics. When the perceived news value is higher, the attention paid to ethics is higher as well.

The relativity of the ethic code is also recognized in the different treatment of ‘known’ and ‘unknown’ **people**. Students seem to be unanimous in their judgement that principles such as the protection of privacy are weighted as more important in the latter case (unknown people) than in the former (known people, e.g., experts and politicians).

Journalism and public relations

Another frequent source of news is the world of PR at large. In the French report, students often mentioned the difficulty of producing information without leaning towards a promotional content. It seems students in Flanders do not have that many concerns about promotional content. They respond understandingly to companies that send out a press release as ‘everyone does’ and see it as their task as journalists to react critically and to bring a ‘good story’ without turning it into a ‘promotional talk’. The students show great self-confidence (‘it’s up to us then’) that they can resist promotional content and that ‘there is no danger there’ because ‘too obvious’. Maybe we should also take into account the fact that no parties or trips went on because of corona. Many students saw themselves limited to desk journalism only. The deeper connection between information subsidies and how to handle them critically did not surface.

Being an intern

The students' status of interns – 'you are only the intern' – popped up in the discussions now and then. Being an intern equals being 'young and inexperienced', with some margin for error. Students admit that they often get the easier assignments without ethical complications. If the topic is more comprehensive, they often have **no control** over the whole process, for example they are involved in research, pre-interviews, scenarios, but not in final editing and finishing the piece. More than one student referred to that lack of control: 'But I wasn't or I am not the one who has to make a final decision about that. Others do.' And they question: 'what is my responsibility now?', 'How do you handle your position as an intern?'. There are some indications that students sometimes are more 'ethically aware' than the others on the news floor. One student points out that as an intern, you are still strongly connected to the educational institution and the lessons you have learned, while as a working journalist you become more dependent on the media institution as you have to receive your income from that organization. On the other hand, students sometimes miss the courage to speak up against experienced journalists ('I don't know how to react yet') although there are examples of students who did raise their point and where the chefs followed them (cf. sections 2 and 4).

Being a journalist

Not only the status of interns is mentioned, but also the status of journalists in general. Some students report negative reactions to their work as a journalist, when they changed their status on LinkedIn to 'journalist' or when they mentioned it in face-to-face conversations. These negative reactions seem to express that all journalists without exception seek sensation, spread fake news, and thus behave unethically. 'You often run into distrust', according to a student. Students feel hurt by these reproaches as these touch the heart of professional journalism according to them, which essentially is the ethical dimension of journalism. At the same time, students admit that mistakes are made also by professional journalists and that professional media should not be exempt from scrutiny (check and double check) either when they are referred to in the reporting.

Being a person

The role of the intern, or of the journalist, could finally be complemented with the role of the individual person with individual convictions and beliefs. A field of tension, therefore, can also be the **own conviction**. For example, two students mentioned that they have a clear opinion about the situation in Israël-Palestina but they were not allowed to let it influence their news reporting because of the requirement of impartiality. That was not an easy task.

Next to convictions, also the individual **character** plays its part. This was expressed, for example in a tension between one's own feelings and the feelings of those involved, or between the demands of (good) journalism ('to dig deeper') and the feelings of those involved ('to spare them'). A few students said they had the impression that they became 'harder' as a journalist. Others made the distinction between 'your capacity as a journalist and your capacity as a person: as a journalist you think differently'. Students try 'to find a balance' between the journalistic job and themselves as a person.

4. Value judgements

Students, as in French-speaking Belgium, have a fairly normative vision of what they consider to be 'good journalism', i.e. journalism that follows ethical norms, even if these norms are sometimes perceived as outdated. They see journalistic ethics as an important part of their professional identity. Not only does the ethical code help the students in their daily routines, they also consider it to be a kind of warranty for the general public for the reliability and quality of professional journalism.

The way they talk about journalistic ethics in the daily routines of their internships, reveals a number of underlying value judgements they have on what 'good journalism' is. They also evaluate the assignments they were given as interns, and the routines in the workplace they were part of.

Students' judgements on the values of journalism

Students find it important to reflect critically on their own work. They mention a number of rules for good journalism, but they also indicate that exceptions to these rules should be possible in specific situations.

As far as the **content** of the news is concerned, according to the students, journalists should have access to all information available. If going undercover and lying about their own identity is the only way to attain the information, this is allowed. Journalists should also sketch the full story, but the students acknowledge that there are time and space limitations. For every story holds: if societal interest is larger than personal interest, the story should be published, but the students reflect carefully and consciously on the added value of revealing names or pictures. The journalistic productions should be accurate and correct, but still understandable for a wide audience. Some students acknowledge that there is a need for accessible and easy-to-read news stories but add that they do not want to make that kind of news themselves. Language use is also mentioned: the language use should be sufficiently nuanced, especially when reporting on delicate matters (e.g. a crime in which the suspect has not been found guilty yet).

As for the **approach of sources and interviewees**, journalists should behave in a respectful and decent way but at the same time hold people accountable for their words and deeds. Some students feel less compassionate than before, they have learned to insist when questioning interviewees and to make people say on camera what they first said off camera. At the same time they have learned that they should be careful, for example in crime cases, not to pass on information on victims which is not yet known by the family. Another example given is where interviewees could not be held accountable for what they said due to their mental state, and where the quotes had to be handled carefully.

For some students, **emotions** (their own emotions as well as those of the people involved) are important in journalism, because without them the tone of the stories would be too detached and there would be no appeal to the audience. Again, others indicate that this kind of journalism is valid in its own right, but that they do not want to practice it themselves.

The students all agree on what journalism should NOT be, i.e. activism like a call for action or for protest, or a mere mirror of what goes on on social media, with all the drama and unchecked information involved. Journalists should not take sides, they should not defend people under attack on social media. Neither should journalists advertise certain brands or products but the students still think it possible to write critically about new information on commercial products.

If the news cannot be brought in a way which sufficiently meets their criteria, the students would prefer not to bring it.

Student judgements on the work environment/the media companies

In their internships, some students found themselves in situations they were not comfortable with. News managers or supervisors would ask for more sensational stories, focusing on the misery of people or highlighting quotes which were not representative for the story. Another example was a case where the face of an interviewee was blurred, but the student thought the interviewee was still recognizable. They had to carry out the assignment, but they evaluate the way journalism was practiced in these newsrooms negatively.

Other negative evaluations had to do with an instance where students did not receive sufficient coaching in reporting on delicate matters, like suicide, or received it too late and with an instance where students made the preparations for news projects, but saw the project taken out of their hands and developed in another way than they had intended it to.

Some students felt they had to follow the instructions of their supervisors, even if they were uncomfortable with the situation. For others, the final responsibility for what is published, is with the journalist who makes the story. They formulate it as 'you always have a choice'. These students gave a few examples of situations where they argued with their supervisors and succeeded to convince them (cf. section 2).

Judgements by others

Some students report that they have felt very bad when interviewees accused them of not rendering the interviewee's words correctly, while they themselves were convinced they had quoted in the proper way.

Also, the students are aware of the fact that journalism is often represented unfavourably. People react in a negative way when they hear the students study journalism or want to be journalists. They are aware of this stigma on journalism, but it does not keep most of them from being enthusiastic about the job.

5. Contemporary issues

In almost all interviews students state that in their opinion the ethical code is predominantly applicable to the traditional legacy media. Working practices to report and to act according to ethical standards are said to be well elaborated for the printed press and specific elements in the codes were designed for the audiovisual media as well. But students experienced that in the digital media sphere, ethical issues got another dimension and that the Code did not offer sufficient supporting guidelines for internet, digital legacy media and social network sites. Students note that the 'reality' that is presented in social media feeds the content of legacy media, and that this relationship poses difficult situations with regard to ethics.

The abundant flow of 'news' on social media poses a challenge for the legacy media, students state. The ethical codes and editorial guidelines to act according to professional standards are struggling with this new reality as they are not yet adapted to this situation. Some students referred to this status as 'the legacy media are lagging behind'.

Students recognize the fact that there are so many types of journalism that one regulatory framework that fits them all is impossible to achieve. Equally, the intertwining of legacy media

adapting to ethical codes with the vast array of ‘news’ items in the digital world without any normative boundaries is an issue that cannot be easily solved.

The students’ observations as expressed in the focus groups are connected with different aspects.

Use of images by journalists

People share a lot of personal content in the digital sphere. They also share a lot of photographic materials that can be retrieved later on by third persons (recruiters, competitors, police, and many other groups and individuals but also by journalists). In the interviews two specific examples were cited.

Firstly, the use of personal data retrieved from social media to give victims a face. The cited example was about an accident in an Italian funicular. Students learned that the family of the little boy that survived the crash gave the permission to publish these pictures but students expressed ethical reflections on this use.

Secondly, students referred to the case of a fugitive man whose picture was used in the media to track him down. In the case of an official/police request for information, the journalistic use of photographs is less restricted. The students noticed that while legacy media acted upon ethical codes and agreements of good practice with police authorities, messages on social media did not take into account the necessary precautions. In the social media ‘news’ there were no restrictions and there was a need felt to display as many details as possible (cf. *infra: social media and ethical behaviour*).

Social media as newsfeed for legacy media

One student gave an example of a situation where social media news was the origin of an interesting news topic, which resulted in a scoop for the medium that was first in finding the message on Facebook.

Students refer to social media as a powerful source for journalists to discover interesting topics and news facts but they also have reservations about the impact of these social platforms that leave legacy media little other choice than go with the hypes and sensationalist news stories. Students gave some examples of news or situations that popped up in social media and that went viral in a split second.

One example quoted in different focus groups was the story of an ordinary man who was filmed without his approval while shouting out his frustration about the fact that a specific product was not available in the supermarket. The images went viral on social media, memes were produced and the legacy media picked up the story soon after. A second example to demonstrate the power of viral distribution on social media was the newsfeed on sexting of three ‘famous’ Flemish personalities.

Students were critical of the so-called news value of these stories and reflected on the dilemma for legacy media whether or not to bring this type of sensationalist news. On the one hand, they raised questions about whether it was appropriate to bring the story that had gone viral and that was already in the open. On the other hand, they reflected on the way the story finally was presented: without the full names of the persons involved, although the majority of the audience knew the names from social media content. Some of the students assumed that legacy media had to fulfill their role with more restrictions than social media thus reducing the value of interest for their audiences. Some students even contended that the more ‘conservative’ (read: ethical) attitude of legacy media might harm the credibility of these media as audiences might suspect journalists to protect certain groups in society and to give them a preferential approach, while social media, in contrast, can provide the audience with the whole story and without any content limitations.

Some focus groups went further in reflecting on this difficult situation: should professional journalism be playing in another league? Should legacy media bring these topics with more

background information, or with more reflection? Should they give information on the detrimental outcomes of some social media stories? The overarching line of these reflections was that students expected a more ethical approach from legacy media than from social media (cf. infra).

Social media and ethical behaviour

With regard to viral news originating from social media, the use of images was discussed as well by the students. Reflecting again on the news story on the angry citizen who lost his temper in the supermarket, students agree that this man's reputation was severely harmed. On the one hand, by social media using footage without his consent. On the other hand, because social media used his image without any 'blurring'. Students recognized that, once the legacy media picked up the story, they 'blurred' the pictures to protect the man's identity. At the same time, the students were critical saying that blurring did not help since the image was widely spread already by the social media. They agree, however, that legacy media had to continue to blur images because – as legacy media – they have a responsibility towards society. In this respect, they show a qualitative normative framing of legacy media (regardless of whether it is print, broadcast or online). So they strongly believe that legacy media can tap from the newsfeed of social media but likewise that ethical professional standards of legacy media should remain on the forefront. An interesting quote in this respect is that of a student saying: 'we, as journalists in the classical definition, are perhaps no longer the first who report specific news stories, but we make a selection in the endless stream of meaningful and less meaningful news items, we have to inform and to contextualize, we do not have to follow in the direction of shaming and blaming, in the direction of mere sensationalism.'

This quality driven approach is also mirrored in a quote that refers to the newsroom practice of the Instagram platform of the public broadcaster aiming at young audiences. According to the intern, this platform brings news that is accompanied with 'good advice' with regard to ethical audience behaviour. On the sensitive topic of sexting, the newsroom added information hinting to the fact that this type of social news messages should not be shared because of their viral character and the excessively detrimental consequences for the people involved. In line with this, the intern holds a plea for the inclusion of educational elements in the news for specific audiences, for example for children and early teens.

Conclusions

Students consider ethics both in an abstract way (as a set of norms and rules) and a very concrete way (in their professional practices). Their internships helped to make ethics more concrete, but they made students' representations also more fluid as the internship experiences made students aware both of the central place of ethics in journalism and of the unavoidable tensions between the ethical dimension and divergent other dimensions. The business model of the media institution and its organizational modalities (organization culture, communication, leadership) appeared as the most important determinants next to source and news characteristics and personal (individual) elements. Time pressure came to the fore as the most quoted 'threat' of ethical journalism.

Even if the Code is not always deemed adequate, for example in dealing with social media, the existence in itself of a set of ethical rules is not questioned by the students. On the contrary, the ethical code is considered essential to professional journalism. It is interwoven with journalistic routines, qualitative journalism and correct behaviour towards others (sources, audiences). Many specific examples prove students take a critical attitude during the internships and make deliberate decisions on how to practice 'good journalism'.

The results of the focus group research in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, are very similar to the results of the focus groups in the French-speaking part of the country. The most noticeable difference between the two groups of students is their estimation of the influence of public relations communication on (ethical) journalism. Whereas the French-speaking students perceived the pressure of PR as a threat to ethical journalism, Dutch-speaking students tend to relativize this as something they can deal with. They consider the general commercial and competitive environment – with its stress on speed and sensationalism – in which all media function to be more threatening than the influence of PR which is deemed 'too obvious'.

It must also be taken into account that the conditions wherein the focus groups in both parts of Belgium took place were not exactly the same. The focus groups in French-speaking Belgium were conducted between September and November 2019. This implies that also the internships of French-speaking students took place in 2019 and were not affected by the Corona pandemic. Dutch-speaking students, however, did their internships in spring 2021. Due to the 'Corona measures' students were forced to work (partly or largely) from home while their (face to face) contacts with colleagues were reduced to a minimum though with major differences between the media. The pandemic also reduced the supply of internships, which meant that a number of students ended up in places other than purely editorial offices. For example, the ombudsman service of the public broadcaster gave a number of students a fallback option, so that they still got a unique look behind the scenes that was linked to ethical issues.

More generally, the starting position of students in Flanders is not the same as that of French-speaking students. Students in French-speaking Belgium accumulate internships up to a year, sometimes in divergent media organizations or types of media. Flemish students who have 'only' a one-year master's degree dispose of a smaller volume of time to carry out an internship. Hence their judgments about media other than the one where they worked are often no more than opinions without practical testing. Despite these differences, it is striking that they have a lot more in common than they differ from one another and that the Flemish students prove to have had sufficient opportunities to be able to form sound opinions on the issue of journalistic ethics in the workplace.

The findings equally have a lot in common with previous studies on journalism students' relationships with ethics.

An internship in journalism education appears as crucial not only in order to master the journalistic profession but also in order to fully understand the ethical dimension of journalism. Conway and Groshek (2009) observed significant changes among students with journalistic internship experience on their concern for journalistic ethics. An internship is an important 'learning experience' whereby 'the more students gain practical experience, the less absolute their ethical perceptions' (Reinardy & Moore, 2007). Based on our research, we cannot make any statements about the length of the internship, but we can confirm that internship is perceived as a crucial learning experience that causes a shift from a merely abstract reasoning about ethics before the internship towards a flexible deliberation during or after internship. At the same time, this 'shift' or this 'internalization' of ethics cannot take place without a solid base laid during education. Several students point out the usefulness of academic attention to professional ethics in the first place. Together with Conway and Groshek (2009, p. 480) we can state that 'both coursework and applied media experiences are crucial to integrating and improving the ethical decision making of future journalists'.

Newsroom learning appears as the 'number one influence' on ethical views of professional journalists as well (Weaver et al., 2007). Media superiors and coworkers also rank high (and above teachers and professors) found Weaver et al. (2007). Our findings seem to confirm this observation. Students consult colleagues rather than the Code in itself. De Cock et al. (2013) came to the same conclusion in their study on Flemish professional journalists reporting on victims. A strong correlation between newsroom discussion and ethical awareness was also found by Voakes (1997, 1998). An organizational culture that leaves room for discussion and consultation is a good instrument to ensure ethical considerations play their part. The presence of an ombudsperson is another. The ombuds, in turn, systematically and directly refers to the Code in their advices and opinions.

The future certainly poses challenges to ethical journalism. In line with Mackay (2012), we can state that the Internet is posing new ethical dilemmas as journalists, for example, struggle to use social media. But based on students' reflection on this matter, we are hopeful that these dilemmas will also be resolved. Students agree that the (mainstream) media should not just 'copy' the social media and their lack of ethics. While social media can be a powerful source of news, according to the students, the traditional media offer a qualitative approach by acting as powerful gatekeepers in the flood of news items, rumours, arguments and opinions as displayed in social media. Students recognize the added value of fact checking, of contextualizing and of linking with societal relevance. Summarized in a concluding quote, one student phrased it as: 'We, as journalists, do not have to mirror social media, we have no need to adapt to that social media logic, our codes of ethics and our newsroom practices are our set of quality markers'. Students argue that adaptations and refinements might be useful, although they are skeptical that it will be a manageable task to elaborate ethical guidelines for so many forms of journalism and media formats. But they are positive towards what they call a 'modernization of ethics'.

When we consider journalism students as the future of journalism, ethical journalism in Dutch-speaking Belgium is not endangered but alive.

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3. JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN INTERNSHIP AND ETHICS IN FRANCE

Cappuccio, A., Quiroga, C., Tixier F (2021). *Journalism students in internship and deontology in France*.

Introduction

This report presents the results of a collective research study on the representations and practices of journalism deontology in a pre-professional context which was conducted by focus groups with journalism students in France. Seven focus groups were conducted by three researchers between June and September 2021 with 28 students from five French journalism schools offering a master's degree in journalism: four schools acknowledged by the professional bodies ('reconnues par la profession') : EJCAM, EJDG, ESJ Lille, IJBA; and a specialised master's degree (Master's degree in «Journalism: reporting and investigation» at Sciences Po Rennes).

This research is part of the *Media Councils in the Digital Age* project, coordinated by the AIPCE (*Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe*), following a study conducted in 2019 in French-speaking Belgium (Tixier et al.), with a comparative focus at the European level. The objectives of the research are the same as for the initial study: to analyse how trainee journalists are confronted with deontology, how they represent these issues, and how they behave in relation to the norms, deviate from them or adjust them. We wanted to determine whether deontology is present, and in what ways, in the accounts of the professional integration practices students who have had an internship experience. Questioning their deontological representations and practices is of particular interest: it sheds light on the perceptions and questions relating to deontology expressed by journalists in the process of discovering and adapting to the professional world and to the professional practices that result from it.

The students' accounts of how ethical standards and principles are - or are not - implemented during their internships allow us to observe their application, but also their possible questioning, or even non-compliance, by the students of journalism. This research aims to provide a better understanding not only of the daily ethical choices and reflections of the actors interviewed, the changing representations of the deontology they convey, but also of the factors that contribute to these challenges such as, for example, the editorial identity of the media, its economic environment, its managerial organisation, the collective dynamics within the editorial offices, the way in which the individual sees his/her career, as well as their professional ethics.

This study is not intended to provide an assessment of the application of deontology by the media or of the teaching of deontology in schools of journalism. We would also like to remind that the participants in the focus groups are students at the very beginning of their careers and that their view of deontology is based only on a theoretical framework taught during their training as well as on a still very young and recent experience in the field. Thus, they cannot be considered as valid and objective scientific observers, as their level of knowledge of the concepts related to deontology and its criticism are varied, their knowledge of the norms more or less precise and their postures towards the journalistic profession different. Contrary to the numerous quantitative research studies (by questionnaires) regularly carried out on the adherence to the principles of journalistic deontology,

both at the national and international levels (cf. Report for Flanders), our study is part of a qualitative approach and analysis of the discourses collected during the focus groups.

The researchers who conducted the focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide in which several themes were to be addressed in the form of an open discussion within the group. The students were invited to discuss their representations of journalistic deontology, and then to give examples related to their field experience(s). For practical reasons related to the students' and researchers' schedules and the corona crisis, most of the focus groups were organised online via Zoom. Only one focus group was conducted in person. In some cases, the students were gathered in the same room and the researcher was online; in other cases, all the participants were at home and connected online. Due to the context of the pandemic and distance learning over the last 18 months, we did not observe any major difficulty in organising these discussions remotely (thanks to powerful software and participants used to interacting with each other online). Although the impossibility of organising the focus groups according to the «usual» face-to-face methods had initially worried the researchers, the practice and the results show that the transposition of this methodology online did not pose any major problem for the collection of data and their analysis in the course of the study. A total of 28 students (between 21 and 35 years old) took part in seven focus groups with 3 to 5 participants each, for an average duration of 75 minutes (duration of 60 to 90 minutes approximately). The focus groups were moderated by a researcher/journalism teacher from outside the students' training course, so that no hierarchical bias would be present in order to guarantee that the context was one of discussion, and by no means a test. All exchanges were recorded and fully transcribed in an extensive manner¹. It should be noted that it was difficult to recruit participants for the various focus groups (our investigation shows a lack of time and interest in ethics-related issues). However, at the end of several focus groups, the students expressed their satisfaction for having the opportunity to debate professional ethic issues, and the dense discussions recorded testify to this interest.

As mentioned earlier, four of the five courses belong to the 14 journalism courses acknowledged by the Commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi des journalistes (CPNEJ), an organization that gathers representatives of publishers' organisations and journalists' unions. We conducted one focus group in Bordeaux, two in Grenoble, one in Lille and two in Marseille. The fifth course is a master's degree in journalism in Rennes, where we conducted one focus group. All the courses offer a Master's degree (120 ECTS). At the time of the focus groups, all the students had had at least one year of training and had completed at least one internship in a media company (several in the vast majority of cases). Due to the fact that the curriculum of acknowledged journalism schools includes compulsory internships in the regional daily press (PQR), the vast majority of the students interviewed had had two months' experience in a PQR title. Many of them had also had other pre-professional experiences in other media, at national or community levels.

Because of our comparative approach, this report follows the division into five themes identified during the initial study in French-speaking Belgium, namely «representations» (answers to the question «For you, what is deontology?» and evolutions observed during the discussion), «negotiations» (reflections linking theoretical learning and practical experience and the adjustments/arrangements to which they give rise), «tensions» (situations in which deontology may come into conflict with other issues and which may give rise to different interpretations) judgements» (value or critical judgements about journalism and the media in relation to deontology, with an explicit normative background) and «contemporary issues» (related to the current media context and issues of journalistic deontology). Within these thematic sections, some of the sub-themes are similar to

¹ We would like to thank Emmanuelle Lecerf and Charly Pohu for the remarkable work done in a very short time.

those identified in the French-speaking Belgium report and others emerged from the focus group analysis for France.

1. Representations

The analysis of this first theme aims to understand better how students in journalism training represent for themselves, conceive and define deontology from a more theoretical point of view at first.

The words used to describe and explain what deontology is are numerous: “rules”, which can be “scientific”, “laws” and a form of “legal framework”, “values”, personal or moral, “ethical principles”, an “ideal”, a “red line” or a “limit” or “safeguard” are those that come up most often. On the whole, they show that deontology is not clearly defined and that there is a shared difficulty in defining what it really is.

A set of rules: a normative framework that is both constraining and protecting

First of all, deontology is seen as a general framework within which to practice journalism, and in that sense, it is a set of rules, compared to the scientific or legal framework most of the time, that determine what to do, but especially what not to do.

“For me, deontology represents almost scientific rules of journalism. You have to know how to go out and find sources, how to protect them, how to write a story within certain rules of ‘you can’t say that or not like that.’” (FG1)

Definitions of deontology are thus related to production routines (verification of facts, cross-checking of sources, place of the adversary) but also to values (honesty, objectivity, truth, independence, dignity, general interest) associated with journalism.

“And the limits we set for ourselves in the case of our activity, what we forbid ourselves to do or not to do, which in relation to this principle, I put questions of transparency, independence, questions of integrity, honesty in what we do, and honesty in relation to ourselves and our own a priori, to question one’s place, our place in the subject, in order to do so transparently, and this allows us to get rid of the idea of militant/not militant, committed/not committed, and to start with the idea that in fact all content is committed, just there are some who assume it, and there are some who don’t, and that’s the difference” (FG4)

While it provides a framework and limits that can constrain professional practice, deontology also provides protection, in that by following the rules, journalists prove their integrity and remain within a well-defined framework. It also helps to prevent deviant behavior and attacks on journalism (judgement by peers and distrust by the public).

“I was thinking in particular of the notion of a safeguard too, a little bit, it also frames our practice in the field, because we have a responsibility too as journalists, with regard to the perception of the profession, with regard to this professional side and here it is also a safeguard against certain behaviour, if we can say it in a very vague way, and then it is something that also protects us, there is really this double aspect I think and it is an important issue also in terms of credibility too [...]” (FG5)

Confusions about ethics

Since it is associated with a set of rules and standards, deontology is often compared, more or less extensively, to law. For many students, it is thus part of a legal framework.

“Deontology for me is related to law. [Hesitation] It’s what as a journalist you can do and what you can’t do.” (FG5)

One of the reference texts in France, the Munich Charter, is often mentioned (more or less precisely) by students, who also often admit they do not really know it. They associate deontology with a set of laws that must be respected, while recognizing their moral character.

On many occasions, the term ethics was also used by the participants, who gave a personal dimension to deontology and show that there can be differences of interpretation between individuals.

“[...] for me, deontology is like the ethical principles that we adopt in the context of our activity. It goes back to the idea that it is notably variable geometry.” (FG4)

From this point of view, deontology is compared to moral values and is specific to each person, following one’s “convictions” (FG6). As one of the interviewees said, “there is not a single deontology, each person has his or her own one” (FG6). There is thus an amalgam between deontology, which is the responsibility of the professional group, and ethics, which is the responsibility of the individual. And in doing so, the students often express a very normative and more restrictive vision of deontology than it really is, which leads them to make judgements about the practices of their peers (cf. part 4).

It is therefore an “accommodating” deontology that respondents often define, with a possible gradation according to individuals: one can place the cursor in different places according to one’s ethics and moral values, but also according to one’s own experience.

Theory vs. practice: confrontation with the field

The students generally recognize that deontology is made up of major principles that are taught to them as part of their training. But for them, it remains difficult to apprehend and to understand deontology without field practice. Therefore, they largely value field practice and press genres related to information gathering rather than analysis.

“There’s always a difference between theory and practice. We’re here with big rules and so on. In the field, the rules ... We are always told that the field is always right, so the rules you can have, you can have them in your head, etc. The field is the field, it’s the field that decides.” (FG3)

There is a recurring opposition between theory and practice: what they learn in class is insufficient when they find themselves in the field, where they have to deal with an entirely different reality. They often find it difficult, if not impossible, to follow punctiliously deontology on a daily basis in a professional setting. To a certain extent, they emphasize that the deontology they learned in school is not grounded.

“When we study deontology in class, it seems simple, clear, obvious, it’s a bit like Human Rights, it’s clear, it’s neat, that’s how it should be. And then finally on the ground it’s different, there are actors who must be respected, taken into account, you have to keep the newspaper on track, to fill the pages, there are many things that... And in the end I realised that deontology is adaptable according to this.” (FG2)

This experience gained over time, in the field, can be ambivalent: while some learn deontology “as you go along”, and it is by practicing journalism that one can master it, others point out that some of their older colleagues have a looser approach and respect less deontology. This bares the implicit idea that deontology must adapt to the conditions under which journalism is produced.

“In school they are very present but they are a bit uprooted, in the professional environment, when we refer to deontology we seem a bit like bookworms, who have their heads in the charts, and there is a real contrast, therefore, between the two.” (FG5)

Finally, the use of numerous anecdotes on specific cases (asking before recording people, image reproduction rights, respect for anonymity, etc.) makes it possible to explain by example, according to the interviewees, what the deontology refers to.

“It makes me think directly of sources, respect for sources, particularly in terms of anonymity, etc. It is the first thing I think of [...]. I couldn’t define it, but I know that it is ‘essential’ in the profession of journalism, it’s a bit of a common thread we’ll say.” (FG7)

The issue of professionalism: building credibility

Respecting deontology means not taking the easy way out, and trying to achieve a certain ideal of journalistic professionalism. In this sense, deontology means doing a balanced and complex job: it requires time and reflection, and cannot be done under pressure and in a hurry. These are also rules that the profession must impose on itself to maintain a certain credibility.

“For me deontology refers to all the rules that are applied to journalists, so both the rules that are imposed on him, but also the rules that they must impose on themselves.” (FG1)

References to the notion of professionalism make it possible to draw a line between the professionals and the others, the “good” journalists and the others, and thus to delimit their professional competence and to enhance the skills acknowledged by their (future) diploma. In this way, deontology is often associated with an idealized vision of journalism, particularly in terms of investigative reporting.

In the end, it is not a positive definition of deontology that is given by the students (what it is) but rather a negative one (what it is not or what it should not be). The vagueness around these questions also seems useful, and to some extent maintained: it allows them to make a more “adapted” and

“nuanced” use of the deontology, and not to be blocked in their work. It could even be argued that, as a cardinal tool of the professional journalist, deontology in a way represents the hazy professionalism (‘professionnalisme du flou’[1]) which is characteristic of journalism.

2. Negotiations

This theme shows how journalistic deontology is seen as a space for negotiation in the journalist’s professional relationships with sources, peers and the public. The blurring of the boundaries of the journalistic profession is also expressed by the students when it comes to mobilising ethical standards in the field. Indeed, while journalistic deontology is described by students as a guide to good practice, as the element that differentiates ‘good’ journalists from others, its perceived shifting nature gives rise to negotiation, and even accommodation, when practising journalism in a professional context. This leads to reflections on the ethical training they receive as part of their course, on the constraints of the field and their professional experiences, and on how they can articulate the two.

Students readily acknowledge the need for training in journalistic deontology, which they perceive as a guideline for good practice, and which they are, on the whole, not very familiar with. But they seem to feel a real gap with the field work they have had to deal with: indeed, deontology seems to them to be constrained by journalistic working conditions. Respecting the material and temporal conditions of production of journalistic content seems to the students to be incompatible with the application “as is” of the ethical standards they know. This is why they point to certain external elements that can lead to an adaptability of the deontology according to various factors stemming from the professional context. The negotiation between the gap felt and expressed by the students between their training in deontology and their professional practice and the conditions of the latter is based on the subjective, interpretative and malleable dimension of ethical standards.

The interpretative dimension of deontology

Some students describe ethical standards as precise, clear, but open to different interpretations in different situations. For others, the very reading of the ethical charters can lead to variable individual questions and interpretations.

“There are also terms where we have not paid too much attention, we are told to be honest, but with regard to what? The editorial line? The truth? The facts? [...]. Perhaps it comes from the profession itself, which is built on a case-by-case basis. There is no recipe for writing an article, it depends on each situation [...].” (FG2)

The subjective and individual dimension of deontology is thus particularly highlighted to justify its malleable and changing nature.

This interpretation of standards can also be guided by external factors, which stem from the students’ perception of their professional practice but also from their mastery of ethical standards. The medium in which the students carried out their various placements seems to be a crucial variable for them when it comes to mobilising ethics.

“I think they [deontological standards] can be translated differently depending on the

media, because already we can talk about the type of media, in radio, TV, or written press, the techniques for collecting a testimony or writing an article are not the same, the needs are not the same, so in radio we can use ways of approaching people or dealing with a subject that we would not use with another subject. [...] I think that everyone adapts the rules to their media and editorial line, to the way they investigate, to their contacts, etc.”
(FG2)

Television seems to be the medium which, in the eyes of the interviewees, requires the most work to adapt deontology to its specific constraints (especially technical), and which requires the most effort from students in terms of negotiating between their vision of deontology and their professional practice.

Apart from the medium of practice, journalists’ perceptions of their sources may also prompt them to negotiate their deontological conduct. On the subject of an article about a book that the student found to be of poor quality, but whose author had seemed sympathetic, the interviewee said:

“[...] I did something a bit neutral, without trashing her but without going her way.”
(FG1)

Norms can also be negotiated according to the attitude of sources towards students, which leads them to rethink their deontological posture.

Deontology is thus perceived as being applicable on a case-by-case basis, whether it is a function of the student’s individual representations, the conditions imposed by the medium of practice or the relationship with the sources. This subjective and interpretative dimension of deontology has sometimes led them, during their professional experiences, to more or less deliberately fail to respect these rules.

Negligence and other breaches to deontology

Students set their own limits and judge for themselves what is and is not acceptable in terms of transgression of deontological standards. While some students refer to deontology as a guide and use it to be more demanding of themselves (FG5), others have determined how far they are able to go without, in their opinion, compromising their integrity or the quality of their work.

“(...) in my internship at [media] I have sometimes, not changed things, but for example not asked someone’s age or first name, and said that she would make a very good ‘Beatrice’. And so she’ll be called Beatrice and she’ll be 42. Or I don’t say the age, or I say ‘that woman who was with ...’ so we work it out.” (FG1)

The gradation in the evaluation of the seriousness of the breaches of deontology that the students were led to make is supported by the subjective and interpretative dimension of the standards. If the practice of immersion and hidden camera are among the accepted and even valued breaches (FG3), certain limits vary from one respondent to another, particularly with regard to relations with sources and in the case of gifts offered by the latter to journalists: if the limit is not to be crossed for some...

“For example, I was in the Aude region, so there are only winegrowers and we’re going to do stories, and they offer a bottle, or serve a glass... I refuse, systematically, because it’s a gift and everything. There are other colleagues who accept [...]” (FG4)

It is more easily negotiable for others.

“[...] It depends on the gift. A book offered, which will be the basis of the article, is a bit more legitimate than the bikes at the end just to please, which is a form of influence, we may not talk about corruption but it is still an important influence. For books, it seems more normal to be offered a book to write about than to be offered a piece of clothing or a console, because the book has a bit of a legitimate, intellectual, interesting culture, you learn things.” (FG1)

All these failures and infringements are ultimately part of a wider reflection and confrontation of their ethics with their professional practice, whether it is a question of reconciling their personal and political opinions with their work (FG1), or of taking it upon themselves to produce a promotional item (FG1, FG3). But it can also come from external constraints, for example, requests from peers or hierarchy, which lead them to transgress deontological standards against their will:

“I was told ‘Here you are, you say you are a journalist for France 3, you prepare the programme, it hasn’t been accepted by the channel yet but we are going to pretend that it has been accepted’. [...] I was told: ‘You’re lying, you say you’re a journalist for France Télé. That way, you’ll get testimonials.’” (FG3)

Time constraints may also force students to bend the rules of deontology.

“Media] (...) had done a paper on an anti-vax radio station, and in fact, when this information came out, it was in the evening at 7pm, we were getting ready to leave, and we said to ourselves: “we must write a paper anyway”. And in fact, I didn’t realise it at the time, but I had heard this anti-vax radio on my way back from a report: “yes, I heard that radio”. So we were looking for testimonies, so we went looking for testimonies of people who had heard it or listened to it on the networks, but we also inserted my testimony in the paper, because I had witnessed it and I thought about things while listening to it. Instead of putting “the colleague” or something else, we put “holidaymaker returning from a report” and so we were: “how far can we accommodate [hesitation], how far can we distort reality?” (FG4)

Respondents also consider that the relationship between the media (especially regional or specialised media, such as the sports press) and sources can lead to a redefinition and adaptation of their deontological stance. These considerations lead to a negotiation between the benefits and risks of transgressing deontological standards.

“I find that in these questions of deontology there is a cost-benefit calculation to be made, the media will say to themselves, ‘it’s worth it, it’s not worth it’. (...) So there is this little calculation in fact.” (FG1)

The malleability of deontology therefore sometimes gives rise to exchanges of various kinds on deontology with different actors, such as the hierarchy or peers.

The deliberative nature of deontology

Deontology is thus generally considered by the students as a flexible material that leads to exchanges and discussions in various contexts. For example, with their hierarchy or peers to clarify a confusion about a norm:

“I know that the first article I wrote was on the conspiracy lists for the regional and departmental elections (...) and there was the question of names, in fact. (...) it was people who didn't have a political career for the most part, but who displayed themselves publicly, who put their names on the leaflets, so there was really a real debate about whether their names were put on the leaflets, in fact. And that was the first debate I remember, that was the first article I wrote and I didn't know what to do. In the end we put the names of the heads of lists in each region and we didn't go into detail about the other people who were on the list.” (FG7)

These deliberations can also sometimes lead to disagreement and negotiation between the student and his/her interlocutor over the mobilisation of a norm, and sometimes even lead to a conflictual relationship within the editorial staff. Despite the numerous situations of tension they report, some participants acknowledge that on certain occasions the outcome of these situations has been “constructive”. For example, some of them mentioned exchanges with editors-in-chief that went as far as questioning.

“But it was interesting, it was constructive because I think he also asked himself questions, and then he came back to me and told me that it had made him think, you know, it was really constructive, which you don't necessarily have with everyone.” (FG6)

Exchanges are also brought about when students need guidance or support, when they have questions of a deontological nature, and in particular when the negotiation concerns the relationship with sources or the positioning vis-à-vis the field of communication.

“I was invited to a town hall event, they said: ‘it's a consultation meeting’, in fact it was communication, I made a short statement to say: ‘a consultation that is not a consultation’. I asked my colleagues what they thought, whether they supported me. They supported me, we thought about the consequences it could have, and we published it. [...] I wanted to be sure that my colleague would support me if there were consequences. It's a way of being supported and protected and knowing you're doing your job well.” (FG4)

The support of their peers is particularly important in making decisions related to deontology, an importance linked to their precarious position and hierarchical status in the newsroom.

Deontology is generally perceived by students as a set of rules that have no real normative power in France, and is therefore seen as malleable and adaptable. This allows students to take it on board and create their own codes to govern their individual practices. This returns deontology to its condition

of journalistic ‘myth’, which does not allow it to govern the profession, but does initiate reflections and exchanges within the journalistic field on good or bad professional practices, and thus, in fact, to position journalism vis-à-vis other fields (le Bohec, 2000).

3. Tensions

The accounts of everyday life in the internship shared by the respondents reveal that their unclear conception of deontology leads to situations of tension. These situations occur particularly when interns have to confront the practices of their colleagues in the field, which they often consider to be in dissonance with their ideals.

The tensions vary according to the journalistic culture of the media in which the participants have worked. Being young and inexperienced trainees also raises many tensions, both within and outside the newsroom. Finally, the fine line that sometimes separates journalism from communication was also a source of discomfort for the participants during their passage through the professional world.

Depending on the medium

In the eyes of the respondents, the malleability of deontology goes beyond the individual level. The adaptation of codes also takes place at a more general level and affects the media structure itself. The identity of the media and its editorial line, its journalistic culture and the professional values that stem from it, or its economic model are all factors that influence the application of deontology.

“But the real constraint is the media, in fact, the media for which we work, i.e. the deontology practices of [media] will not be the same as those of [media], for example, I think that our real constraint will be with our employer. It is he who will lay down the basics of how they work and it is up to us to adapt to that in fact.” (FG3)

Tensions arise when the identity of the media as perceived by the students and the practices of the editorial staff are in dissonance. For example, a news agency, positioned at the beginning of the news production and dissemination chain, must, in the eyes of some respondents, be particularly meticulous in checking facts. One participant who completed an internship in this type of structure testifies to his discomfort when he was unable to verify information that the editorial staff wanted to publish anyway.

“We were sure that this person was dead, but not 100%, we had no concrete proof. And the bureau editor [...] had told me to confirm it anyway, and I was a bit embarrassed to confirm a death without being sure.” (FG1)

The political orientation of the editorial line can also influence the adaptation of deontology codes in some media. Some students testify to the discomfort this generates for them, like this participant who admits that she does not know how to position herself

“When I spoke to the person in charge on the phone, he gave me his shopping list of what he wanted to appear in the article, and then I realised the affiliations between certain newspapers and parties, particularly left-wing ones, given that [media] is communist, and that at the deontology level I didn’t really check if it was OK.” (FG2)

Some formats also lend themselves to deontological circumventions. This is the case, for example, with continuous news, particularly that broadcast on the audiovisual media and the Internet. One respondent mentions, for example, the “bastardisation of news” (FG1), which would prevent the respect of principles such as the verification of information or the respect of the anonymity of sources.

Trainee status

Faced with the structural malleability of deontology, trainees, who lack experience, feel they have little room for manoeuvre. This status is one of the main sources of tension revealed during the discussions. Tensions arise when students are confronted with what they consider to be ‘bad journalistic practices’ from a deontology point of view. However, lack of experience or self-confidence, coupled with a preoccupation with employment, often prevents students from expressing their disagreements. Students report that constructive exchanges can still occur when they dare to express their views.

The discussions highlight the illegitimacy felt by the vast majority of respondents in relation to their superiors or more experienced journalists. This feeling prevents them from questioning certain requests made by the hierarchy or the practices of colleagues that they feel go against their own representations of deontology codes.

“When we are trainees, we do what we are asked without asking too many questions, because we are not yet journalists, we are not legitimate to say what we want to do or not.” (FG2)

In addition to this feeling of illegitimacy, there is the issue of professional integration. For many students, the internships they complete represent a first step in building a career in the professional world to which they aspire. Accommodating the “ways of doing things” of the editorial offices where they do their internships seems to be a prerequisite for finding a place in the industry. Even if this means sometimes having to deviate from the deontology codes as they see them.

“I think that experience and our age play a role, because it is also, at a complicated time, professionally, to insert oneself professionally. I think there are also people who might go against their own deontology and ethics to keep their job for example.” (FG6)

The feeling of illegitimacy also seems to be a problem with sources. Many participants say that they disguise their trainee status or present themselves outright as journalists when they have to meet sources in order to avoid jeopardising their chances of getting answers. But the use of such practices raises questions for those who consider them contrary to deontology codes.

“I had to say that I was a journalist to advance my investigation. If I said I was on an internship, I wasn’t going to get testimonies that I was a journalist for [media]. [...] Yeah, you have to deal with it but I was a bit confused, I didn’t dare.” (FG3)

Only one participant admitted to presenting himself as a journalist. He considers that this practice is totally legitimate and does not represent any departure from deontology. However, he acknowledges that the acquisition of this legitimacy is strictly linked to the work environment, to the trust and autonomy granted by his superiors.

“No, in any case I did not present myself as an intern, I am a journalist, and then it is the case, ok my contract is an internship, but the fact is that we replace journalists in post, and we have the same missions as journalists, so I was a journalist.” (FG6)

Journalism and communication

Another source of tension that emerges from the focus groups is the often shifting boundary between journalism and communication. While most participants consider that communication “is not journalistic work” (FG3), the discussions reveal that the design of content assimilated to communication or advertising is very often part of the editorial missions entrusted to the interns. They are thus faced with a contradiction between what is expected, both by the hierarchy and by the sources, and the representation they have of the deontology codes.

Having to distinguish between the two is all the more difficult given the blurring of the line between communication and journalism for some respondents. For example, one student wonders where the line between “propaganda” and “opinion journalism” lies (FG3). Another questioned the supposed emptiness of communicative content, wondering whether it was not, in some cases, a “service to the person” (FG4).

“It’s really this proximity sometimes between journalism and communication, [hesitation] the border is very porous [...] the problem is not that the communicator is doing her job and wants to make me say things, the problem is that if I copy and paste, I’m doing communication and not journalism.” (FG5)

The use of communication and/or advertising content is very closely linked to the economic balance of the media in which the students work. This content appears to them almost as an inevitability, something that is indispensable to guarantee the economic stability of the media. This is particularly true for emerging media, specialised media or media in great economic difficulty, for which “there is not always a choice” even if it is “sad” or even “frightening” (FG2). The use of these practices nevertheless raises many questions of deontology.

“There were journalists who did nothing but that, only relaying publicity stuff, and that’s also where the money came from to keep the paper going, so I’m not saying that it was bad in itself, but it bothered me in any case to have such a large share for communication when we claimed to be a newspaper”. (FG1)

Tense situations also arise when students have to meet with communication professionals or sources who see media coverage as an advertising opportunity. One participant explains this conflation of information and communication by the fact that the interests of sources and journalists are “divergent by nature” (FG3).

“There are already two activities in the same newspaper, a commercial aspect and a journalistic aspect, and people don’t distinguish between them, and in fact we are taken for advertisers most of the time by people, and then people say: ‘I’m not going to put any advertisement in [media] because people take me apart.’” (FG4)

Even if they can be problematic, relations with communication officers or advertisers are nevertheless necessary in the eyes of some respondents. The difficulty they face is all the more important: they have to carry out their journalistic work while taking care not to offend these people, particularly insofar as they can block access to certain information later on, as one participant testified (FG6).

The evocation of situations of tension experienced in the field reveals a set of value judgements made by the participants, based on their conception of deontology. However, these judgements are not limited to isolated experiences. They are often aimed at journalism and the media world in general.

4. Judgements

Despite the vagueness of the students' understanding of the set of codes of journalistic deontology, they do not hesitate to draw on them to make value judgements about the profession and the media world in general. However unclear it may be to students, deontology thus acquires a normative character allowing them to establish what does or does not correspond to 'good journalistic practice'.

These value judgements make up a body of work that has been developed in a personal and subjective way under the term 'deontology'. This is most often related to personal ethics, or even moral principles, and allows for the evaluation of journalistic information production processes.

The first set of judgements made by the respondents concerns the professional values of each media, especially in a contemporary context marked by economic constraints. Criticism was also expressed towards the deontology standards themselves, especially with regard to their lack of adaptation to journalistic practice in the field. Finally, many students are critical of their deontology training, which they consider to be perfunctory and disconnected from the field.

Judgement of the media and their professional values

The economic constraints experienced by the entire media ecosystem are pointed out by the vast majority of participants as responsible for the deontology breaches observed in many newsrooms. Many of them consider that the choices made by certain structures to alleviate their economic difficulties can influence the editorial line or even journalistic practices. The question of the funding model, especially in the specialised media, comes up several times. The points of view converge on the infringement of independence represented by the financing by actors from the sector covered by the media, especially in fields such as sport, fashion or economy. And this is true regardless of the size of the structure.

"I find it complicated to talk about a sector if you are financed by it. [...] This is a problem for the general press, but even more so for the specialist press. It poses a problem in terms of conflict of trust." (FG1)

Others mention a daily work routine marked by the injunction to be productive and point to the infringement of deontological codes that this can cause. Many agree that the lack of time prevents journalists from thinking about deontology issues and looking critically at their own practices.

Strong criticisms were also made of practices associated with time constraints, such as “news bastardisation”, “micro-trotters” and “ambiance”. The testimonies of some students reveal that these can introduce bias in the treatment of news. Journalists who do not have the time to go to the sources then risk producing news content based on their own point of view.

“And, it happened during an anti-pass protest [...], where there are firemen who arrived, and the journalist didn’t do her job. That is to say, she just made a catastrophic portrait of the firemen, but at no time did she go to see them. At no point did she go and talk to them, it was just a mood piece and it looked like she was writing her article from a balcony. It wasn’t right at all. But there you have it, it’s a lot of things that we observe too, especially on the web and in the regional daily press (Presse quotidienne régionale, PQR).” (FG6)

Value judgements also vary according to the type of content and the derogations from deontology codes to which they may be subject. The tensions felt with regard to continuous audiovisual information and the practices specific to it (cf. section 3) bring out negative judgements. On the contrary, the investigative work is, in the eyes of some respondents, more in line with deontological standards. In this sense, one student also highlights the work of public radio.

The relationship with sources as envisaged in some newsrooms or by some journalists also raises many criticisms. Some consider that collusion with sources is also an obstacle to media independence. This was particularly highlighted by participants who had done an internship in local structures, and age also seemed to influence the nature of the relationship.

“On the local I find that there is still something that remains, of the journalist who did not have the favours, but a quality of life, and yes for him it was normal. In my local there was a journalist of 80 years old, he thought it was quite normal that they came to offer me things to write the article.” (FG1)

Deontology also serves as a normative support for students who are led to question the status of local press correspondent (a special status for the regional and departmental press which designates an activity of producing information that is carried out as an accessory to another professional activity). One student recognises the centrality of these actors in the news production process: “They are the ones who make the newspaper” (FG5). But many associate this status with “bad practices” in terms of deontology. For example, one student referred to the failure of local correspondents to verify information: “we had huge catalogues of information, which are not necessarily verified” (FG5). Another student sums up the complexity of this status of non-professional information: “Their place is also special, because they are neither journalists nor advertisers, it is a status that I find special, especially in terms of deontology” (FG2).

Judgement on deontological standards

Deontology, which is also used by students to defend “good journalistic practice”, is also subject to normative evaluation. Many of them stress the need to bring deontology back to the centre of the concerns of aspiring journalists.

“We really need to get back into it and finally talk about it again, to put it back at the centre of our future profession.” (FG3)

Others think that it is important to push the reflection on deontology beyond the academic framework. For example, one student points out the interest for professional journalists to follow “in-company training” (FG5). Another considers it important to integrate actors from outside the journalistic world so that the profession is better understood by all, especially the readers “who are the first ones concerned: it is for them that we work. (FG5).

Strong opinions appear when the question of adapting deontology codes to the contemporary context is raised. One student feared that adapting to current journalistic practices could “impoverish the quality of the journalist’s work [...] since we would be adapting to the time constraints and economic constraints that the profession is experiencing” (FG3). Other participants, on the contrary, felt that deontology codes should be changed. One participant even proposed that the codes be redefined collectively, on an international scale.

“Why shouldn’t the charter of deontology be changed too, at least a few articles, I don’t know ... We take editors, not from the whole world, but something a bit selective, from the main world newspapers, we sit around a table and discuss: ‘is this obsolete?’, ‘wouldn’t we change a word there?’ it changes everything in a sentence, so wouldn’t we change a word that makes it... I don’t know.” (FG3)

Judgement of training courses

Finally, some students make judgements about the way deontology is taught in journalism schools. The most common criticism is that it is given very little space in the curriculum. The speed with which these issues are addressed helps to explain the “omissions”. For example, the teaching of deontology appears to be a mere formality.

“No, it’s just that the master’s degree in journalism is so dense that you can’t look at deontology for months and months. It’s an important thing, though, like everything else, we’re given some marbles and it’s up to us to dig. So this point is not necessarily very well developed.” (FG2)

A second criticism shared by several students was the very theoretical nature of the teaching. It seems difficult to them to build bridges with their practices in the field.

“It is at the beginning of the year, it is very theoretical, it is not associated with a practice, with a particular case. [...] And also the person who teaches it to us at school is not a journalist, even he doesn’t realise I think what he is teaching us.” (FG2)

Despite the fact that students are confronted with practical exercises as part of their training, some deplore the fact that no link is made with deontology courses. These exercises, which often take place in a context very similar to that of the professional world, do not allow for collective reflection on related deontology issues.

“I can perhaps add something to this, that I think that at school there is perhaps not enough room for deontology, where for a TV subject for example we are sent in one day, we have to find the subject at 9.30am, we have to hand it in at 5pm, and so in this time we have very little time to do a subject.” (FG1)

Despite the blurred representations of deontology, and a practice in the field that leads to adjustments, journalists in training quite spontaneously denounce numerous practices, of which they have been actors or witnesses, and which go against deontology. They make judgements on ‘problematic’ situations, with more or less justified references to deontology to denounce certain problems or limits. However unclear it may be to respondents, deontology often serves to mark the difference between professional journalists and those who are not.

5. Contemporary issues

This theme concerns the students’ perception of deontology as adapted or not to the current professional context, from a socio-economic or professional point of view, particularly in terms of issues, recognition and professional differentiation.

The students interviewed questioned the adaptability of deontological standards to today’s world and specific issues were raised in relation, firstly, to the presence of the media on the Web and social networks and the new demands this makes on their professional practices and the mobilisation of deontological standards. A second axis concerns what can be described as the “precariousness” of the journalistic profession, which is perceived as increasingly strong, and all the problems that this generates in terms of respect for deontology. Finally, the students questioned the context of distrust and mistrust of the media and its consequences for journalists and their professional practices.

Deontology, the Web and digital social networks

In order to meet the demands of the immediacy of the Internet, students feel that they have to work faster and faster, and that they have to put aside the normative basis of deontology in order to meet these demands of speed. Indeed, the Internet has caused an overall acceleration of the temporality of the media (both for the gathering and dissemination of information), leading journalists to be increasingly fast in the execution of their tasks, even if it means sacrificing, at times, deontology in order to be able to keep up with these new temporal constraints.

“There was a small case in [city], it made the buzz, it was a mother who accused an Uber driver of racism etc., because she had thrown her out of her car. And this journalist did this story only with the Twitter and telephone testimony of the person who complained about the driver, but she had not called Uber, so there was a big problem from the start, and there were many things like that. (...) it’s serious if it’s not adapted anymore [deontology] indeed for the conditions and I’m wondering about it, maybe it is. On the web, when you have 4 articles a day...” (FG6)

Some deliberate breaches of deontology are even identified as serving the purposes of digital journalism and the “dictatorship of the click” (FG5).

A particular concern emerges from the discourse of the students interviewed, who identify the problem not in terms of deontology, but in terms of the objectives of immediacy and sensationalism.

“It is these practices that are completely wrong, that are quick, where you have to create a buzz etc., and that is what is wrong. (...) Well yes, that’s what’s wrong, it’s not the deontology that’s wrong. It’s the practice, and what’s more, it’s a practice that doesn’t even have time to ask itself this kind of question.” (FG6)

Other respondents invoke the need to better apply deontology to web-based journalistic media, which would not prevent “good results on the digital” (FG7), affirming the possible reconciliation of web-based practices and the normative base that frames them (FG7). However, some advocate a re-adaptation (FG3), a re-actualisation of deontology rules in the light of these new challenges.

“But in any case, digitisation has transformed the profession so much that there must be texts that also provide a framework for all this. I don’t know if I have any very concrete examples, but obviously the Internet has changed everything, and digital technology has changed everything, and we need to... I don’t have enough of the texts in my head to say: “this, for example, is crazy”. But what is certain is that we no longer work... This job is no longer the same, and so necessarily it has to be readjusted, that’s it.” (FG5)

The students also produced a specific reflection on the relationship between journalism, deontology and social networks. Indeed, questions were raised about the personal stance taken by journalists on their own social networks (in particular Twitter), which could fuel confusion between journalistic discourse and the personal opinions of journalists (especially among people who are sceptical about the media and their honesty).

“And in the end I thought this sort of immediacy that is on Twitter... Because yes there are journalists on Twitter who completely break the rules of deontology when they tweet, and it also serves to make that distinction...” (FG1)

The presence of journalists on social networks also questions the border between the world of journalism and the world of influence.

“I’m interested in fashion journalism, I don’t think I’d do that, but there’s a journalist I like a lot, who is also a bit of an influencer, and he’s more and more of an influencer and less of a journalist.” (FG1)

Beyond the presence and personal use of social networks by professional journalists, students also questioned the responsibility of social networks in relation to deontology. Whether it was the deletion of Donald Trump’s Twitter account (FG1) or the blocking of other content that might be considered offensive, the respondents reflected on the appropriation of journalistic deontology by platforms and more particularly social networks.

In addition to raising deontology issues, these new media seem to constrain and increase the workload of student interns. Respondents see their editors requiring them to be increasingly versatile and fast. Respondents described an increasingly precarious environment that sometimes prevents them from respecting deontology in their daily practices.

The intensification of the work rhythm and the precariousness of the profession

The intensification of the pace of work sometimes leads students to feel that they are rushing their work, even though the charters of deontology require the media to offer working conditions that allow journalists to exercise their profession in compliance with deontological standards.

“To do a good job, you have to be able to do it in good conditions and at some point, when you start to have such a long day, you feel like you’re in the thick of it. There are certain papers that I feel I did badly, but because I was at the end of my rope. Physically, I was at the end of my rope. I couldn’t take it any more, and so we forget... Perhaps we won’t forget to seek out the contradictory, but we will be much less square in our work, and for me that poses a real problem in the production, in the quality of the work, in the legitimacy we have in relation to our public, that’s all. All that makes for an extremely complex system, and deontology is also a weapon to be used in relation to the labour code, to our rights.”
(FG5)

The students also point to the injunction to multi-task and its impact on their use of deontology in their professional practice. This injunction comes from the reduction in the number of staff and the resources allocated to newsrooms.

There are fewer and fewer of us and we all have to know how to do everything, and at some point there is clearly a budgetary issue behind this multitasking as well. That’s for sure that we do everything, and I’ve heard it from former photographers and editors: staff cuts = pressure on those who remain. (FG5)

The specific challenges of the Web and the global casualisation of the journalistic profession thus hinder students’ recourse to deontology. Recent social movements in France, such as the yellow waistcoats movement or, more recently, the anti-sanitary pass movement, have also marked their professional experiences and fed their deontology reflections.

The global context of mistrust and distrust of the media... a deontology issue?

The recent nature of the students’ journalistic experiences contributed to their early exposure to media coverage of social movements marked by a strong tendency to scepticism towards the media. The respondents also had to work around the health crisis, which also fuelled the general mistrust of the press.

As a result, the coverage of these issues has been difficult for some, who have been insulted or even threatened (FG3). Moreover, the fact that journalism has been “put under the microscope” (FG3) since the resurgence of the crisis of public confidence (associated with the yellow waistcoats movement in particular) towards the journalistic profession and the media makes the deontology issues more prevalent. The students were thus led to question in particular the contribution of contradictory speech in journalistic content, but also the objectivity and neutrality of journalists in the face of opinions that they do not share, concerning divisive social subjects in the public debate.

“I didn’t want to discredit this [anti-sanitary pass] movement from the outset, but we are also here to report on reality, and so I chose to highlight these irrational arguments [...] because it is also my role to show this reality, that there were conspiracists. And I find that sometimes they are hidden, they are hidden on that side, they just show the rational arguments and they don’t show that there is a big part that is violent, that are conspiracy theorists. And that was the whole problem with that treatment.” (FG6)

Conclusion: Deontology as a reflection of journalism in 2021

As in the case of French-speaking Belgium, the relationship that French journalism students have with deontology is twofold and, in a way, paradoxical. On the one hand, **they consider it in an abstract way and offer rather vague definitions, confusing it with ethics and law; on the other hand, they are quick to embody it in a very concrete way in their field experiences and to invoke it to make judgements on journalistic practices.** But even when applied concretely, deontology and the interactions it implies - with peers, sources and the public - are rarely free of tensions and even problems.

Deontology is thus defined as a set of rules that constitute a normative framework that includes many restrictions (what not to do) but also allows them to practice journalism within a reassuring, even protective, framework (how to do it well). It leads to a lot of questioning and necessary adjustments between theory and practice, through negotiations with oneself and with others. Often, these negotiations take place in the context of more or less strong tensions around certain themes such as the specific characteristics of the media of practice, their status as trainees or the porous border between journalism and communication.

On the whole, they feel little confidence in deontology and already feel the pressure of the working conditions of journalistic practice, which they believe runs counter to the proper application of deontology. The representations of deontology are those of a theoretical ideal towards which to strive, but often unattainable in practice. They thus express a rather disillusioned and disenchanted vision of deontology, and of journalism more generally, which in a way reflects a form of internalisation of their future professional insecurity. Deontology thus becomes a way of talking about the journalistic profession in general and its problems in particular (working conditions, sexism, discrimination), without necessarily having a direct link with it.

Moreover, the recent events that have agitated the French news over the last two years (Gilets Jaunes, health crisis, anti-vax and anti-pass movements) and that have impacted the public's perception of the media, have brought questions and deontology issues back to the fore. They accompanied the first journalistic experiences of these journalists in training and, in addition to shedding a particular light on deontology standards and their mobilisation, can explain, in a way, their reservations about the future of the profession

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4. JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN INTERNSHIP AND ETHICS IN SPAIN

Puertas Graell, David, *National report on 'Attitudes and perceptions of young journalists on ethics and self-regulation'*, 2021.

Introduction

The situation of internship students in media has been studied in Spain since the beginning of the third millennium (Cantalapiedra et al., 2000). Some recent studies (Gómez-Calderón et al., 2019) based on surveys of students who have carried out internships in the field of communication in different universities (UMA and UCM) show various circumstances that affect a higher or lower level in the degree of student satisfaction during the internship. Some of them are, for example, the dissimilarities between large or small companies.

Related with students' satisfaction of the scholarship holder, it is also possible to find some students who have carried out internships in communication cabinets, as opposed to traditional media, so these types of circumstances may vary. These changes are also evident in comparisons of routines and conditions of students between Spain and other European countries such as Norway (Borrego, 2021) or Denmark.

The aforementioned works focus on the extent to which students are forced during the training period. Some of these tasks contravene their principles and values, putting obstacles that are usually denounced as inherent to the exercise of journalism.

However, before focusing on different situations that interns face for ethical or professional reasons, it is convenient to contextualize the relationship between media, universities and students. In this line, it could be paradoxical demanding a reflexive effort on ethics in the profession to incipient professionals who, at the same time, could accept some unethical contractual conditions. We refer to the number of contractual hours, professionals' replacements or salary.

As for what role ethics plays for scholarship holders in this stage of the internship, there are a series of options that have already offered some results. Two examples of that are proposing themes and deciding the approach. In this last aspect we must bear in mind that the origins of this cause may be linked to certain deficiencies from:

- The formative point of view (questions of style, spelling and grammar);
- Narrative precision;
- The use of resources that attract audiences' attention (Wu, 2020) or;
- The imposition of an ideological bias by editors.

This national report is based on the holding of four focus groups in 2021 with master's students from two different universities in Spain: Ramon Llull University, privately owned (Barcelona), and Miguel Hernández University, publicly owned (Elche).

The concept of deontology

One of the main ideas offered by these focus groups is related to the doubts that have arisen when conceptualizing deontology. Main reason is that there are problems regarding its relationship with standards and regulations. Some participants are against using the word ‘norms’, preferring to associate it with good behaviours. This generates some confusion, such as its relationship with journalistic norms or different Style Books.

Despite the fact that ethical principles, given their quality (truth, respect for dignity, etc.) cannot be flexible, which is why they are called principles, some participants mention the need for flexibility applied to deontology.

FG1 - (1) 22. “I don’t have much more to add either, but basically it is the good practice of the profession and respecting ethical standards. Well, the thing is ... It’s as (3) said, that they are not rules, but in a certain sense, they are. In the end, it is something to aspire to and we must take into account from exercising the profession.”

There is an important issue when some participants mention the need for flexibility applied to deontology: ethical principles (truth, respect for dignity...) cannot be flexible. This is the main reason why they are called principles.

In this sense, there are concepts aligned with deontology’s definition such as “conduct” or “codes”, and others such as “morals” and “good practice”, applied to journalism. That is, different conversations derive in relational aspects with honesty and respect. Deontology is oriented to each one performances, even as a personal decision.

FG3 - (2) 22. “I agree with you. They always told me in college about dealing with sources of information. Well, if there is an off the record, the source is not failing you. You can continue with your work, pulling the thread and always maintaining respect for your source and yourself. It is also important to know where you are because I see that the concept or what most clashes with honesty and deontology is also the editorial line. It weighs a lot what to publish or not. For example, on ABC they praised Feijóo [Spanish politician from the right-wing Partido Popular].”

University and non-university education in ethics and deontology

This [perhaps] vague knowledge about journalistic deontological aspects is linked to university education, where ethics’ role remains in the background. In addition, participants’ perception is not clear and some doubts appears about whether the subject (Ethics) should be integrated among first or last years of the degree.

FG2 - (4) 22. “I do not remember any Ethics subject, or at least that it was treated with enough consistency to name it as a subject. But it is true that I have the feeling that all these values, or modus operandi of how to behave in society, or how to act in some cases, are established in other subjects. It is as if it was already assumed through other lines, such as History or Philosophy.»

Along these lines, some participants reflect and share the same idea: it is through debates and practical cases, mainly current events, that they learn the most and show interest.

FG3. (4) 27. “I am remembering a subject: Opinion Journalism. The subject was based on each week writing an opinion column. I reflected a lot about this. Then I had another subject, Sociology, which was influenced more by the professor, because we had many ethical debates. I missed seeing more practical examples. For example, last year I saw The Alcàsser Murders documentary on Netflix and I saw atrocities. So, I would have liked them to teach me that in the degree and see that this was a bad example and it was seen on TV from the 90s.»

FG3. (2) 22. “I believe that sometimes the subject does not matter so much as the actuality that creeps into the faculty and the debates that arise spontaneously. When it coincided with Brexit and Trump elections, fake news’ debate arose spontaneously.»

This last example shows us how when participants approach the subject of deontology through conversations with friends or co-workers they do know how to identify conflict.

FG1. (1) 22. “I agree a lot with (4) because in the end it is much easier to see something negative in others than to see it yourself. Although [you can] see them even something positive when these codes are missing. So, seeing how other people make mistakes helps you internalize it and you say: «okay, I’m seeing this from another person who is wrong, I’m not going to do it .» Regarding debates with friends, I remember a degree subject last year, [Deontological] Codes. We were reading the FAPE (Federation of Associations of Journalists in Spain). And then I saw Matías Prats [news presenter at Atresmedia] on TV advertising a bank. I remember debating with my friends about how this journalist was going to criticize ING Direct if he is the very image of that bank. Or even with sports, so many things also happen there. I remember many conversations about that.»

Lack of knowledge and perception about media councils

Another essential topic that flourishes in focus groups has been oriented to the knowledge and functions of media councils. In this sense, most of the participants are not clear about what a media council is. They confuse these bodies with other regulatory bodies such as the Consell de l’Audiovisual de Catalunya (CAC), in charge of applying the law, not deontology.

FG1. (2) 24. “They [media councils] are not very present in my life. In the best case, they have been for the last year because I have a friend who came to do an internship in a place like that and then I understood a little more how they work. They look at specific cases and make reports. And I say to him, “but who reads this?” I had never read a report from these, from the CAC, or from anywhere. I mean, I know the CAC, not much else. I don’t really know what it’s for. I understand its role but I don’t know who it is addressed to or if it really reaches journalists. Not in my experience.”

This last point is not only a problem due to the lack of knowledge of organs but another more worrying from the point of view of journalism and journalists accountability to the citizen.

This confusion between different types of associations or institutions show that participants do not feel represented by them. They provide subjective views on the image that this concept reflects, such as: “old men with ties.” This implies a relationship with a certain obsolescence or disconnection of media with respect to journalistic reality.

FG4. (2) 24. “I make it up. I had never heard of this concept. But taking into account the focus group line, I think it can be the council that analyzes press’ ethics in any territory. It is in charge of verifying if this ethics, those values, these deontological codes are really being complied with. I do not know.”

FG4. (4) 38. “I follow what (2). I do not know. It is not very familiar to me. It does come to mind that there is a council of editors and publishers in Spain, who are like representatives of the media, something very modern and very diverse [irony] because they are all men 50 years or older. The photograph that I imagine is that of the typical journalist: a man with a tie. Every time I see them I think: “Do these people represent us? My goodness!” The first thing that comes to me with media council is a body or an agent that regulates and establishes rules on different journalism areas.”

Internship experiences

During internships development participants show with some certainty that they have not experienced moments of tension, ethical conflicts or where ethics and values of each one were questioned. However, in the course of the FGs they do claim to have lived certain experiences that fit within an ethical conflict conception. Some students tend to naturalize this type of situation. Despite detecting certain irregularities or injustices, participants adopt an attitude where they accept and assimilate consequences. This type of ethical conflict usually occurs in current news topics, such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement in USA or political conflicts such as the independence of Catalonia.

FG1. (4) 22. La Vanguardia headlines publish on press are generally debated. There are cases in which there is a deontological debate. I remember a recent case in which every two days there was a murder by a police officer of a black person in USA: “How do we entitle this? Because it is the third news that we have in a week. We cannot entitle another black man killed by a policeman. What do we use? We call it by name, we do not call it by name...” It was a great debate and we couldn’t find a solution. The good thing is that there was that debate and at least we were concerned about not discriminating against victims. In that sense, it is cool. Cases of journalistic malpractice... is that they forced me to do a topic. I was totally free to do it but it was like... I didn’t feel very comfortable doing it.”

Students’ role during their internship also influences a certain weaker ability to raise any ethical conflict with their superiors.

FG2. (2) 25. “I believe the same as (3). Seen in perspective, perhaps there have been things that you have seen that have squeaked at you at that moment. But you have seen that it is something minimal. Or maybe you did not comment because of your position in practice. You go over it.”

Deontological codes and challenges of digitization

Regarding whether the participants believe that ethical or deontological codes respond to new challenges derived from digitization and new platforms, some participants' comments evidence a generalized confusion: ethical principles are the same; in any case, what varies is its needed application to new situations.

FG1. (3) 22. "I don't think so. It is not only a problem in Spain. Nobody is prepared because we have just learned of real potentialities of social networks, especially after COVID. Before of that there was very little perception for such an implemented theme. On the other hand, now it is an activity that needs to be regulated much more. That is why we know that people in charge have to make decisions to regulate it."

In this line, clickbait, informational saturation and other types of information disorders appear as the main defining elements of the new journalistic reality. These types of circumstances are reflected in a kind of journalistic dichotomy that differentiates between traditional journalism and new narratives led by influencers.

FG4. (3) 24. "I believe that today it is like: the more you publish, the better. The faster, the better. I am a faithful defender of leisurely journalism. To contrast. Uncheck a bit of what everyone does. In the end, if everyone does the same, it is the same news for all media and the first one to launch is the one who gets the credit, the crumbs [By crumbs (3) refers to, in this case, a small part of the profits. The speaker may not be using the correct words]. I think it is very important to give it another approach, another point of view. But right now business model doesn't allow it. We are very focused on monetization, which is obviously the way to sustain media, but I think we should also bet on other things. At what price are we selling information? We should be more aware of what we do and not go so fast, or with so much volume. The paradigm of journalism in Spain must change so that ethics is more present."

Following the previous example, different participants point to the business model and corporate communication of media as the main counterpoint with respect to ethics. In other words, interests of the company itself replace public interest.

FG3. (2) 22. "I don't think so either because in the end we have gone to the easy, to the precarious and to a business model that is exhausted in which only visits and breaking news is worth it. All efforts have been put into that part of digitization instead of actually producing things that are worthwhile and that are novel and powerful on a journalistic level. Good digital products are not made."

Self-censorship

One of the FGs topics discussed has been the concern over alleged self-censorship, both in professional practices and in personal use of social networks. In this direction, students do not seem to have the feeling, at least consciously, of self-censorship in the exercise of their profession during internship. However, there is some unanimity on a differentiated use of their profiles on social networks. Participants assume a normalization when accepting certain changes over years,

where their personal accounts tend to become corporatized. This is connected with a feeling of being watched by your future boss or employer. Thus, they draw a certain relationship between professional independence with respect to self-censorship and ethics.

FG1. (4). 22. "I subscribe to what my colleagues have said. In professional practice I have never censored myself. In social networks I try not to see it or it is not so easy to see what my political opinion is. Although from time to time I have to say that I tweet. I have never messed with anyone directly, not a journalist or a politician. I try to be much more observant than participant in social networks. I mean, yes. I do exercise self-censorship on social media."

Sanction for journalists / media that violate deontological criteria

The proposal on include some type of sanction for journalists or media that violate deontological criteria is the last great topic of discussion and the one that generates the greatest dose of disagreement among participants. Some consider this route as a measure to set precedents or change current dynamics of journalism, although there is no consensus on whether to apply these measures to journalists or media:

FG2. (3) 23. "I think so because in the end you are doing malpractice in your job, and as in all other jobs, if you do it wrong you will have a sanction, or a fine, or whatever. In journalism it has to be the same. Also accentuated because consequences go beyond you. They have an impact on public opinion and on the rest of the citizenry."

However, other participants offer their doubts about it and believe that it is not the solution:

FG3. (4) 27. "Of course, it is complicated because as it is an unwritten code, so... Who establishes jurisprudence? If you could put fines, for example, I'd go for the media. And if the media considers that it is an independent practice of a journalist, then the media take action. I have seen trials by individuals against media that had violated their honour, etc. for very dubious ethical practices. And of course, in the end you go against the media. Journalist is an employee who has been sent to do that."

Conclusion

This report offers a more enlightening panorama on the vision and conception of future professionals in communication field in matters of ethics and deontology.

In this sense, participants show certain resignation to the situation detected in the labour environment. There is confusion regarding the concept of deontology itself. Furthermore, a certain awareness has been detected that ethical principles can be applied flexibly. This is related to an attitude of acceptance and even understanding in terms of praxis and a business model based on the attention economy (Wu, 2020). That is, participants show a certain normalization of behaviours that are clearly contrary to deontology, such as a journalist "guiding his information." In addition, focus groups shows a reality regarding media councils: young journalists do not know that there are resources to complain or demand transparency mechanisms.

This national report based on Spain demonstrates the need to create and develop projects such as *Media Councils in the Digital Age*. This could be helpful in order to achieve a greater and better type of projects and dissemination of media councils, especially from a communicative point of view that can serve to bring new generations closer through different narratives.

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Annex II: Codes of journalistic ethics

“Code de déontologie journalistique”, Conseil de déontologie journalistique (French-speaking part of Belgium):

<https://www.lecdj.be/fr/deontologie/code>

“Code van de Raad voor de Journalistiek”, Raad voor de Journalistiek (Dutch-speaking part of Belgium):

<https://www.rvdj.be/pagina/journalistieke-code>

“Código deontológico”, Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España (Spain):

<https://fape.es/home/codigo-deontologico>

“Codi deontològic”, Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya (Catalonia) :

<https://www.periodistes.cat/codi-deontologic>

‘Charte des devoirs professionnels des journalistes français’, Syndicat national des journalistes :

<https://cdjm.org/les-chartes>