

*The ethical decision-making of the journalists in the UAE*

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**Summary**

The United Arab Emirates is considered one of the leading countries in the region in terms of the advanced media infrastructure, as the country has excellent technologies, and form a good destination that target diverse media cadres from all over the world. However, In the UAE, the media environment is still not as advanced as it could be. In order for a country's media environment to reach the ranks of the leading media in the world, it requires understanding, study, and observation from those in charge in the country. Many questions revolve around the practices of journalists with regard to their duties because of the huge responsibility they have in shaping people's minds and how the public perceives the world. When it comes to questions about the ethics of journalists, many revolve around whether or not the journalists are meeting their obligations. Many researchers argue that the Arab countries, including the UAE, has been largely absent from research on the media environment. However, this study was conducted to measure the ethical decision of journalists in the UAE and explore how their decisions are influenced by their level of education or educational background. The results of this study show that most of the journalists couldn't make an ethical and fair decision in the difficult ethical dilemmas they may face. It was also found that education had a definite influence on ethical decisions.

**Abstract**

Journalists have a great responsibility in relation to the news published and presented to the public as they collect, analyze, and write news stories. Many questions revolve around the journalists' practices concerning the duties that they must commit to in their profession. This study aims to explore the state of ethical decision-making among journalists in the UAE and the extent to which education as a factor influences their practices. The study results show that most journalists were unable to make an ethical and fair decision in the ethical dilemmas that they may face while performing their job. Education has also been shown to have a definite influence on ethical decision-making.

**Key words:** Deontology, Education, Ethical decision-making, Journalists.

### ***Introduction***

According to the latest statistics, media consumption around the world reached approximately 8 hours per day for each person (“Media use-statistics& facts”, 2020), which indicates a high degree of dependency on the media. One of the essential reasons people use visual, audio, and printed media is their desire to be informed about the events around the world, which convey to them through the eyes of different media outlets, and the tongues and pens of its journalists. Dugan (2008, p. 801) states that there is an increase of distrust of the reliability of the media content among people because of deception, lack of credibility, fake news, inaccuracy and others. Journalists take big responsibility for enhancing the reliability and validity of the provided content to the audience as they are accountable for gathering, analyzing, validating, and presenting information.

Media organizations and institutions usually create a code of ethics that regulates the practices of their affiliates and determine what is expected from them (Mfumbusa, 2008, p. 142). However, researchers argue that despite the code of ethics importance in the media organizations, its existence alone is insufficient to guarantee that the practices of journalists and their decisions are ethical and fair (Webley & Werner, 2008, p. 406-407). Journalism ethics are the fair and reasonable practices of the journalists in accordance with several principles by which they can affect the content presented to the public in an efficient, unbiased, acceptable, and harmless manner (Richards, 2005, p. 6-8). There are basic principles that play a vital role in guiding and organizing the professional practices of journalists that guarantee the quality and validity of the published content, such as balance, accuracy, honesty, fairness, respect for privacy, and impartiality (Pavelin & Karamarko, 2015, p. 141). The journalist should strive to provide trustworthiness news and avoid distorting any content and present it accurately after validating it, without any biases (Reinardy & Moore, 2007, p. 161).

Journalists face many ethical challenges that may interfere with their interests, the interests of the organization they work for, or the interests of a certain group in society and this may lead them to make unethical decisions that are not in the interests of other individuals. Decision-making varies from a journalist to another, and this may be affected by several variables, either related to the ethical dilemma and the situation that is facing the journalists, or to the personal factors of the journalists themselves (Trevino, 1986, p. 602). In the same sequence, Hans Jonas (1966, p. 74) stresses the importance of shedding light on individual practices and trying to understand them through two dimensions, the internal dimension, which represents awareness of the morals, and the external dimension, which is represented by experiences that affect how ethical decision-making is made.

The power and authority the media have today raise many concerns of its reliability degree and its journalist's credibility. That stresses the importance of media ethical commitment in creating its content to be considered at a high level of professionalism, which increased attention to

the ethical state of journalists in various media organizations. (Knowlton & Reader, 2009, p. 15).

***Problem statement and the importance of the study***

The media system in the UAE, although it is considered in terms of infrastructure one of the best systems in the region, compared to other countries in the world, it is still in the process of formative and development, which requires researches and studies to understand the stages it goes through (Kirat, 2012, p. 458). Several studies have indicated that the Arab world needs more studies to explore the ethical environment for journalistic practices due to the limited literature discussing this matter in the Arab region. According to William Rugh, the environment of journalistic practices and the impact of the regulations on the decisions and habits of journalists, and their awareness and commitment to them is something that has not been discussed and debated widely and clearly by scholars in the Arab world (Rugh, 2004, p. 259). Rugh thus notes the importance of conducting studies that clarify the state of the ethical environment for journalists' practices in the Arab world.

Moreover, journalists face many ethical challenges that are difficult to handle and may interfere with their interests, the interests of the organization they work for, or the interests of a certain group in society. Besides the great responsibility for collecting, analyzing and presenting various news stories, journalists have a significant influence on the audience in the way they view the world around them, which enhances the importance of their commitment to the profession's ethics. This study aims to give an initial understanding of the journalists' practices in the UAE and their ability to distinguish between what is ethical and unethical concerning the content they publish based on a philosophical approach to moral decision-making. The study also aims to find out if there is a correlation between the educational background of journalists and their decision-making.

**This research attempt to answer two questions:**

**RQ1)** How the journalists in the UAE make decisions in uncertain ethical situations?

**RQ2)** Is there a correlation between ethical decision-making and journalist's educational background?

***Journalism ethics and principles***

Media organizations and governments around the world adopt different principles and ethics that regulate the work of the journalists, which are usually set out in what is called the Code of Ethics. Although the Code of Ethics differs from one country to another, the most are share the importance of several principles, as they are an integral part of the duty and obligation of any journalist in the world (Perkins, 2002, p. 194-195). What is important in the ethical principles that a journalist must adhere to is his/her role in creating guidance for a correct and justified final decision (Christians et al., 1987, p. 31). According to the Code of Ethics of the society of professional journalists (SPJ) the first organization to represent journalists in the U.S.A (1909), four essential foundations must be met in

the practices of journalists to ensure their integrity and devotion to the profession, which are truthfulness, minimize harm, independence, accountability and transparency ("SPJ Code of Ethics" 2015). On the other hand, the Code of Ethics for Journalists in the United Arab Emirates agrees with those principles, as its principles stipulate the importance of truthfulness, transparency, accuracy, avoiding manipulation and infringement of the privacy of others, and the importance of creating fair and credible content ("UAE Journalists Association," 2016).

Truthfulness is the first and most important principle for journalists, as the journalist must verify the accuracy of the information before publishing it without any bias, and be accountable and take into account the correction of any error to ensure the integrity of the information received by the public (Ward, 1997, p. 71). Furthermore, Stocking (2008, p. 293) states that it is the journalist's duty to seek to embrace ethical practices that lead him to create content with the least amount of harm that likely will affect others and it is an obligation to him to always put himself in the place of the people in his stories. Besides, the journalist must act independently and avoid any form of conflict of interest, such as accepting bribes and money in exchange for publishing a specific article in a specific manner, and he must take great care to distinguish the news from advertisements to avoid any manipulation (Temenugova, et. al., 2017, p. 17).

### ***Deontology of Journalism***

According to the great responsibility of journalists from different organizations in the media system to influence people, publish stories about them, inform them, and address various issues and present them in the context of the truth, it becomes essential to assess their decisions in creating their published contents, considering the ethical dilemmas they encounter continuously during their career (Hoo & Yeing, 2010, p 31-32). It is not possible to accurately determine what a moral and immoral act of journalists is by simply discussing and expressing personal views and feelings about their actions. The more systematic evaluation of the act and decision-making must be established from an ethical and philosophical perspective to be built on logic (Swain, 1994, p. 2). Diverse ethical theories have been used by researchers around the world to assess the practices of journalists and to understand the amount of the moral awareness of their obligations around the requirements of the profession. The deontological theory will serve as a theoretical framework for conducting this study and examine the ethical state of the journalists in the UAE. Deontological theory formally considered an essential method to study the eligibility of employees in the media (Korkonosenko, 2012, p. 1725).

Deontological ethics theory (*duty ethics*) beginnings go back to the eighteenth century, and it is mainly related to the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804), who founded an ethical philosophy of moral reasoning based on the obligations and duties rather than emotions and outcomes (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 353). It is determined whether or not the decision is correct if it does not contradict with the principles, laws, duties, and responsibilities related to the action. Concerning journalists,

deontological theory indicates that it is the obligation and duty of a journalists to say and present the truth, regardless of the outcome of this act, even if the consequence will not be for their interest or the interests of the organization they work for (Breit, 2011, p. 308). A journalist must not make his decisions based on his desires, he must act based on *pure reason*, indifferent to the results of his behavior whether negative or positive, if it is driven from a moral obligation.

On the other hand, Kant states in his book *Foundations for a Metaphysics of Morals* the term categorical imperative in which he discussed that ethics must be considered as a universal law that requires individuals to act only with the *maxims* (rule or principle of action) that they want others always to act on when they face the same situation (*universalizability principle*) (Kant, 1785/2002, p. 26). Kant means by the word *categorical* that acting by moral principles cannot change under any circumstance with no exceptions, and the word *imperative* indicates that acting by those maxims is a duty that everyone has to abide by and work with (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 353). From this perspective, there is a great debate about the content provided by journalists about the victims, celebrities, and others, which the coverage of these news could have a negative impact on their relatives and the persons themselves, that if it is possible for the journalists to accept the same coverage for their relatives or belonging ones (Gross, Katz & Ruby, 1988, p. 135-144). Journalists should not make exceptions for themselves.

Moreover, the categorical imperative also suggests that it is immoral for people to treat others as a *mere means* to reach their own goals and purposes and that people carry a human duty towards others through viewing them as persons with infinite worth and treat them as an end in themselves (Kerstin, 2009, p. 163-164). Kant does not mean that people should not be treated as a means, but should not be treated only as a means. Journalists in this side should not only deal with victims or people that they cover their stories as a mere means to gain more views, fame, or gain the admiration of their managers, but should also take into account the benefits or harms that will affect the people that they use them in their stories (Meyers, 2010, p. 299).

### ***Journalists education***

Many factors may play a role in shaping the decision-making that journalists adopt while covering their stories. However, researchers argue that personal factors, such as educational background, have a significant role in influencing the ethical decision-making performed by journalists, but in contrast, many researchers have objected and denied this. Findings and results from previous researches were mixed and differed from one study sample to another.

Every decision made by journalists during their coverage of the news has a value and a result that affects not only a specific person but many people including the journalists themselves, the audience, the people who are in the news. Education must play an important role in shaping and influencing the practices of journalists, so the focus on the importance of

teaching journalists how to make the right decision is critical and essential (Richards, 2003, p. 141-142). Joseph Pulitzer (1904, p. 646-651) is one of the first people to emphasize the importance of education to raise the ethical level in journalist practices and noted that the better the education, the better the journalist's decisions and choices improved. Pulitzer has noticed that journalists are mostly seeking fame, winning audiences, and covering events that are likely to gain popularity among people without paying attention to the principles of the profession. Pulitzer, in his turn, provided students in the journalism field with resources to teach them the ethics of the profession, which contributed to the development of their performance and made their decisions wiser. Education is one of the most important elements that contribute to the development of the individual's moral reason and that in each time that a person has made progress in the educational level and move to a higher educational degree this will have an impact on making his decisions wiser and fairer (Rest, 1979, p. 19-20). In a study conducted by Kohlberg (1981) on undergraduate students to measure the process of moral decision-making, he reached results stating that moving from one educational stage to another contributes significantly to moral development, thus contributes more on creating ethical decisions (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009, p. 42). Elliott (1988, p. 28) also stated that education is a key factor in shaping and developing ethical values and principles consistent with the duties and obligations of a professional journalist.

In a study by Coleman and Wilkins (2009, p. 41) about the impact of education on the reliable performance of journalists, they found that journalists who had spent their education in majors related to journalism and media tended to adopt more ethical decisions than those who had majored in other fields. Both researchers emphasize that there is a great importance of education to influence the professionalism and development of journalist's performance, and when educational institutions attach importance to including courses about ethics, this will have a definite impact on the development of values and principles of journalists. Furthermore, Arshad and Ashraf (2014, p. 4) conducted a study on the educational level of journalists, compared them with their performance, and found that journalists who only completed their undergraduate studies tended to make fewer fair decisions when they cover stories, compared to those who completed their postgraduate studies. Several other studies objected to these allegations, as their results demonstrated that while journalists with high academic degrees are facing ethical dilemmas that they may face in their work, the largest percentage of them choose decisions that are not preferred in terms of credibility, accuracy, transparency, and infringement on the privacy of others, which proves that education has nothing to do with influencing the ethical decisions (Kayode, 2004, p. 14; Hanitzsch, 2005, p. 505; Motlagh et al., 2013, p. 1827).

### ***Methodology***

This study aims to investigate the state of the ethical decision-making of the journalists in the UAE, so to understand their attitudes, a survey method used to collect the data. The information was collected

starting from the date of April 2 till the date of April 18, 2020. One version of the questionnaire was developed in English language and circulated among all participants. The questionnaire was distributed in the form of an e-survey using survey monkey system divided into two questions. The first question contains eight items that have been measured using 5 points Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to examine journalist's decision-making. The second question includes different items related to personal information. The questions were developed using previous studies. The target population for this study is all the journalists in the UAE. The respondents were 102 journalists (editors, writers, reports) from different nationalities, working full time in various media institutions in the UAE (newspapers, TV, radio). To gather a basic data, non-probability sample, the convenience sample used to determine the study participants that were reached via couple social media platforms (LinkedIn and Twitter). A Chi-square test used to examine the variables and to understand the correlation between them.

### **Sample**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18-29 years	19	18.6%
30-39 years	49	48.0%
40-49 years	27	26.4%
50 and above	7	6.8%
	<b>Total 102</b>	
<b>Role</b>		
Reporter	38	37.2%
Writer	41	40.1%
editor	23	22.5%
	<b>Total 102</b>	
<b>Media institution</b>		
Newspaper	51	50%
Television	39	38.2%
Radio	12	11.7%
	<b>Total 102</b>	

\*Table1: Journalists demographic information

### **Findings and results**

The findings show a bleak image of the journalist's decision-making regarding the ethical dilemmas they may face. To answer the first research question, *How the journalists in the UAE make decisions in uncertain ethical situations?* the first part of the survey contained eight hypothetical scenarios of ethical dilemmas that journalists may encounter while performing their work. The results of 5 out of 8 questions measured based on the Likert scale shows that the highest percentage of journalist's answers indicates that they tend to make unethical or unfair decisions, while only

three questions where ethical or fair answers prevailed over the unfair answers (see table2).

<b>Ethical decision-making hypothetical scenario</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Majority Ethical/ Unethical</b>
1- A journalist published a report has information that not been verified because his boss gives him the order to do so immediately. The journalist believes that this is a part of his commitment to his duties.	17.82% 18	34.65% 35	8.91% 9	28.71% 29	9.90% 10	101	Unethical
2- After a journalist published a good report, he discovered that there were several errors in the facts and inaccuracies in some information. The journalist decided to reformulate the report, correct the errors, and republish it again despite the absence of any complaints or undesired comments on the content.	34.31% 35	44.12% 45	4.90% 5	11.76% 12	4.90% 5	102	Ethical
3- A journalist wrote a report of a very well-known athlete presenting facts about his doping to outperform other athletes. This news caused the loss of many of his fans as audiences to the journalist's media organization. The journalist believes it is the right of the public to know the truth.	4.90% 5	22.55% 23	16.67% 17	42.16% 43	13.73% 14	102	Unethical



4- A journalist has scooped a story of a rape victim and he revealed details about her name, face, and life. The journalist believes that this story will gain many views and he may receive awards regarding his effort.	10.78% 11	40.20% 41	3.92% 4	33.33% 34	11.76% 12	102	Unethical
5- A journalist published information, photos and details about a famous singer after he discovered and collected them through spying her private life. The journalist believes that she is a famous figure and there is no harm in publishing those details as this story will bring many views that will be in the interest of the journalist and the media organization he is working for.	1.96% 2	30.39% 31	6.86% 7	45.10% 46	15.69% 16	102	Ethical
6- A journalist decided not to publish pictures of a murder victim, and only published written details of the incident, although other media outlets circulated the pictures significantly. The journalist commits to his decision, which causes fewer views and circulation of his content.	8.82% 9	20.59% 21	5.88% 6	49.02% 50	15.69% 16	102	Unethical
7- From his perspective, a journalist believes that one of the candidates for the Federal National Council is not sufficiently qualified to fill this position. The journalist changes	2.94% 3	43.14% 44	15.69% 16	29.41% 30	8.82% 9	102	Unethical

the facts he knew about him, to influence the voting result that would be in the candidate favor. The journalist believes that this will be in the public interest, as the position will not go to someone who does not deserve it.							
8- A journalist accepts the publication of an advertisement in the form of news without mentioning that it is sponsored by a certain company. The journalist believes that the company already has good products and this news article will benefit the public.	1.96% 2	29.41% 30	9.80% 10	46.08% 47	12.75% 13	102	Ethical

\*Table2: The number of respondents and the percentage they form for each answer of each hypothetical scenario of the ethical dilemmas that journalists may encounter while performing their work.

In the first statement in the questionnaire, journalists are given the choice between either adhering to accuracy in making their content or adhering to the decisions of their bosses as a priority in relation to their obligation in this dilemma. The largest percentage, which constituted 52.48%, strongly agreed and agreed that the journalist must abide by the decision of his manager, while 38.61% of the journalists strongly disagree and disagree not to adhere to the accuracy in submitting their content. However, 8.91% of journalists could not distinguish between the most ethical decision. The largest percentage indicates that the majority of journalists did not respond with fair answers. On the other hand, most journalists supported the second statement, 78.43% of them strongly agreed and agreed on the importance of accountability as an ethical commitment to publish the content. In comparison, 16.67% of journalists strongly disagree and disagree on the need to correct the information and republish it. 4.90% of the journalists did not have a clear decision on this situation. The higher percentage of the answers reveals that most journalists chose ethical decisions.

Moreover, in the third question, 55.88% of journalists oppose publishing content that may cause the loss of a large number of audiences to the media institution, while 27.45% of them their answers divided into strongly agree and agree that they must commit to presenting the truth to the public. 16.67% of journalists puzzled in choosing the fairest decision. Most journalists failed to choose an ethical answer. After that, the

percentage of dissenting opinions and approval was close in the fourth scenario about revealing the details of one of the rape victims in order to obtain a scoop, as the largest number of journalists strongly agreed and agreed by 50.98% with this act, while 45.10% objected the action. A small proportion constituted of 3.92% from journalists was not sure what is the correct behavior. As in the previous scenario, most journalists could not make a fair decision. Furthermore, in the next question, 60.78% of the journalists their answers ranged from disagree to strongly disagree to spying the private life of a celebrity to produce content that gains high attention from the public. On the contrary, 32.35% of the journalists believe that there is nothing wrong with this act. While 6.86% of journalists were confused about what is the most appropriate action. Most journalists were able to choose the reasonable answers to this question.

Also, in the sixth statement, 29.41% of the journalists supported the journalist's commitment to not publishing pictures of a murder victim, although this caused a lack of circulation of the content, while 64.71% objected to this decision. There was no clear choice for 5.88% of journalists in this scenario. The high percentage of answers indicates that journalists were unable to answer this question fairly. In addition, 46.08% of the journalists agreed in the following statement to change some facts if it would be in the public interest, while 38.24% of them objected to tampering with the facts. A high proportion of 15.69% of journalists could not discern the most ethical answer. Once again, unethical answers prevailed over ethical answers. In the last question, 31.37% of the respondents supported publishing an advertisement in the form of news without mentioning that, while 58.82% of the journalists did not agree to blur the line between the news and the advertisement. A number of journalists made up of 9.80% did not know what the best option is. The high percentage of journalists was able to choose the most ethical answers.

To answer the second research question *Is there a correlation between ethical decision-making and journalist's educational background?*

<b>Profile</b>		
<b>Nationality</b>	UAE locals 17.6%	Other nationality 82.3%
<b>Field of Study</b>	Journalism/ media related majors 73.27%	Other majors 26.73%
<b>Journalism ethics courses</b>	Taken courses in journalism ethics 26.47%	Not taken courses related to journalism ethics 73.53%
<b>Level of education</b>	Undergraduate degree 55.88%	Postgraduate degree 44.12%

\*Table3: Profile of the respondents

A Chi-square test was used to measure if there is an association between the attitudes of the journalists and their educational background. The largest percentage of journalists 73.27% are studied majors related to journalism and media, while 26.73% studied other majors. The results showed that the majority of journalists, 73.53%, did not study courses related to journalism ethics, while only 26.47% of them studied journalism ethics in the university. A total of 57 respondents carry an undergraduate degree, while 45 respondents have a postgraduate degree.

For the first scenario in the survey, 28.6% of journalists with an undergraduate degree were able to choose an ethical decision compared to 51.1% from the journalists with a postgraduate degree. Based on the chi-square test, there is a correlation between the educational degree and the ethical decision-making of the journalists, as the value of chi-square is 11.15 with 4 degrees of freedom, and  $p = .025$ . Besides, in the second statement, 66.6% of journalists with an undergraduate degree were able to choose ethical decisions, while the percentage of ethical decisions for journalists with a postgraduate degree reached 93.3%. By using the chi-square test, results indicate that there is a strong correlation between the educational degree and the ethical decision-making of the journalists on this situation as the value of chi-square is 17.59 with  $df = 4$ , and  $p = .001$ . In the next question, with a rate of 19.3% of journalists holding undergraduate degrees, they were able to choose ethical answers. 37.8% of journalists with postgraduate degrees were able to choose moral decisions. The value of chi-square is 9.23 with  $df = 4$ , and  $p = .049$ . Chi-square test also shows here that there is a correlation between the educational degree and the ethical decision-making of the journalists. In the fourth statement, the results present that 35.1% of journalists with undergraduate degrees chose fair and ethical answers, while journalists who completed their postgraduate studies achieved 57.8%. Using the statistical test, the value of Chi-square is 10.58 with  $df = 4$ , and  $p = .032$ . Chi-square statistics show that there is a correlation coefficient between ethical decisions and educational level.

Moreover, in the fifth scenario, 45.6% of those with undergraduate degrees from journalists responded with moral answers, compared to 80% of journalists with postgraduate degrees who were capable of answering ethically. The Chi-square test provided results manifest that there is a significant correlation between education and the ethical decision as the value of chi-square is 15.72 with  $df = 4$ , and  $p = .003$ . In addition, the sixth statement ethical answers accounted for 19.3% from the undergraduate degree holders of journalists and 42.2% for those who completed their postgraduate studies. By using the Chi-square test, it appears that there is a correlation between ethical decision-making and the journalist's education degree since the value of Chi-square is 15.96 with  $df = 4$ , and  $p = .003$ . Furthermore, the ethical and fair answers of the seventh question from journalists who finished their undergraduate studies only counted for 24.6%, while it forms a percentage of 55.5% for those with postgraduate degrees. Relying on the Chi-square test, it turns out that there is a correlation between ethical decisions and educational level as the value of

Chi-square is 12.31 with  $df= 4$ , and  $p= .015$ . In the last statement, journalists with an undergraduate degree were able to answer with an ethical answer with a percentage of 50.9%, while the percentage of the ethical answers for those with postgraduate degrees formed 68.9%. Based on the chi-square test, there is a correlation coefficient between the educational degree and the ethical decision-making of the journalists, as the value of chi-square is 9.66 with  $df= 4$ , and  $p= .046$ .

The results of this part of the study show that there is a strong correlation between ethical decision-making of journalists and their educational background, and this correlation is not by chance or accident.

### ***Discussion***

The findings suggest that the journalists make their decisions unfairly most of the time, and there is a vague picture of their adopted principles that seem to be influenced by their educational background in most cases.

The results show that journalists carry an incorrect understanding of the priorities of their obligations related to the profession. The UAE Journalist's codes of ethics emphasize the necessity of ascertaining the validity of the content before it is published as an essential obligation in the profession. However, it appeared that most journalists pay attention to adherence to the orders of their managers, rather than adhere to the principle of accuracy. These attitudes held by journalists are interpreted by deontological theory as unethical, as the decision performs by them did not drive from the principles, laws, and practices that consider as an integral part of the journalist's duties. Moreover, it turns out that journalists choose to make decisions about what they publish that ensures to maintain the largest number of audiences of their content without concerning the results they may cause in other aspects. Despite the importance of credibility and telling the truth as a fundamental duty in the field of journalism, as the society of professional journalists (SPJ) sets it as the first and most important principle that a journalist must adhere to, most journalists were opposed to revealing the truth if it would lead to losing a part of the audience. As mentioned by Breit (2011) that the deontological theory emphasizes the importance of the obligation to tell the truth, whatever the results may affect the interests of the journalist or the media institution he works for. This explains why this decision of journalists in such situations is unethical.

Besides, journalists also objected to the publication of a story of a murder victim that does not contain details that will lead to less circulation of content with the possibility of displaying it in a way that attracts more viewers regardless of the harm that this content will cause. This indicates that no attention is paid to one of the essential principles shared by most codes of ethics for journalists, including codes of ethics for Journalists in the UAE, which stresses the importance of not displaying or publishing content that may cause harm to any individual or group. The philosophical view of Immanuel Kant's theory makes it clear that the practices of journalists to be considered ethical must be based on the maxims that they

wish others always to work with as a universal law. Therefore, according to Gross, Katz & Ruby, 1988, this act of UAE journalists is evaluated as unethical because journalists will not be able to accept the publication of the victim's pictures if it belongs to one of their relatives, they are making exceptions to their behaviors that assuredly clarify the possibility of not committing to the principles of the profession unless it corresponds with their desires.

Additionally, the majority of journalists agree to reveal the personal details of a rape victim to win a scoop without thinking about the consequence of this story. Journalists treated the victims as a mere means to their interests, seeking fame, appreciation and rewards from their managers without thinking about the negative consequences that will affect the victims and their relatives, and as noted by Meyers (2010), journalists decisions considered unethical. However, the story coverage did not stem from reasons related to helping the victim and deliver her voice to the viewers but for the sake of a personal interest in favor of the journalist; thus, it did not stem from a pure reason. According to Stratton-Lake, 2004, this is not considered an ethical behavior from the deontological perspective.

Journalists in most cases failed to make ethical decisions, even though the higher percentage of them had an educational background in majors that related to media and journalism. The results of this study disagree with the previous studies, which indicated that journalists who had spent their studies in journalism and media-related majors tended to make more ethical decisions (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009). Additionally, a very small percentage of journalists confirmed that they had studied at least one subject related to journalism ethics during their studies, while the largest number of them had not studied courses related to ethics. Previous studies show that this affects ethical choice, as Joseph Pulitzer (1904) study showed that journalists who receive an education that provides them with sources of the profession ethics and how to apply it, their performance improves and becomes wiser and more related to the duties of the profession rather than personal interests and the pursuit of fame.

On the other hand, the largest proportion of journalists who were able to make ethical and fair decisions are those who have completed their postgraduate studies and made progress at the educational level. As suggested by many scholars, the knowledge that journalists gain by moving from one educational to another enhances making their decisions more objective and fairer, as education is one of the most important reasons that raise an individual's moral reason and thus positively affects his performance and makes him more committed to his duties (Rest, 1979; Kohlberg, 1981; Elliott, 1988). The result of a previous study done by Arshad and Ashraf (2014) supports the findings of this study as it confirms that the journalists with an undergraduate degree were able to make fewer fair decisions compared to the journalists with a postgraduate degree. In contrast, this study objected to studies claiming that the journalist's

education has no influence in making his decisions more ethical (Kayode, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2005; Motlagh et al., 2013).

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the ethical situation of decision-making among journalists in the United Arab Emirates, as it showed that the majority were unable to make ethical decisions in the ethical dilemmas that may confront them. Despite the belief that the journalists code of ethics is a way to discipline their practices and make their decisions fairer, the reality proves the opposite, as the moral reason that controls the journalist's actions has a more significant impact on influencing the decisions. However, it was found that many did not receive an education related to journalistic ethics, as universities must pay more attention to instill the ethics of the profession, its importance, and how it should be applied, in the educational phase of journalists. Journalists who completed their postgraduate studies showed a more ethical picture than those without undergraduate degrees, as education has proven its impact on improving an individual's thinking and making the decisions more correct and wiser.

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## اتخاذ القرار الأخلاقي للصحفيين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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ملخص الدراسة:

تتمتع دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة ببنية تحتية إعلامية متقدمة وتضم كوادراً وطنية ومهنيين من مختلف أنحاء العالم. مع ذلك، لا تزال البيئة الإعلامية في طور التشكل والتطوير، ولكي تكون البيئة الإعلامية أكثر تقدماً، فإنها تتطلب الفهم، الدراسة، والملاحظة لتصل إلى مصاف الإعلام الرائد. في مجال الإعلام، ولمجال أكثر تحدياً، الصحافة، يُعدّ العمل الصحفي المسؤول بشكل رئيس عن جمع الأخبار للعوام وتحليلها ونشرها أحد أهم وأكثر الجوانب الواجب الاهتمام بدراستها وفهمها لضمان واقع وصورة ومرجعيات صادقة تشكل ركيزة للجمهور داخل مجال أراضى المؤسسة الإعلامية وخارجه، يتبادر عدد من الأسئلة عن ممارسات الصحفيين فيما يتعلق بالواجبات التي يجب عليهم الالتزام بها في مهنتهم بسبب عظم المسؤولية التي يتحملونها في التأثير في شريحة ضخمة من الناس. يجادل عدد من الباحثين أن هناك قلة في عدد الدراسات التي تركز على البيئة الإعلامية في الدول العربية، ومن بينها دولة الإمارات. تركز الدراسة المرفقة على قياس القرار الأخلاقي للصحفيين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة ومدى تأثير عامل التعليم أو الخلفية التعليمية في قراراتهم. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن أكثر الصحفيين في دولة الإمارات يميلون إلى اتخاذ قرارات غير أخلاقية أمام المعضلات التي قد تواجههم في أداء عملهم بوصفهم صحفيين. بجانب ذلك، تُظهر الدراسة أن هناك ارتباطاً واضحاً بين الخلفية التعليمية واتخاذ القرار الأخلاقي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأخلاق الواجبة، اتخاذ القرار الأخلاقي، التعليم، الصحفيين .