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Assessment of News YouTubers' Adherence to Media Professional Ethics from the Perspective of Evening Students of Kabul University (2025)

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ABSTRACT

Digital platforms have enabled independent news YouTubers to operate outside traditional media structures, raising concerns about their adherence to professional media ethics. This study assessed the extent to which Afghan news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of evening students of Kabul University in 2025. A quantitative, descriptive-analytical survey was conducted using a researcher-made five-point Likert questionnaire covering five dimensions: accuracy and honesty, impartiality, social responsibility, respect for human dignity, and avoidance of distortion and rumor. The instrument was validated by communication experts and showed high reliability (Cronbach's alpha=0.983). Using proportionate stratified random sampling from a population of 1,386 students, 206 valid questionnaires were analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics. All dimension means fell below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00: social responsibility (2.93), impartiality (2.87), respect for human dignity (2.74), accuracy and honesty (2.73), and avoidance of distortion and rumor (2.67). The lowest-rated items concerned refraining from disseminating unverified news and avoiding misleading headlines. These descriptive results indicate that respondents perceived adherence to media ethics as unsatisfactory, although inferential testing is needed to confirm statistical significance. The findings highlight the need for media ethics training, audience media literacy, and self-regulatory frameworks for digital news creators.

KEYWORDS

professional media ethics; news youtubers; digital media; Kabul university students; media social responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Media are among the most important social institutions in contemporary societies for transmitting information, shaping public opinion, and facilitating communication between individuals and society. The credibility and effectiveness of media largely depend on adherence to professional ethical principles, including honesty, accuracy, impartiality, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity. Media ethics refers to a set of principles and norms that guide the professional conduct of producers and distributors of media messages. Adherence to these principles can contribute to strengthening audience trust and enhancing the credibility of news sources (McQuail, 2020; Ward, 2015). Conversely, failure to comply with ethical standards can create conditions conducive to the dissemination of misinformation, distortion of facts, declining public trust, and other undesirable social consequences.

The expansion of communication technologies, social media, and digital platforms has transformed the traditional structures of news production, distribution, and consumption. In the past, news production and dissemination were largely conducted within formal media organizations, professional newsrooms, and established journalistic systems. Digital media, however, have enabled individuals and independent groups to produce and disseminate content directly. In this context, YouTube has evolved beyond being merely an entertainment platform and has become an important space for the production, dissemination, and consumption of news and analytical content. The emergence of news YouTubers has increased audiences' access to diverse sources and perspectives while simultaneously raising questions concerning information accuracy, source credibility, impartiality, accountability, and adherence to professional ethical principles (Hermida & Young, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018).

One of the major challenges in this context is that many producers of news content on YouTube operate outside formal media structures and are not necessarily subject to the supervision of editors, newsrooms, or established journalistic systems. In such an environment, content creators can independently select news topics, gather and interpret information, and make it available to large audiences. At the same time, attention-seeking mechanisms and the pursuit of higher viewership on digital platforms may encourage content creators to use sensational headlines, emotionally charged content, or controversial material. Consequently, a significant ethical tension may emerge between adherence to professional journalistic standards and the need to attract audience attention. Under such circumstances, news accuracy and honesty, impartiality, social responsibility, and avoidance of distortion and rumor become important criteria for evaluating the quality of news YouTubers' activities.

This issue is also significant in Afghanistan. The growing use of social media and digital platforms has led some users to rely increasingly on online sources for news and analysis. Under these circumstances, the quality of digital news content may be associated with public awareness, audience trust, and perceptions of social events. The dissemination of unverified news, misleading headlines, incomplete information, or biased content may make it difficult for audiences to distinguish between professional and non-professional news content. Therefore, examining the extent to which producers of news content in Afghanistan's digital media environment adhere to professional ethical principles, from the perspective of their audiences, is of considerable research importance.

Furthermore, audiences' evaluations of the performance of a news source are associated with the perceived credibility of that source. Source Credibility Theory, as developed by Hovland and colleagues, emphasizes the importance of factors such as source expertise and trustworthiness in the acceptance of messages. In the YouTube environment, where content creators can directly assume the role of news sources, their accuracy, honesty, impartiality, and transparency may influence audiences' perceptions of their credibility. In addition, Expectancy–Confirmation Theory emphasizes the comparison between audiences' prior expectations and their perceived assessment of actual performance. Accordingly, the discrepancy between the standards audiences expect from a news source and its perceived performance may influence audience evaluations. Parasocial Relationship Theory can also be applied to explain the perceived relationship between audiences and media personalities in digital environments.

Despite the importance of this issue, existing studies reveal a gap concerning the direct assessment of Afghan news YouTubers' adherence to professional media ethics from the perspective of university audiences. Previous studies have primarily addressed topics such as media ethics, news-source credibility, audience trust, citizen journalism, and the quality of digital content. However, the specific ethical performance of Afghan news YouTubers

from the perspective of Kabul University students has received comparatively limited attention. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding how Afghan university audiences evaluate the ethical performance of news YouTubers and which dimensions of professional ethics face greater challenges remains limited.

Accordingly, the main problem addressed by the present study is the assessment of the extent to which Afghan news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University. The study focuses on dimensions including news honesty and accuracy, impartiality, social responsibility, and avoidance of distortion and rumor in order to determine how these dimensions are evaluated by the respondents. Therefore, the main research question is as follows: To what extent do Afghan news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University in 2025?

Based on the research problem and the main research question, the study hypothesizes that Afghan news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics at a level significantly below the desirable standard, as perceived by students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University.

The significance of this study derives from the transition of news dissemination from organized media institutions to digital platforms, which has created greater opportunities for independent content creators to participate in news production and distribution. In such an environment, adherence to principles such as accuracy, honesty, impartiality, social responsibility, and avoidance of distortion is essential for maintaining the quality of news content and sustaining audience trust. Assessing news YouTubers' adherence to these principles can provide an empirical picture of the state of professional ethics within a segment of Afghanistan's digital media environment.

The necessity of this research in Afghanistan is further underscored by the increasing reliance of users on digital sources for news and analysis. Examining the perspectives of Kabul University students can demonstrate how university audiences evaluate the ethical performance of news YouTubers and which dimensions of professional ethics require greater attention. The findings may be useful to students and researchers in communication and journalism, news-content creators, and media professionals in identifying the challenges associated with professional ethics in digital environments. Furthermore, the findings may contribute to strengthening journalism ethics education, enhancing audiences' media literacy, and increasing attention to the accountability of online news-content producers.

Accordingly, the overall objective of the present study is to assess and analyze the extent to which Afghan news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University in 2025. In pursuit of this objective, the study examines the extent to which news YouTubers adhere to honesty and accuracy in news reporting, impartiality and avoidance of political bias, social responsibility, and avoidance of distortion and rumor, as perceived by students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University.

Theoretical Framework

Given the nature of the research topic, the present study is situated within the theoretical perspectives of communication, audience studies, and professional media ethics. The expansion of digital media and the emergence of platforms such as YouTube have transformed the ways in which news content is produced, distributed, and consumed, creating opportunities for independent content creators to participate in the process of information dissemination. In this environment, audiences are no longer exposed

exclusively to organized media outlets and professional journalists; rather, they also encounter individuals who independently produce and disseminate news and analytical content. Consequently, issues such as source credibility, evaluation of content creators' performance, and the relationship between audiences and media personalities have gained increasing importance (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013).

Accordingly, the present study draws on three theoretical frameworks—Source Credibility Theory, Expectancy–Confirmation Theory, and Parasocial Relationship Theory—to explain dimensions related to audiences' evaluation of news YouTubers. These theories approach the relationship between the message source, perceived performance, and audience from different perspectives and can therefore be used to provide a contextual explanation of the environment in which audiences evaluate the professional ethics of news YouTubers.

Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory is an important perspective in the field of persuasive communication and emphasizes the role of message-source characteristics in audience acceptance and message effectiveness. In their studies of persuasive communication conducted at Yale University, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley identified source credibility as an important factor influencing audience responses to messages. Within this perspective, characteristics such as the source's expertise and trustworthiness are important in shaping audiences' evaluations of a message (Hovland et al., 1953).

Ohanian (1990) subsequently examined source credibility in terms of three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Expertise refers to the perceived level of knowledge and competence of a source regarding the subject under discussion; trustworthiness refers to the perceived honesty and integrity of the source; and attractiveness refers to characteristics that may influence audiences' attitudes toward the source (Ohanian, 1990). In digital media environments, the evaluation of source credibility becomes more complex because content creators may perform the role of information sources without being directly affiliated with a media organization. Therefore, when evaluating a news YouTuber, audiences may consider factors such as the creator's expertise, history of activity, manner of presenting information, and transparency regarding sources (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013).

In the present study, Source Credibility Theory is used to explain the context in which students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University evaluate the performance of news YouTubers. From this perspective, perceived characteristics of the source, particularly expertise and trustworthiness, may contribute to audiences' perceptions of the quality and credibility of news YouTubers' performance. Thus, the theory provides a basis for considering the audience perspective in evaluating the professional conduct of news YouTubers. However, the present study does not directly test a causal relationship between source credibility and ethical adherence; rather, the theory is employed to explain the importance of source characteristics in audience evaluation.

Expectancy–Confirmation Theory

Expectancy–Confirmation Theory was initially proposed by Oliver (1980) in the field of consumer behavior. The theory is based on the assumption that individuals develop expectations regarding a product, service, or performance before experiencing it and subsequently compare their perceived performance with their initial expectations. The degree of congruence or incongruence between expectations and perceived performance contributes to the formation of an individual's evaluation (Oliver, 1980). The framework

was later applied in other fields, including information technology and the use of digital services (Bhattacherjee, 2001).

In the media context, audiences may similarly develop expectations regarding the performance of a news source before evaluating it. A news source is generally expected to present information accurately and honestly, avoid unnecessary bias, disclose its information sources as clearly as possible, and assume responsibility for the social consequences of its content. Therefore, an audience's evaluation of a news YouTuber's performance may be shaped by comparing the creator's perceived performance with the standards expected of a news source.

In the present study, Expectancy–Confirmation Theory is used to explain the context in which students evaluate the performance of news YouTubers against the standards they expect from a news source. Standards such as honesty and accuracy, impartiality, and social responsibility may constitute part of audiences' expectations regarding the professional performance of a news source. Accordingly, this theory enables the study to consider audiences' evaluations of news YouTubers' adherence to professional ethics within the context of congruence or discrepancy between expected standards and perceived performance. However, because the present study does not directly measure expectation confirmation as an independent variable, the theory serves primarily an explanatory function rather than being empirically tested as a causal model.

Parasocial Relationship Theory

Parasocial Relationship Theory was introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) and refers to relationships that audiences may perceive with media personalities through repeated exposure to them. Such relationships may involve feelings of familiarity, intimacy, and personal connection, although the relationship is fundamentally one-sided (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

With the expansion of social media, the nature of communication between content creators and audiences has changed. YouTubers can foster a greater sense of intimacy among audiences through continuous presence, the use of informal and conversational language, the presentation of aspects of their personal lives, responses to comments, and direct interaction with users. Under such circumstances, audiences' evaluations of a media personality may not be based solely on the content of the message; their perceived sense of familiarity and closeness with the content creator may also influence such evaluations.

In the present study, Parasocial Relationship Theory is used to consider the potential role of the perceived relationship between audiences and news YouTubers. The theory may help explain why audiences' evaluations of a YouTuber may be influenced not only by the characteristics of news content but also by their perceived familiarity and sense of closeness with the content creator. However, if parasocial relationships are not independently measured in the research questionnaire, it should not be concluded that such relationships have been empirically tested in the present study. Rather, the theory is presented solely as an explanatory framework for understanding the relationship between audiences and content creators.

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

The three theories employed in this study address three distinct aspects of audience evaluation in the digital media environment. Source Credibility Theory emphasizes the characteristics of the message source and the role of perceived expertise and trustworthiness; Expectancy–Confirmation Theory focuses on the comparison between expectations and perceived performance; and Parasocial Relationship Theory explains the

perceived psychological relationship and sense of intimacy between audiences and media personalities.

In the present study, these theories are considered alongside the concept of professional media ethics to provide an appropriate theoretical basis for examining how students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University evaluate the performance of Afghan news YouTubers. The central focus of the study is the extent to which news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics, while the aforementioned theories are used to explain the context in which audiences evaluate the credibility and performance of these producers of news content. Accordingly, the present study seeks to empirically examine the evaluations of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University regarding the ethical performance of Afghan news YouTubers, with particular emphasis on dimensions such as news honesty and accuracy, impartiality, social responsibility, and avoidance of distortion and rumor**.**

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of previous research is an essential stage in any scientific study because examining prior studies helps establish the position of the present research, identify existing scholarly contributions, and determine research gaps. In the field of communication and journalism, particularly in relation to professional media ethics and digital media, technological developments have led recent studies to focus increasingly on issues such as news-source credibility, audience trust, media accountability, and adherence to ethical principles on online platforms.

In Afghanistan, studies conducted on media ethics and digital media indicate that adherence to professional standards is directly associated with public trust in the media. Yaqubi, Nabil, and Safi (2025), in a study examining the relationship between public trust and ethical reporting in Afghan media, found that factors such as accuracy, impartiality, fairness, and editorial independence play an important role in shaping audience trust. The findings indicated that the weakening of media ethical standards can contribute to declining public trust in media organizations.

Similarly, Rahmani and Javad (2025), in a study on the role of peace journalism in Afghanistan, emphasized that adherence to values such as social responsibility, truth-seeking, and avoidance of provocative content constitutes an essential element of responsible media performance. The findings of this study provide a relevant basis for examining ethical standards in digital news activities.

In the area of new media, Arian and Ghasemi (2025), in their examination of the quality of citizen journalism in Afghanistan, demonstrated that the expansion of platforms such as YouTube has created new opportunities for news production and dissemination. However, the absence of traditional media-monitoring and editorial oversight mechanisms may contribute to reduced fact-checking, the dissemination of misinformation, and the weakening of professional standards. These findings highlight the importance of examining the ethical conduct of independent producers of news content in digital environments.

In a theoretical study, Rezaei, Sais, and Bahadouri (2024) analyzed ethical standards in journalism and identified dimensions such as truthfulness, accuracy, independence, accountability, and respect for human dignity as fundamental principles of professional media ethics. These dimensions are considered in the present study as a conceptual framework for assessing news YouTubers' adherence to ethical principles.

At the international level, research has also demonstrated that media ethics in digital environments has become an important topic in communication studies. Mikalovich and Hershkowitz (2020), in their examination of the credibility of scientific news on YouTube,

found that content quality, source credibility, and audiences' ability to evaluate information are important factors in assessing the credibility of online news. This study indicates that in digital environments, audiences consider not only the characteristics and presentation of content but also criteria related to credibility and trust.

Oh and Choi (2022), in a study examining the development of trust in YouTube news channels, found that news quality, comprehensiveness of information, reporting accuracy, and transparency in content presentation play essential roles in building audience trust. These findings are directly related to the core dimensions of professional media ethics, particularly accuracy and accountability.

Zimmermann, (2020), in a study of young people's use of YouTube videos, demonstrated that perceived credibility, expertise, honesty, and the personality characteristics of content creators influence audience acceptance of messages. This finding highlights the importance of examining the role of audiences and their perceptions of the ethical conduct of YouTubers.

Similarly, Al-Nashmi et al. (2017), in their examination of the use of user-generated content by international news media, found that reputable media organizations emphasize verification, source accuracy, and quality control even when incorporating citizen-generated content. This demonstrates that the principles of professional media ethics remain fundamentally important in digital environments.

Despite the growing body of research on media ethics, digital news credibility, and audience trust, the review of the available literature indicates that no independent study was identified that has directly assessed the extent to which Afghan news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of university audiences, particularly students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this research gap by examining the perspectives of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University in 2025 and providing an empirical assessment of the state of professional ethics in YouTube-based news activities in Afghanistan.

RESEARCH METHODS

The present study adopts a quantitative approach and employs a survey research design. In terms of its purpose, the study is applied, while in terms of its nature, it is descriptive-analytical**.** The main objective of the study is to assess the extent to which Afghan news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University in 2025. Given the nature of the research problem and its objectives, the required data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed quantitatively.

The statistical population consisted of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University in 2025, with a total population of 1,386 students. To determine the required sample size, the Cochran formula and information obtained from the preliminary study were used, resulting in a calculated sample size of 199 respondents**.** However, during the data-collection stage, 206 valid questionnaires were collected and included in the statistical analysis.

A proportionate stratified random sampling method was used to select the respondents. Under this procedure, the statistical population was divided into strata based on the respective faculties, and the sample allocation for each stratum was determined proportionally to its size within the population. This procedure ensured that students from different faculties were represented in the sample according to their respective proportions in the population. The sample-allocation table presented in Chapter Three indicates that the

total population consisted of 1,386 students and that a total planned sample of 199 respondents was initially allocated.

The data-collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire designed on the basis of the theoretical framework, literature review, and operational dimensions of professional media ethics. The questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, through which respondents indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement with the presented statements. The main variable of the study—the extent to which news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics—was measured through the operationalized dimensions included in the questionnaire.

To assess the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the fields of communication and journalism. The experts evaluated the appropriateness and relevance of the questionnaire items in relation to the research topic and objectives. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient**.** The results showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the different dimensions ranged from 0.786 to 0.965**,** while the coefficient for the overall questionnaire was 0.983**.** These results indicate a high level of internal consistency and demonstrate that the research instrument had satisfactory reliability. Following data collection, the collected data were entered into SPSS and subjected to statistical analysis.

Ethical research principles were also considered throughout the research process. The information provided by respondents was used solely for academic and research purposes, and efforts were made to maintain the confidentiality of participants' information and identities. In addition, the collected data were analyzed and reported without manipulation or alteration.

RESULTS AND DICUSSION

Assessment of the Research Data

The data collected from 206 respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. The demographic characteristics of the respondents included gender, age, field of study, employment status, history of YouTube use, and level of YouTube use. The descriptive analysis was conducted using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Gender Distribution

All 206 respondents were male, accounting for 100% of the sample. No female respondents were included in the study.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents (N = 206)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	206	100.0
Female	0	0.0
Total	206	100.0

Age Distribution

The age distribution of the respondents indicates that the largest proportion of participants was between 20 and 25 years of age, comprising 135 respondents (65.5%). This was followed by respondents under 20 years of age, with 36 respondents (17.5%). A total of 27 respondents (13.1%) were between 26 and 30 years old, while 6 respondents (2.9%) were between 31 and 35 years old. Only 2 respondents (1.0%) were older than 35 years.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents (N = 206)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 20 years	36	17.5
20–25 years	135	65.5
26–30 years	27	13.1
31–35 years	6	2.9
More than 35 years	2	1.0
Total	206	100.0

The findings therefore show that the sample was predominantly composed of young respondents, with 82.9% of participants being 25 years old or younger.

Field of Study

The distribution of respondents by field of study shows that students of Economics constituted the largest group, with 72 respondents (35.0%). They were followed by students of Law, with 33 respondents (16.0%), and Sharia, with 30 respondents (14.6%). Students of Foreign Languages and Literature accounted for 24 respondents (11.7%).
The remaining respondents were distributed among Persian Literature (11; 5.3%), Agriculture (10; 4.9%), Journalism (10; 4.9%), Geology (8; 3.9%), Mathematics (3; 1.5%), Psychology (3; 1.5%), and Social Sciences (2; 1.0%).

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Field of Study (N = 206)

Field of Study	Frequency	Percentage
Mathematics	3	1.5
Psychology	3	1.5
Agriculture	10	4.9
Sharia	30	14.6
Economics	72	35.0
Foreign Languages and Literature	24	11.7
Social Sciences	2	1.0
Journalism	10	4.9
Law	33	16.0
Geology	8	3.9
Persian Literature	11	5.3
Total	206	100.0

The data indicate that Economics had the highest representation in the sample, whereas Social Sciences had the lowest representation. Journalism students constituted 4.9% of the total sample.

Employment Status

Regarding employment status, 111 respondents (53.9%) reported that they were students only. A total of 34 respondents (16.5%) were employed in the government sector, while 61 respondents (29.6%) were employed in the private sector.

Table 4. Employment Status of Respondents (N = 206)

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
Student only	111	53.9
Government employee	34	16.5
Private-sector employee	61	29.6
Total	206	100.0

Overall, 46.1% of the respondents reported being employed either in the government or private sector, whereas 53.9% were students without employment.

Descriptive Analysis of Professional Media Ethics

The respondents' perceptions of news YouTubers' adherence to professional media ethics were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, where 3.00 represents the theoretical midpoint. Means below 3.00 indicate a relatively unfavorable assessment, whereas means above 3.00 indicate a relatively favorable assessment.

Accuracy and Honesty

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Accuracy and Honesty

Item	Mean	SD	N
They accurately cite their news sources.	2.78	1.108	206
They avoid exaggeration in their news reports.	2.74	1.244	206
They present information accurately.	2.67	1.181	206
Overall Mean	2.73	-	206

The overall mean for Accuracy and Honesty was 2.73, which is below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00. This indicates that, from the respondents' perspective, news YouTubers' adherence to accuracy and honesty was not satisfactory.

Among the individual items, accurate citation of news sources received the highest mean (M = 2.78), whereas accurate presentation of information received the lowest mean (M = 2.67). Although all three item means were below the scale midpoint, the results are descriptive and do not by themselves establish whether the difference from the midpoint is statistically significant.

Impartiality

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Impartiality

Item	Mean	SD	N
They reflect different viewpoints.	3.01	1.255	206
Their personal feelings do not influence their news reporting.	2.82	1.277	206
They avoid political bias.	2.79	1.299	206
Overall Mean	2.87	-	206

The overall mean for Impartiality was 2.87, which is slightly below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00. This suggests that respondents generally perceived the impartiality of news YouTubers as less than desirable.

Among the individual items, reflecting different viewpoints had the highest mean (M = 3.01), slightly exceeding the theoretical midpoint. The lowest mean was recorded for avoiding political bias (M = 2.79).

5.2.3. Social Responsibility

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Social Responsibility

Item	Mean	SD	N
They produce educational and useful content.	3.15	1.351	206
They consider the social consequences of their content.	2.91	1.330	206
They refrain from disseminating harmful content.	2.73	1.409	206
Overall Mean	2.93	-	206

The overall mean for Social Responsibility was 2.93, which was below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00 but was the highest mean among the five dimensions examined.
The item concerning the production of educational and useful content obtained the highest mean (M = 3.15), indicating a relatively favorable assessment. In contrast, refraining from disseminating harmful content obtained the lowest mean (M = 2.73).

Respect for Human Dignity

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for Respect for Human Dignity

Item	Mean	SD	N
They refrain from insulting and humiliating others.	2.83	1.264	206
They respect individuals' privacy.	2.73	1.222	206
They do not exploit victims' emotions to attract audiences.	2.67	1.290	206
Overall Mean	2.74	-	206

The overall mean for Respect for Human Dignity was 2.74, which was below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00. This finding indicates that respondents did not consider adherence to this dimension to be satisfactory.
The highest mean was obtained for refraining from insulting and humiliating others (M = 2.83), while the lowest mean was observed for avoiding the exploitation of victims' emotions to attract audiences (M = 2.67).

Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor

Item	Mean	SD	N
They openly correct their mistakes.	2.72	1.268	206
They do not use misleading headlines.	2.66	1.264	205
They refrain from disseminating unverified news.	2.62	1.215	206
Overall Mean	2.67	-	205

The overall mean for Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor was 2.67, which was below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00. This indicates that respondents perceived news YouTubers' adherence to this dimension as unsatisfactory.
Among the individual items, openly correcting mistakes received the highest mean (M = 2.72), while refraining from disseminating unverified news received the lowest mean (M = 2.62). One missing response was recorded for the item concerning misleading headlines, resulting in 205 valid responses for that item and for the corresponding overall dimension score.

Overall Descriptive Interpretation

The descriptive findings show that the mean scores for all five dimensions of professional media ethics were below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00. The highest overall mean was observed for Social Responsibility (M = 2.93), followed by Impartiality (M = 2.87), Respect for Human Dignity (M = 2.74), Accuracy and Honesty (M = 2.73), and Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor (M = 2.67).

These descriptive results indicate that, from the perspective of the respondents, the perceived adherence of news YouTubers to professional media ethics was generally below the desirable level. However, whether these differences from the theoretical midpoint are statistically significant must be determined through an appropriate inferential test, such as

a one-sample t-test or, where the assumptions of parametric testing are not satisfied, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Disscussion

The primary objective of the present study was to assess the extent to which news YouTubers in Afghanistan adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University in 2025. The findings indicate that respondents did not perceive the overall adherence of news YouTubers to professional media ethics as satisfactory. The mean scores for most of the dimensions examined were below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00 on the five-point Likert scale. Overall, this pattern is consistent with the direction of the research hypothesis, which proposed that, from the perspective of Kabul University night students, news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics at a level below the desirable standard. However, because statistical significance cannot be established from descriptive means alone, confirmation of the hypothesis in its full statistical sense requires the results of an appropriate inferential test, such as the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The findings therefore indicate that, from the respondents' perspective, the news activities of YouTubers are associated with shortcomings in adherence to professional media ethics.

Regarding the first sub-question, the findings showed that the mean score for the dimension of Accuracy and Honesty was 2.73. The fact that this mean was below the theoretical midpoint indicates that respondents did not consider the performance of news YouTubers satisfactory in terms of presenting accurate information, correctly citing sources, and avoiding exaggeration. This finding is consistent with the results of Arian and Ghasemi (2025), who, in examining the quality of citizen journalism in Afghanistan, identified weaknesses in fact-checking and the absence of professional oversight mechanisms as challenges affecting digital news content. The similarity between these findings may be understood in terms of the relatively decentralized structure of content production in digital environments, where independent content producers may assume responsibility for selecting and publishing information without the editorial procedures and professional oversight mechanisms commonly found in established news organizations. From this perspective, the observed weakness in accuracy and honesty may constitute an important challenge for news production on digital platforms.

Regarding the second sub-question, the mean score for Impartiality was 2.87. This finding indicates that, from the respondents' perspective, news YouTubers did not perform entirely satisfactorily in presenting different viewpoints and avoiding political bias. This result can be theoretically interpreted through the Source Credibility Theory developed by Hovland and colleagues (1953). According to this theory, the credibility and characteristics of a source are important in the acceptance of a message. Therefore, when audiences perceive a news source as lacking sufficient impartiality or independence, the perceived credibility of that source may also be affected. The present finding is also consistent with Yaqubi, Nabil, and Safi (2025), who identified impartiality and editorial independence as important factors in the formation of public trust in the media in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the present study did not directly test the statistical relationship between impartiality and audience trust. Therefore, the relationship between these concepts is presented here as a theoretical interpretation rather than as an empirically established relationship within the present study.

Regarding the third sub-question, the mean score for Social Responsibility was 2.93. Compared with some of the other dimensions, this dimension showed a relatively more favorable condition; however, its mean remained slightly below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00. Respondents evaluated the production of educational and useful content relatively

positively, whereas their assessments were less favorable regarding consideration of the social consequences of content and avoidance of harmful material. This finding is related to the results of Rahmani and Jawad (2025), who, in examining the role of peace journalism in Afghanistan, emphasized the importance of social responsibility, truth-seeking, and avoidance of provocative content. The similarity between these findings suggests that social responsibility remains an important criterion of professional media performance in digital environments. The mere production of news content, without consideration of its potential social consequences, cannot in itself be regarded as evidence of satisfactory journalistic performance.

The finding concerning Respect for Human Dignity and Privacy**,** with a mean score of 2.74, also indicates an unfavorable assessment by the respondents. This result suggests that, from the students' perspective, news content produced by YouTubers does not always fully comply with desirable professional ethical standards concerning respect for privacy, avoidance of insult and humiliation, and appropriate treatment of vulnerable individuals and victims. This finding is consistent with the perspective of Rezaei, Sayes, and Bahadori (2024), who identified respect for human dignity and protection of privacy as important principles of professional journalism ethics. The significance of this issue in the digital environment lies partly in the fact that rapid publication, extensive opportunities for content redistribution, and competition for audience attention may increase the need to protect individuals' rights and dignity.

Among the dimensions examined, Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor received the lowest mean score, at 2.67. This result indicates that respondents evaluated the performance of news YouTubers less favorably with regard to avoiding the dissemination of unverified news, refraining from using misleading headlines, and openly correcting mistakes. The low score of this dimension is particularly important from a content-quality perspective because distortion, rumors, and the dissemination of unverified information are directly related to the quality and credibility of news content. This finding is consistent with the study by Al-Nashmi et al. (2017), which emphasized the importance of fact-checking, source accuracy, and quality control when using user-generated content. The principal difference between professional media organizations and some independent content producers in this regard may concern the presence or absence of systematic mechanisms for information verification and editorial quality control.

From the perspective of Source Credibility Theory**,** the overall findings indicate that the professional and ethical characteristics of a source are relevant to audiences' evaluation of news performance. Hovland and colleagues (1953) identified expertise and trustworthiness as important elements of source credibility. In the present study, the relatively low assessments of news YouTubers' accuracy, honesty, and impartiality suggest that audiences consider professional performance when evaluating a news source. This finding is also consistent with the results of Oh and Choi (2022), who identified news quality, reporting accuracy, and transparency as important factors in audiences' evaluations of YouTube news channels. However, because source credibility was not examined in the present study as an independent causal variable, the findings do not support the conclusion that weak professional ethics directly cause reduced audience trust. Rather, the findings can be understood as being conceptually consistent with the assumptions of Source Credibility Theory.

The findings can also be interpreted from the perspective of Expectancy–Confirmation Theory. According to this theory, individuals compare the perceived performance of a source or service with their prior expectations (Oliver, 1980). In the context of the present study, audiences may expect a news source to provide information accurately and honestly, maintain impartiality, consider the social consequences of its content, and avoid distortion

and rumors. The fact that the mean scores for most dimensions were below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00 may suggest that respondents perceived the performance of news YouTubers as falling below the level they considered desirable. However, because expectations and the degree of expectation confirmation were not independently measured in the statistical model of this study, the theory is primarily useful here as a framework for interpreting the findings. Accordingly, reduced satisfaction or trust cannot be reported as a direct empirical finding of the present study.

The findings may also be considered from the perspective of Parasocial Relationship Theory**.** YouTubers may facilitate a sense of familiarity and perceived interpersonal closeness with audiences through continuous and relatively personal communication (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Such relationships may influence how audiences evaluate the personality and performance of content creators. Nevertheless, if parasocial relationships were not independently measured and statistically tested in the present study, the findings cannot establish the existence or intensity of such relationships. Therefore, the application of this theory in the present study is primarily contextual and helps explain the communicative environment between YouTubers and their audiences rather than providing an empirically tested causal explanation.

One of the notable findings of the study concerns Social Responsibility**,** which had the highest mean among the five dimensions (M=2.93), whereas Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor had the lowest mean (M=2.67). This difference may indicate that respondents viewed the educational and useful activities of news YouTubers relatively positively, while adopting a more critical assessment of aspects directly related to accuracy, fact-checking, and the prevention of misinformation. This finding has practical significance because it suggests that producing useful content alone is insufficient for achieving professional journalistic performance. Compliance with fundamental news standards, particularly verification and avoidance of distortion, remains essential.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings demonstrate that the principles of professional media ethics remain relevant in digital environments, even though the context of news production and distribution has changed. The emergence of news YouTubers has not eliminated the need for ethical standards; rather, it has made their application more significant in an environment where content producers can operate relatively independently of formal media organizations. The findings are also conceptually consistent with Source Credibility Theory and Expectancy–Confirmation Theory, suggesting that audiences' evaluations of a news source are conceptually related to their perceptions of the source's quality and professional conduct.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for greater attention to professional ethics training for digital news content creators. Training in fact-checking, accurate information attribution, source transparency, impartiality, privacy protection, and avoidance of misleading headlines may contribute to improving the quality of online news content. Strengthening audiences' media literacy may also enhance their ability to evaluate source credibility and identify unverified information. In addition, the development and strengthening of professional self-regulatory mechanisms for digital news content creators may contribute to improved compliance with ethical standards.

Despite the significance of the findings, the study has several limitations. First, the study population was limited to students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University; therefore, generalizing the findings to all YouTube users or to the entire population of Afghanistan should be undertaken with caution. Second, the data were collected on the basis of audience perceptions and evaluations and may therefore have been influenced by respondents' personal experiences, frequency of YouTube use, and subjective perceptions. Third, the study did not examine the actual and objective performance of news YouTubers

through content analysis or direct observation. Consequently, the findings represent audience evaluations rather than direct measurements of all ethical practices of news YouTubers. Fourth, Source Credibility Theory, Expectancy–Confirmation Theory, and Parasocial Relationship Theory primarily served explanatory purposes in this study, and the causal relationships proposed by these theories were not comprehensively tested.

Overall, the findings indicate that, from the perspective of students enrolled in the night program at Kabul University, the adherence of news YouTubers in Afghanistan to professional media ethics was not at the desirable level. Among the dimensions examined, Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor showed the lowest mean (M=2.67), while Social Responsibility showed the highest mean (M=2.93). Nevertheless, both dimensions, as well as the other dimensions examined, remained below the theoretical midpoint of the scale. The central issue, therefore, is not merely the expansion of YouTube as a platform for news dissemination, but also how professional ethical standards can be maintained in an environment where news production and distribution are increasingly shifting toward independent content creators and digital platforms. These findings emphasize the need for simultaneous attention to professional ethics education, content verification, audience media literacy, and accountability among digital news content creators.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed how far news YouTubers adhere to professional media ethics from the perspective of evening students of Kabul University, using a quantitative survey of 206 respondents. The results show that all five dimensions scored below the theoretical midpoint of 3.00, indicating that adherence was perceived as below the desirable level. Social responsibility received the highest mean (2.93), followed by impartiality (2.87), respect for human dignity (2.74), and accuracy and honesty (2.73). Avoidance of distortion and rumor was rated lowest (2.67), with unverified news and misleading headlines as the main concerns.

These findings are conceptually consistent with Source Credibility Theory and Expectancy–Confirmation Theory, but they remain descriptive audience perceptions. The study did not test causal relationships between ethical performance and audience trust, nor did it apply inferential tests to confirm that the means differ significantly from the midpoint. Because the sample was limited to male evening students of one university, the results should not be generalized to all Afghan YouTube users.

Overall, news YouTubers have become significant actors in news dissemination, yet greater attention to professional ethics is required for them to be credible sources. Strengthening journalism ethics education for online content creators, fact-checking practices, audience media literacy, and self-regulatory mechanisms would help improve the quality of digital news in Afghanistan.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, particularly the relatively low mean scores observed for several dimensions of professional media ethics, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthening Professional Ethics Education for Digital News Content Creators**
   News YouTubers and online media content creators should receive specialized training in fundamental principles of journalism ethics, including accuracy, information verification, impartiality, social responsibility, source transparency, and respect for privacy.
2. **Developing Media Self-Regulatory Mechanisms in Afghanistan's Digital Environment**

Given the growing role of social media in news dissemination, media organizations and journalists' associations should consider developing and promoting clear ethical guidelines for journalistic activities on platforms such as YouTube. Such mechanisms should emphasize accountability, transparency, accuracy, and responsible content production.

3. **Strengthening Fact-Checking and Preventing the Dissemination of Unverified Information**
   Given that the dimension of Avoidance of Distortion and Rumor received the lowest mean score (M=2.67), news YouTubers should verify information and sources before publishing content and should avoid disseminating unverified news and using misleading headlines. Clear procedures for correcting errors should also be encouraged.
4. **Increasing Media Literacy Among Audiences, Particularly University Students**
   Universities and educational institutions should develop and implement media literacy programs that enable audiences to evaluate the credibility of online news sources, identify unverified information, recognize misleading content, and distinguish professionally produced news from less reliable content.
5. **Conducting Broader Research on Digital Media Ethics**
   Future studies should examine not only audience perspectives but also the perspectives of news YouTubers, professional journalists, and communication scholars. Such research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the state of media ethics in Afghanistan's digital information environment.
6. **Expanding the Sample and Comparing Different Audience Groups**
   Future research should consider larger samples and participants from different universities and geographical regions of Afghanistan. Comparative studies could also examine differences among social, demographic, and educational groups in their evaluation of professional media ethics and the performance of news YouTubers.

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