

The news is free - but the ethics are sold separately!

By [Portia Mubu](#)

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The so-called 'death of traditional news media' is a conversation that has been going on in journalism circles, and the communications discipline, for a long time. In fact, when I was in journalism school a decade ago - the phenomena of social media and what it means for news to no longer break in the newsroom was scary.



Source: www.unsplash.com

It almost felt like the world no longer had a place for journalism. 10 years later, with a much more vigorous digital ecosystem and even more competition for traditional media publications – do we need traditional media – and does the world still have a place for journalism?

Of course it does!

While we can dive into a discussion about the aesthetic of a newspaper, and the scent of a freshly printed glossy magazine, I believe there is much more to journalism than society appreciates, and sometimes even its own scholars have the confidence to realise.

Journalism has undoubtedly faced a harsh need to quickly reinvent itself, to catch up with trends and changing audience behaviour.

Take, for example, the growing number of YouTubers and blogger/vloggers that have somewhat 'taken over' tabloid journalism today, and will 'own the scoop.' by literally just being the first person at the scene of an incident who records and posts the video on Twitter.



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There is also the revenue generation challenge for traditional media, where influencer marketing is threatening advertising opportunities – as well as podcasters taking some shine from radio – and radio journalists being replaced by celebrities in the chase after audiences. The competition is rife! There are too many platforms, too many content creators and an audience spoilt for choice – and likely overwhelmed. So back to the question on journalism – still relevant? Yes – and here's why!

Evolution

All that has simply happened and will continue to happen in the communications industry - is evolution. Journalists today must therefore keep their ear on the ground and take advantage of the new media, and craft good stories – but most importantly remain true to one future-forward aspect – ethics.

The reality is, though platforms evolve – the consumer need remains simple – the need for valuable, well-crafted content, on the right channel, at the right time. Marketers, PR practitioners, businesses and audiences are all-embracing these platforms – and so are traditional media practitioners of today and they are standing out. I always enjoy keeping up to date with big cases on social media while going on with my workday by keeping up to date with an established reporter's real-time posts, knowing they are factual and accurate. It gives you that edge of a developing story – but also the digestible, factual summary that only a trained journalist will know how to deliver comprehensively.

People can tell...

Though the struggle of fake news continues, people often fall back on traditional media for reliable content. We should never underestimate that many people understand what's real from what's not. Although sadly, many also don't. And from a revenue perspective – this is the power of the media house that should continue to be leveraged. Consumers are real, they believe real journalists, with real information - based on the trust built from consistency and reliable content that speaks to them, and this is where businesses want to be.

Ethics matter

I saved the best for last because I can still hear the voice of my media ethics lecturer say; "Is it of public interest? Is it fair and non-biased? And can you say beyond reasonable doubt that it is balanced?" The biggest and distinctive differentiator between the old and so-called new media is ethics.

The art of journalism is guided by ethics, a press council, press code, editor's forum, and a dedicated Press Ombudsman. And yes, like all good constitutions there have been slip-ups – which is the very reason why the discipline needs to be regulated and to guide media ethics. It is the constitution aimed at preserving the discipline and dignity of journalism – encouraging fair, non-biased, non-sensationalist reporting. More importantly, it is through these ethics that democracies have improved, justice has been served, corruption exposed, and journalism recognised as the 5th pillar of democracy – the so-called 'watch dogs' of our republic.

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Trends will come and go – but the principles of news haven't changed much. Most meaningful content takes time, editorial objectiveness, verified sources and sensitivity to any prejudice. Journalism should have a place in our society, and its integrity preserved as much as its independence - and so too should the good, honest, and ethically driven journalists are hailed for the incredible work they are doing!

I am pleased to see big business support the ethics of journalism in my daily communications role. I will continue to play my part in uplifting journalism and its incredible impact on our democracy and our ethics as a country.

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