# From Aristotelian to Kantian Ethics in the Digital Media Age: Defining and Practicing the Good for the Common Good in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The media serves as a bridge between the state and the public, performing key roles such as informing, encouraging public discourse, and providing leadership for a transparent democracy. However, ethics refers to inherent principles and standards that individuals use to delineate right from wrong. In Nigeria, the media is free and possesses the power to operate, but must do so within the confines of accepted ethics in information gathering and dissemination to the public. However, with the new age, media practices have shifted from traditional to digital with unique technological enhancements, giving room for ethics to be flouted in Nigeria, mainly because media professionals do not consistently think about right and wrong. It is hence suitable to respond to this crisis by revisiting standard ethical frameworks that predate context and technology. This paper evaluated the ethical implications of digital media practices from the Aristotle and Kantian perspectives, to define what is good in practice for the Nigerian public. The study conducted a theoretical review of the Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontological ethics in Nigerian society's traditional and digital media parlance. Findings revealed that the influence of elements of the digital age, such as technology and social media, is reflected in the negligence of ethical conduct in the Nigerian digital media landscape. This development has led to a decline in adherence to ethical standards set by regulatory bodies for the Nigerian media. Therefore, introducing and enforcing ethics in the digital media landscape is

crucial, drawing particularly from philosophical frameworks such as Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian ethics.

## Introduction

Ethics refers to a system of moral principles by which individual actions and decisions can be judged as right or wrong. Ethics is quite expedient in every sphere of life. In media practice, where decisions tend to influence public perception, ethical principles are crucial to ensure responsible communication that maintains public trust and integrity. Media or information ethics is that branch of ethics that focuses on the channels of communication and connections that exist among the constructions, organisation, dissemination of information, moral values, and ethical codes leading to human conduct in society (Tilak, 2020). Over time, many philosophers have presented diverse ethical theories framed to cover and rectify human judgments. However, the lack of universally accepted moral and ethical standards has made media ethics to be regarded as a controversial field (Hove, 2021). Media operations in different regions and cultures project on variant values. Media priorities vary across countries; developed nations, such as the US, emphasise individual freedom, whereas developing countries focus on protecting local communities (Darch & Underwood, 2019).

To provide a structured understanding of how moral decisions are made in media parlance, different philosophers have proposed diverse ethical theories. These theories serve as a framework for evaluating the rightness or wrongness of media actions. The work of Christians (1983) identifies five major ethical principles used in setting moral standards. They include Aristotle's Golden Mean, Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, Mills' Principle of Utility, John Rawls' Veil of Ignorance, and the Judeo-Christian perspective on Morality (Amana & Oyibo, 2014).

Theories of character and virtue, such as the "Aristotle's virtue ethics" are premised on the assumption that virtue is the middle ground between two extremes. Aristotle emphasises moderation for the appropriate actions. Aristotle's virtue ethics stresses the cultivation of character traits conducive to human flourishing (Curren, 2016). In the digital space, this translates to developing virtues like digital literacy, critical thinking, and online civility. These virtues equip individuals to navigate the vast information landscape responsibly, discern truth from falsehood, and engage in respectful online

discourse (Panda & Kaur, 2024). However, the addictive nature of social media and the ease of anonymity online can hinder the development of these virtues, posing challenges for Aristotelian ethics in the digital age.

Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative represents theories based on duty and principle, which underscore that moral actions are determined by adherence to duty and universal principles, regardless of the consequences or circumstances. This implies that the media must publish a true story regardless of the resultant effects. Kant's deontological ethics posits that the morality of an action is determined by its adherence to universal moral principles, such as the categorical imperative (Ezedike, 2020). In the digital context, this translates to considering the potential consequences of online behaviour on others. Kantian ethics would advocate treating others online with the same respect and dignity as one would in the physical world, avoiding cyberbullying, online harassment, and the spread of misinformation. However, the complexities of online anonymity and the difficulty of establishing universal principles in a constantly evolving digital environment pose challenges for the application of Kantian ethics in the digital age.

Mill's principle, also called 'Utilitarianism', has gained significant prominence in media ethics for a century. The principle affirms that what stands as right must be that which pleases the larger percentage of persons in a country. It is a widespread ethical view in American society (Christmas et al., 2020).

John Rawls' Veil of Ignorance is a principle that advocates that fairness is a basic tenet of justice. Justice ought to be an "insulated virtue" that is blind to social status, colour, or creed. All persons ought to be treated fairly without fear or prejudice. This implies that the media must uphold moral uprightness to avoid special treatment for societal bigwigs. Everyone, regardless of culture or status, must be subjected to the same moral standards.

The Judeo-Christian perspective on morality focuses on persons as ends. In this principle, love is perceived as more than a raw principle, but is firm and unconditional. The unconditionality of this love makes it wrong for someone to use their fellow being to achieve specific ends. Love to one another is a practical action that involves helping whoever needs it, such as the weak, poor, less privileged, and downtrodden in society (White III, 2019).

Together, these five foundational concepts underpin the ethical debates surrounding various approaches such as teleology, deontology, relativism, absolutism, situational ethics, universalism, subjectivism, objectivism, legalism, and antinomianism, which serve as guides for

journalistic ethical decision-making. These frameworks provide the guidance needed to make ethical decisions in media communication.

The media acts as an information disseminator and a channel of communication between people and the government (Saputra et al., 2022). The media enlightens the public by providing a wealth of information related to socio-cultural and politico-economic aspects of society. The rising demand for media ethics, stimulated many media organisations to frame certain codes of ethics to regulate employee performance and protect themselves against government rules and regulations. In practice, the use of ethical standards helps media professionals to honour and preserve honesty, integrity, and absoluteness. These ethical standards equally help the media in gaining public trust and confidence of individuals, organisations, and society at large. It is impossible to operate the media without ethics, as it determines how well it can respect information rights, freedom of speech, absolute truth, and respect for human entities (Alsina & Da Silva, 2018).

The rise of cyberspace and hypertext has disrupted traditional media routines, with professionals losing control over event selection and information dissemination. The vast amount of digital media content makes it challenging to assess credibility and trustworthiness. Digital media challenges the ethics of media in the form of the symbiotic relationship that exists between social bloggers, social media users, and digital publishers of information, despite their conflicts of interest (Elliott & Spence, 2017). There are obvious layers in the media sphere, but the inclusion of digital media actors may raise certain concerns regarding what exact features, intents, and social identity should be possessed by the media to fit the world of today. It is argued that the decentralising ability of the new media to empower anyone to publish information does not necessarily mean they are media professionals. It is thus believed that in this digital world, conventional media practice can only be distinguished from digital media practice by ethics and not technical capabilities (Christians, 2019).

Conversely, digital media diverges from traditional media in its speed, timeliness, and operational pace, which can lead to vagueness and inadequate verification. Often, digital content prioritises headlines over in-depth analysis, risking oversimplification and undermining the media's core purpose of informing and enlightening the public (Mateus, 2020). Digital media is also characterised by certain concepts, such as post-truth, as opined by Harsin (2018), and fake news, as suggested by Lacković (2020), which both give rise to social distrust in digital media practice. Fake news is a viral post based on fabricated accounts, assumed to be correct

information. It is usually based on probable or alternative facts and not real facts. Fake news is described as information pieces that are deliberately and verifiably untrue and capable of misleading readers (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The concept of post-truth is complicated by its own limitations, revealing that objective truth may not be the primary goal of media practice (Carlson, 2018).

Therefore, digital media can be said to have initiated certain hiccups and risks to the function and identity of the media at large. This implies that ethical considerations are integral to media practice as a mode of social building (López Jiménez et al., 2021). Although codes of conduct are in place, ethics are being broken in digital media in Nigeria, mainly because media professionals do not consistently think about right and wrong. Moving from traditional to digital means that new issues have emerged in the field, making it hard for the media to maintain its ethical standards in producing and publishing news. There is a strong reason to reexamine traditional philosophies that can be used in any situation. The ideas of Aristotle's virtue ethics and Immanuel Kant's categorical imperatives can be used as a guide for revising Nigeria's digital media practices.

Consequently, there is a need to evaluate the implications of the transition of ethical practices in accordance with media practices during the pre-digital and digital age. Nevertheless, the crux of this paper is to trace and analyse the ethical implications of new media practices from the Aristotelian and Kantian perspectives. This paper argues that applying Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontological ethics as main ethical guides can help address the current moral challenges in Nigeria's media industry. The principles connected to these philosophies have the ability to direct media professionals to report honestly and carefully about issues that matter to people. Employing media determinism as a theoretical framework, this paper examines the impact of Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontological ethics on digital journalism, media quality, and communication in Nigeria, to promote ethical journalism practices and enhance media trustworthiness and accountability.

## The objective of the study

This paper aims to:

- Trace and analyse the ethical implications of the new media practice from Aristotelian and Kantian perspectives.
- To define what is good for the common interest in Nigeria.
- To analyse how to practise the good for the common good in Nigeria.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Media Determinism Theory was propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1964. The theory holds that the media not only form the attitudinal opinion of people but also fosters revolution in the mode of operation of a social system. The theory further posits that the running of a social outfit can change with the adoption of new technology (Jan et al., 2021). The fundamental underlying principle of media determinism theory is that the survival of humans is dependent on variations in the system of human communication. McLuhan opines that the development of media for mass communication enables the diffusion of culture in society, which consequently impacts human behaviour. It was famously quoted by McLuhan that "we shape our tools and they, in turn, shape us" to fit into the discourse. In other words, it was reframed by West and Turner (2010) that humans have a mutual relationship with arbitrated technology, first by creating technology and in turn getting recreated by technology. The historical opinion about this theory is that the revolutions in the media over time have brought about commensurate changes in societies. Media Determinism theory refers to the assessment of media systems and mediated environment in modern societies. The theory considers the impact of media on individual societies. This theoretical framework ascribes more impact to the role of the media than arbitrated content with regard to societal influence and growth.

Media Determinism theory is based on three assumptions: media influences societal behaviour; media shapes views and organises human experiences; and media connects the world. In this digital age and the prevalence of social media, its impact cannot be overemphasised in bonding people of diverse cultures together. Regarding the first assumption, social media has not only turned the world into one small global village, but it has also fashioned every aspect of man's social life. McLuhan, in the second assumption, believes that the media messages are capable of influencing people's view of the world. The positive portrayal of any matter or concern by the media can chart the thoughts and views of the public about such issues. Similarly, a negative portrayal of an entity or matter by the media can direct the public to view it in such a manner. The third assumption of McLuhan is perceived in the way the media has turned the globe into a huge political, economic, social, and cultural system. This assumption is believed to be McLuhan's projection of the appearance of social networking sites. The producers of digital technology have

endeavored to enhance it with better and user-friendly features to ensure smoother connectivity among humans.

The application of the media determinism theory emphasises social media arbitrated contents and its impacts on the social, economic, and political attitudes of man. The new technology of social media has penetrated deep into human lives, and it is used to socially interact with familiar and unfamiliar people in a bid to upscale their social capital (Dyer, 2020). Social media platforms are designed to encourage specific behaviours, including frequent content creation, sharing, and engagement. These design elements, according to media determinism, influence how users interact with the platform and with each other (De la Cruz Paragas & Lin, 2016). However, the growth of social networking sites in the last decade has caused a significant change in the communication attitude of people globally. Social media enables interpersonal, group, and mass communications in the form of text messages, photos and video sharing, and so on. These subsequent technological innovations have made room for better advancement and growth in communication patterns (Ciarli et al., 2021). The internet and social media have fostered a participatory culture where users are no longer passive consumers but active creators and distributors of content. This shift, argued by media determinists, is a direct result of the technological affordances of digital platforms (Willems, 2021). Algorithmic curation on social media platforms can create echo chambers and filter bubbles. Users are exposed primarily to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, potentially limiting their exposure to diverse viewpoints. Media determinism suggests that these algorithmic structures shape user experience and potentially limit critical thinking (Fisher, 2022). In today's digital age, navigating media influence is nearly impossible. Given this and based on the assumptions of media determinism theory, the ethical priorities of the media in defining what is good for Nigerian society are of major interest to this study.

## Aristotelian Ethics and Media Practice

Virtue ethics refers to a moral philosophy that emphasises the development of good character traits or habits, prepared for action by intentional choice and guided by practical wisdom (Duffy et al., 2018). Aristotle opines that virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, being determined by rational principle, and that principle is determined by practical wisdom. It is not a separate action but a continuous attitude of acting well. For an action to be classified as virtuous, it must be done intentionally, with the actor fully aware of their actions and motivated by a

sense of moral excellence. Aristotle believes that a developed character is a virtue to the degree to which the person exhibiting it can contribute to achieving the aim of the domain (Onuoha, 2018). Aristotle believes that the aim or purpose (telos) of a domain is the end or goal that something naturally strives to achieve, and it is understood through reason and observation rather than mere intuition (Lawrence, 2020). He opines that society is the peak of political organisation, and virtue is supposed to help humans excel in that state. Therefore, it can be understood that virtue ethics is based on Aristotle's concept of striving towards the ideal of human flourishing, which involves cultivating virtuous character traits in contrast to merely focusing on the real versus ideal human being.

Similarly, Aristotle describes virtues as encompassing both moral and intellectual virtues, among which wisdom (*Sophia*) and practical wisdom (*Phronesis*) are the most important. The cardinal virtues identified by Aristotle include justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence (Kaczor & Thomas, 2020). He argues that each moral virtue is a mean between two corresponding vices, representing an excess of one extreme and a deficiency of the other. This concept is exemplified by the virtue of fortitude, which is the mean between the vices of cowardice and rashness. A closer examination of the virtues of the Aristotelian ethical theory is provided below.

### Fortitude

Fortitude, also known as courage, was discussed by Aristotle as a point of average between rashness and cowardice. A courageous person faces their fears for the right reasons, using the right approach, and at the right time (Halifax, 2018). They act out of a sense of dignity and moral purpose. A courageous man shows no fear in facing a dignified death. It is thus the mean regarding things that inspire confidence or fear, under the given circumstances, and involves choosing or tolerating actions based on their dignity, while rejecting those that lack it.

Aristotle believes that the media must possess this virtue of fortitude in order to fully discharge its functions. To perform its basic functions of informing and educating the public, the media must be brave enough to say the truth while ensuring that there is no rashness in its presentations for the purpose of the public good.

### Temperance

Temperance indicates the significant average between excess and deficiency in terms of emotions and desires (Sanz & Fontrodona, 2019). A

temperate human is balanced when it comes to the subject of pleasure and pain. He appreciates such pleasure as the right reason calls for it. Temperance keeps the desiring part of a man's mind in synchronisation with the voice of purpose. This implies that a temperate man is mindful of his media consumption. It can, therefore, be said that temperance facilitates responsible digital media usage. The dangers associated with digital indulgence, such as depression, severe attachment disorder and isolation, are resultant effects of excessive social media use (Aslan, 2020). These dangers can be abated with moderation of digital media usage, which promotes mental well-being (Dennis, 2021). Consequently, the benefits of digital media usage remain undeniable, which, therefore, suggests that a temperate digital media user will cultivate a balanced approach that optimises media strengths while being mindful of the risks involved. Aristotle suggests that this cardinal virtue helps navigate the digital media landscape by finding a balanced middle ground.

## Prudence

Prudence is a virtue premised on practical wisdom to make sound judgments instead of blindly following rules. Aristotle posits that prudence requires an intentional faculty that allows a person to consider diverse probable actions in terms of their resultant effects. In terms of digital media, prudence would mean a thorough assessment of information before sharing to envisage the kind of impact it would generate, especially in digital media. In a research work by Wright (2021), it is averred that the virtue of prudence helps users to be cautious about their online presence and content as well. Prudence in the digital world will help users not to accept online information naïvely.

It is, however, challenging to utilise prudence in the modern digital media landscape. Social media platforms utilise algorithms that foster spontaneous behaviours, such as constant content sharing and uncensored responses. It had been discovered that people often disengage themselves from the resultant effects of their digital activities (Bandura, 2017). This thus contributes to the erosion of prudence since the landscape fosters satisfaction in the immediate over more permanent consequences. It should be noted that if prudence were infused into digital media usage (Grube, 2017), then users will have a better sense of awareness and responsibility to engender an ethically compliant media space.

## Justice

The virtue of justice by Aristotle was positioned as a major pillar of ethical living. Justice ensures that there is a consistent will to give each person

their due (Nozick, 2013). It holds that there should be a fair distribution of resources and opportunities to everyone alike. Justice by Aristotle describes justice as a virtue that guides individuals to act fairly, lawfully, and with integrity.

Justice in the digital landscape implies addressing concerns such as online harassment, cyberbullying, and misinformation. Applying the virtue of justice in the digital space is not without challenges. For instance, free speech is a liberty that clashes with concerns about online harm. Furthermore, the global nature of the internet raises questions about the applicability of universal standards of justice. Cultural norms and legal frameworks differ across countries, making it challenging to implement uniform regulations (Vitolla et al., 2021). This requires fostering international cooperation among governments and platforms to develop justice-oriented solutions that respect cultural diversity. By striving for distributive justice, ensuring fair access to the digital world, and promoting corrective justice by addressing online harms, media professionals can contribute to a more just and equitable digital landscape.

## Kantian Ethics and Media Practice

Deontology ethics, on the other hand, focuses on the actions instead of virtues and the consequences of actions. Deontology is an ethical theory that posits there are limitations on promoting the ultimate best consequences, implying that the right actions may not always lead to the best outcomes (Hennig & Hütter, 2020). Deontologists believe that an action is right simply because it inherently carries the imperative to act in such a manner. The action assigns an unavoidable duty to a moral agent. Deontologists also believe that every action possesses innate features that ascertain its rightness or wrongness. This thus means that in a certain scenario, a rational agent would choose the same course of action regarding deontology. Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics posits that moral actions stem from a sense of duty, emphasising the importance of responsibility in ethical decision-making. In other words, duty ethics demands that people should act from a sense of responsibility. This kind of commitment is based on reason rather than experience. Thus, a moral principle will not depend on empirical data and will be binding on everyone. This is described by Kant as the Categorical Imperative. In his opinion, an action should not be regarded as good because of its eventual result, but rather because it is a moral act performed out of a sense of duty to the moral law.

The deontological perspective is encapsulated in the Kantian Categorical Imperative, which asserts that actions must be based on maxims that can be universally applied to anyone in similar conditions. These maxims must be applicable without exception. Kantian ethics prohibits treating humanity as an end, emphasising that we must not use human beings merely as instruments to achieve our goals. Consequently, the media must regard the public as ends in themselves, rather than to profit (Owakah & Aswani, 2011). In summary, Kantian ethics focuses on the inherent morality of actions, adherence to universal principles, and the intrinsic worth of individuals, emphasising duty and rationality over consequences.

## Ethical Codes of Media Practice in Nigeria

The Nigerian media, under the auspices of the Nigerian Press Organisation and Nigerian Press Council, established a new ethical code of journalism in 1996. The Nigerian code of media ethics is a derivative of the international code with some differences, but shares most common elements such as virtues of truthfulness, accuracy, responsibility, balance, impartiality, and public accountability as they apply to the gathering of newsworthy information and its subsequent broadcasting to the public. The council claimed that the old code of ethics was lacking in many vital areas. The new code was accepted and approved. The new codes are fifteen, ranging from editorial independence to press freedom and responsibility (Qaribu, 2016). The codes also include accuracy and fairness, privacy, privilege and non-disclosure, decency, discrimination, reward and gratification, violence, children and minors, access to information, public interest, social responsibility, plagiarism, and copyright.

The most important provision of this code is editorial independence, which stipulates that media professionals should make news content decisions. Another essential part of the code covers the virtues of precision and justice. The media must inform the public and must earn their trust and confidence. The media ought to desist from publishing erroneous and ambiguous information. In any scenario where such information has been unintentionally published, prompt correction should be made. The media must hold the right of reply as a cardinal rule of practice. In the course of his duties, a media professional should strive to separate facts from speculation and comment (Christmas et al., 2020). The frontline of the Nigerian code of ethics is decency, stating that media professionals should dress and comport themselves in a manner that conforms to public taste. The media must not use abusive language or post gaudy details in words

and pictures. The media must protect the identity of the relatives of convicted persons except in unavoidable cases. Lastly, the media must not discriminate on any basis such as ethnicity, religion, gender, or health status.

Regardless of how the Nigerian code of ethics guides traditional media, the dynamic nature of digital media defies adherence to regulation. This implies that users of digital media practice will have to imbibe the culture of self-regulation to ensure ethical compliance. Furthermore, users must incorporate and uphold fundamental ethical codes for media in digital parlance to ensure that information flow is accountable and reliable. Similarly, digital media platforms must operate on fairness and objectivity to present a balanced perspective of raised issues without exaggeration or provocative language (Ogbodo et al., 2024). Since digital media platforms can serve as grounds for cyberbullying, hate speech, and the exploitation of vulnerable groups, there is a need to promote responsible online behaviour and condemn the act of spreading hate or abuse. In terms of abused privacy from the large amount of data stored by digital media, ethical codes on seeking users' consent and permission to store and use their personal data should be encouraged. By upholding accuracy, fairness, privacy, respect, and responsible expression, media practitioners can foster a thriving digital space in Nigeria that promotes positive social and democratic growth.

## Ethical Implications of Digital Media Practices in Nigeria

The media in the Nigerian environment is a social institution that morally contributes to society and, as such, must be guided in its practice. They are known to eliminate the darkness of ignorance by ousting the errors and establishing the truth in the country (Agang, 2022). The Nigerian media is often criticised for subjectivity, with both government and privately-owned outlets operating under editorial control (Anthony et al., 2021). The government-owned media works to protect government interests while the privately owned media work to protect the interests of their owners, which eventually results in violation of ethical conduct. The traditional media thrived more in the pre-Internet era when instant access to news and information was not yet available (Kperogi, 2019). However, the advent of digital media has significantly changed the concept of information flow and accessibility globally. In Nigeria, the use of social media has facilitated change by expediting civic conversations, providing platforms for citizen expression, and creating favourable markets for entrepreneurs and other

business owners. However, this kind of revolution has been marked by complex ethical concerns.

Social media and new media have become integral to Nigerian society, posing significant challenges to traditional media (Obukoadata, 2017). Habits such as readership are threatened due to the presence of vlogs, reels, and other internet-enabled news and information sources. The new media is not only saturated with copious information, but it also travels at a rapid pace. The instant feature of social media is one of the options that guaranteed its global acceptance. Also, the amount of breaking and trending information disseminated via the internet per hour or minute cannot be matched by print or other conventional media forms (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012). It is easy for users to revisit such information on sites at any time or anywhere without having to store newspapers or any other tedious process of the old media. The process of searching and getting information in the new media consumes less time and is less cumbersome. These attributes have forced the old media to pave way for the new media, which allows people to act as both the transmitters and the producers as well. It can therefore be said that the new media has a solution to almost every possible information-related need (Rajendran & Thesinghraja, 2014).

Digital media in Nigerian society is highly useful for interactive purposes and serves as a potential mediator between the governors and the governed. There is the issue of the credibility of the news carried by the online media, but the case is the same with the traditional media as well, with the main difference in the processes of accountability. In Nigeria, organisations in traditional media are regulated by the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), which can take action against them for sharing wrong or dangerous. However, some traditional media outlets, such as print houses and television houses, have political biases that are often reflected in the kind of information they prioritise. This has resulted in the diminishing of their credibility while the trust of information on the new media is gaining ascendancy (Rajendran & Thesinghraja, 2014).

A discourse of the discrepancies and similarities between the traditional and digital media reveals that the former is highly centralised, needing huge funding which can be easily controlled by the government using diverse means while the digital media is decentralised, requires little startup, has more interactivity and public participation, and is significantly difficult to control (Clarke, 2020). In the conventional media, the elements of freedom and space are directly or indirectly proposed by the government. This has therefore raised concerns about self-censorship within the conventional

media community (Yesil, 2014). It is thus no wonder how fast digital media has gained popularity and prominence in civil society. Citizens are free to create news on their own or get stories from the internet, which is free from control. It implies that anyone can become a media professional, whether by owning a blog to act as a reporter, using a cell phone to become a videographer or photographer, or serving as a people's advocate via social media platforms.

The scope of interaction with audiences got widened and became more engaging with the use of new media. Unlike in traditional media, users are allowed to interact and give feedback in digital media. Digital media users are not passive receivers but active participants in the entire information dissemination process. This has made it quite difficult for traditional media to escape the digital media's influence. In reality, it has become a norm for traditional media to integrate itself with digital media for a mutual relationship or risk going out of relevance (Rozario, 2013). Another undeniable fact about digital media is that it is extremely useful for point-to-point and mass-to-point information dissemination. The digital media allows individuals to hold authorities accountable and expose injustice. Social media platforms have proven to be effective tools for civic engagement and mobilisation, as seen during the #EndSARS movement. Additionally, digital media can promote social inclusion by providing a platform for marginalised voices and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

## Exploring the Concept of 'Good'

The concept of "good" is an intricate phenomenon that is approached from individual perceptions, societal norms, and philosophical frameworks. The Nigerian social system believes that specific elements such as good governance, inclusive education, and accessible healthcare make up a thriving society (Idike *et al.*, 2019). However, understanding what is good in the digital age requires drawing on established ethical theories, such as Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontological ethics. According to Aristotle, someone who practices integrity, moderation, and responsibility will experience a good life and help others in the community. To Kant, "the good" relates to doing what is right and obeying general principles, no matter the result, such as always speaking truthfully, respecting independent choices, and seeing people as ends instead of as tools. For this reason, this paper defines "the good" as adherence to ethical principles that prevent being influenced by ratings or money.

The relevance of ethics in media practice is to help define what is good and acceptable to the public it serves. The underlying responsibilities of ethics in media usage are to ensure fairness, objectivity, accuracy, and moral judgments, among others, in both traditional and digital media practices. The delineation between what is good and otherwise from the media implies determining whether it has fulfilled its obligations to its audience (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). To serve the public interest, media must uphold responsibilities that include values, rights, duties, and moral principles. The media must incorporate a sense of value that embodies the ideals or beliefs in each society about what is good or bad (Qaribu, 2016). Media practice without inherent values will encourage ethical violations. A sense of value is significantly capable of impacting a person's attitude and serving as a general ethics in practice.

Current digital media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and defining what serves as the common good in today's parlance. The various social media platforms, news outlets, and online forums all serve to influence what members of the public consider desirable for society. As much as digital media can help to facilitate open focus discussions and spread positive social change, it is believed to be subject to mismanagement and exploitation (Dutta, 2020). It is also important to note that beyond the digital sphere, societal definitions of good are deep-rooted in cultural norms and traditions. Emphasis on good governance in Nigeria highlights the significant role societal values play in shaping ideals of a fair society.

The application of Aristotelian virtue ethics encourages individuals to strive for personal excellence in their pursuit of the common good. This implies that if digital media users in Nigeria express these virtues in their everyday lives, they can contribute to a more just and equitable society. On the other hand, Kantian deontological ethics emphasises duty-bound moral actions, guiding individuals to act in ways that can be universally applied. Duties encourage media users to undertake certain actions in the interest of the public. This would imply that Nigerians can utilise digital media practice to promote policies that provide equal access to education and healthcare for all citizens, regardless of social background.

## Media Practice for the Common Good in Nigeria

The primary focus of the media in any society ought to be the promotion and protection of the common good. The Nigerian media ought to adopt the Aristotelian ethics that propagates that there should be no restrictions on media freedom. Ethical use of media freedom can foster peace and reduce conflict. Ethical journalism is the bedrock of media practice for the

common good (Ahmed et al., 2020). In Nigeria's current context, aligning media freedom with ethical standards is crucial for addressing corruption. By promoting ethical journalism, transparency, accountability, and civic engagement, media outlets can play a pivotal role in addressing pressing societal challenges.

From history, it was learned that the media served as a beacon of hope during the desperate and vulnerable times in the fight for Nigeria's independence from colonial and military rules. In the past, the Nigerian media's unwavering commitment to informing the public about government's excesses, despite threats, has earned them press freedom and public respect (Christopher & Onwuka, 2013). Before the advent of digital media, the media assumed major roles in the exit of the military government in Nigeria via their reportage of government antagonism and dissatisfaction. Investigative reports have exposed corrupt practices in government, the private sector, and other spheres of society. For instance, exposing the mismanagement of the funds to combat Boko Haram sparked public outcry and demands for accountability (Salihu & Gholami, 2018). Media can contribute to education by providing informative programmes and campaigns on issues such as literacy, health, and civic education. The Nigerian media, through educational programmes on radio and television, have been effective in reaching rural communities, where access to formal education is limited (Aondowase et al., 2023). Media can raise awareness about public health issues, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and maternal mortality. It plays a vital role in supporting democratic processes by providing unbiased coverage of elections, facilitating political debates, and promoting voter education. The media in Nigeria has the power to be a force for good by promoting ethical journalism, transparency, accountability, and civic engagement. However, to realise this potential, media practitioners must adhere to the highest ethical standards and prioritise the public interest over commercial interests.

Despite its historical enthusiasm and capability, Nigerian media still face fundamental challenges. Ownership influence remains a major driver of unethical practices, with media outlets often pressured to serve their owners' interests. Many successful private media organisations are often allied to individual politicians or certain political parties, and their thriving is based on influenced reportage. This is in direct conflict with what is in the best interest of the public.

**Conclusion**

The concept of ethics in media is essentially about duty, freedom, responsibility, and accountability. It embodies a set of rules meant to be adhered to by the media to ensure zero deviation from free, just, and fair performances. Media irregularities, such as unethical conduct and immoral values, often stem from a lack of adherence to ethical standards. The advent of digital technology has exacerbated the Nigerian media's pre-existing ethical challenges, with the decentralised nature of digital media amplifying issues of irresponsibility and lack of accountability, resulting in unprecedented consequences.

However, as a vital link between the government and the governed, the media's role demands a nuanced blend of courage and prudence to effectively discharge its duties and promote the public good. There is, therefore, a need to ensure the practice of ethics in this era of digital media to achieve unbridled focus, transparency, credibility, and accountability in the Nigerian media space. Applying Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian categorical imperatives can help define what is good in the digital media era, addressing the diverse societal challenges that threaten the common good in Nigeria. Understanding what is good enables us to promote the common good, and media can play a vital role in addressing Nigeria's numerous challenges.

**Recommendations**

- Media organisations should develop a clear ethical framework, defining "the good" as truthfulness, fairness, and social responsibility. This framework should guide all journalistic practices and decisions.
- Creators of digital platforms should work in conjunction with media authorities in exercising censorship on publishable content.
- All media personnel should be trained to exercise freedom balanced with responsibility in their practice.
- Media academic institutions should emphasise the significance of ethics in media practice.
- Relevant stakeholders, including journalists, academics, and community leaders, should be involved in defining what constitutes "the good" in the media context to ensure a broad and inclusive perspective.

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