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## Miscellaneous

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# Ethical guidelines for journalistic use of GenAI. The main trends in the international debate and progress in self-regulation in Spain

## Abstract

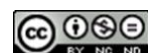
The emergence of generative AI (GenAI) has led to a far-reaching transformation of the entire journalistic working process, from the business model to the production, distribution and consumption of content. Beyond the expectations of greater productivity and efficiency it has generated, its use also poses important individual, professional and democratic ethical risks. These include attacks on privacy, a decline in journalistic quality and an increase in misinformation. To deal with this situation, academics and the journalistic sector have been publishing different professional guidelines and codes in an attempt to guide the ethical use of this technology. Based on the systematic review of three sets of academic guidelines and 18 important professional publications, and including data from more than 60 countries, this study establishes a double objective: to identify the main trends determining the international ethical debate; and to examine the degree of correspondence between these trends and the first self-regulation initiatives launched by the Spanish media. The results show the construction of a professional consensus on clear ethical standards: principally transparency, human supervision, verification, and respect for classic journalistic values (truth, loyalty to the public, and checking information). Taking a similar conceptual basis, the Spanish media's commitment to more operational ethical self-regulation codes –with express recommendations, for example, covering the traceability of sources, the differentiation of synthetic content, and limitations on the use of GenAI– is also clear.

## Keywords

**Artificial Intelligence, GenAI, journalism, ethics, professional guidelines, transparency, Spain.**

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## 1. Introduction

Ever since the launch of the ChatGPT application in November 2022, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in news has undergone remarkable development, confirming its potential to provoke “one of the most radical transformations ever undergone by journalism,” affecting business models, content dissemination and professional roles and routines (Parratt-Fernández, Mayoral-Sánchez & Mera-Fernández, 2021, p. 10).

The evolution of journalism in recent decades is closely connected to digital technological development. And this initial journalistic application of AI, together with other innovations (virtual reality, 5G, drones, among others), opens a new stage in this development that raises new professional opportunities (Pérez-Seijo *et al.*, 2020). Along with changes in professional routines, the arrival of these technologies also questions the classic parameters of journalism, from its content (clickbait) to its influence on public opinion (disinformation), to the arrival of new professional profiles (Sobrados-León & Ruiz-Acosta, 2021). And yet, at the same time, the scientific debate has been dominated by reservations (or rejection) of the concept of ‘technological determinism’ as the main force to explain changes in the journalistic sector. Recent authors propose breaking this stigma and carrying out a more nuanced evaluation of the concept when reviewing the role of technology in journalism (Appelgren, 2023).

Although academic interest in AI in journalism is not new and has gradually increased over the last decade (García-Orosa, Canavilhas & Vázquez-Herrero, 2023; Peña-Fernández, Meso-Ayerdi, Larrondo-Ureta & Díaz-Noci, 2023), the emergence of generative artificial intelligence or GenAI has led to an exponential growth in both its professional use and in attention paid to it by researchers (Ufarte-Ruiz *et al.*, 2024). The study of the ethical risks of AI in journalism is becoming increasingly important but is still in a subsidiary position when it comes to academic studies of this area (García-Orosa *et al.*, 2023) and academic activity in communication (Redondo-García & Caffarel-Serra, 2022).

The media, especially professional organisations and the academic field, have been publishing regulatory documents<sup>1</sup> which are setting significant trends in the practical application of ethical criteria. This study seeks to deepen the analysis, with the following objectives:

- O1. To identify the main international trends in the publication of guidelines for the ethical use of AI in journalism, especially those published since the beginning of the rise of generative AI in 2022.
- O2. To analyse the main common points and key concepts of the guidelines published by the media, professional groups and leading international bodies in the field of journalism.
- O3. To examine the degree of correspondence between the international trends detected and the first self-regulation initiatives launched by the Spanish media.
- O4. To raise a series of initial recommendations for the effective application of ethical criteria in the use of AI in journalism.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The different uses of AI are already fully integrated into all phases of the journalistic process and they affect the collection, storage, creation, transmission, distribution and consumption of news (Diakopoulos, 2019; Túnnez-López, Fieiras-Ceide & Vaz-Álvarez, 2021). A survey carried out at more than a hundred media outlets in 46 countries (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023) shows astonishing levels of current implementation and growth expectations: more than 75% of the media already use AI in at least one of the areas of the news value chain. However, this integration into newsrooms still has important professional challenges pending, such as, for example, its rigorous application to complex functions such as data verification (Fridman *et al.*, 2023). In

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the study, different types of regulatory documents with an ethical perspective, such as protocols, principles, rules, directives and editor’s notes are referred to as ‘guidelines’.

Spain, although there is a growing interest in the sector, a mismatch is still being detected between business-technological development and actual application in the media (Sánchez-García *et al.*, 2023).<sup>2</sup>

In the face of this increasing implementation, hybrid or collaborative approaches including both AI and journalists as complementary elements of the process, rather than replacing one another, are becoming more popular (Peña-Fernández *et al.*, 2023). The aim is to maintain the human dimension of journalism in practice (Kapuściński, 2002), with AI understood as a set of tools developed by humans to serve human means and ends (Broussard *et al.*, 2019). This human and social dimension of journalism is the basis for upholding the need to maintain values inherent in the profession, such as providing information and critical evaluation and encouraging citizen participation (Meier, 2019). If AI does not serve to improve key elements of journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2003), such as its obligation as regards the truth, its duty of loyalty to citizens, and checking as an essential element, “then AI will not have fulfilled its ethical mission in the media” (Codina *et al.*, 2024, p. 223).

Although the possibilities offered by AI are promising, and arouse curiosity and interest, they also generate fear, suspicion and concern in the sector (Franganillo, 2023). Specifically, three types of risks are detected. Firstly, certain individual threats are perceived, including digital exclusion, the infodemic, digital addictions, hyperconnection, cyberbullying, impersonation, privacy violations, and data loss and theft (Vera-Baceta, Navarro & Gómez-Hernández, 2022). Secondly, other professional risks associated with AI include particular concern for the decline in quality, lack of transparency, editorial independence, checking, ethics in data management, and the commercialisation of journalism (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023). A third group of risks would be those related to its social and democratic consequences: an increase in disinformation and polarisation, interference with electoral processes, dissemination of hate speech and the perpetuation of inequalities (Helberger & Diakopoulos, 2023; Manfredi-Sánchez & Gómez-Iniesta, 2023).

To deal with these risks, ethical, transparent use must be made of AI and critical thinking incorporated into its application (Lopezosa *et al.*, 2024). Beyond technical considerations, the use of AI must address ethical issues, with responsibility as key aspect for maintaining trust and journalistic integrity (Lima-Santos, Yeung & Dodds, 2024). So, together with the technical and organisational problems, Codina *et al.* (2024) highlight the ethical issues as perhaps the most challenging when implementing AI. Overwhelmingly, people advocate for regulation of its use (new ethical frameworks and codes) to preserve the values of journalistic work (Forja-Pena *et al.*, 2024).

The media have significant responsibility when it comes to applying AI, as they must act with transparency, ensure ethical use and carefully monitor the possible negative effects (Franganillo, 2023). In this sense, a theoretical consensus has been consolidated on the importance of transparency (and its effects on the veracity of content and citizen trust) as a central value in the journalistic use of AI (Borden *et al.*, 2024). And yet, limits to achieving this professional transparency are currently also detected among media and other verification platforms (Cuartielles *et al.*, 2024).

Only from this ethical perspective can the media’s objective of trying to generate mature, responsible public opinion be defended (Cortina, 1999). In this sense, the ethical codes that give formal shape to the values and decision-making criteria that define organisational culture internally and manage reputation externally are crucial (García-Marzá, 2017). Guidelines are positioning themselves as a decisive instrument to ethically guide the use of this technology. The European Commission itself, in its regulation of AI, encourages the drafting of codes of

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<sup>2</sup> This contrasts with the fact that the Spanish media are leaders in the European Union in creating journalistic content about AI (Alcaraz-Martínez, Váñez & Lopezosa, 2024).

conduct, especially in the case of businesses like media companies that are not, at least initially, classified as high risk (Helberger & Diakopoulos, 2023).

The complexity of the current situation, in which the full potential of AI is not yet known, makes the development of guidelines difficult and means they have to be periodically reviewed and amended (Calvo-Rubio & Rojas-Torrijos, 2024). Since the rise of generative AI, the media in the United States, and particularly in Europe, have been most prolific developing these professional codes (Lima-Santos *et al.*, 2024). However, in the Spanish-speaking world there are not many specific references to these guidelines (Corral, n.d.). Meanwhile, other tools, such as the figure of the ethical AI editor in newsrooms, (Marconi, 2020) or assessment mechanisms that take ethical alignment into account, (Nishal & Diakopoulos, 2024) could be of interest when it comes to managing this technology responsibly.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology is based on an exploratory systematic review of both academic texts and the so-called “grey literature” (Pons & Monistrol, 2017), which includes other types of publications such as reports, news, information documents, and so on. The work process is organised in three phases and has made it possible to obtain a complete, up-to-date bibliographical base from which to develop the objectives of the study.

In the first phase, developed during June to October 2024, an initial search is carried out in the two main reference scientific databases (Scopus and Web of Science), based on keywords in Spanish and English: “AI,” “journalism,” “guidelines,” “rules,” “recommendations” and “principles.” Using a snowball technique with documents found on other search engines (Google) and by following news from the industry, the number of related texts found, such published guidelines and self-regulation codes, was expanded. In a second phase, the authors agreed on the inclusion and analysis criteria using the scoping review technique (Codina, Lopezosa & Freixa, 2022), understood as a systematic type of summary that allows the situation in a field of knowledge to be determined precisely, until the sample of selected texts was complete (see details in Table 1).

**Table 1.** Classification of the documents selected in the analysis sample.

Type of document	Sample analysed
Guidelines for ethical regulation of AI and in journalism drawn up by academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lima-Santos, Yeung and Dodds (2024)</li> <li>● Ventura (2023)</li> <li>● Cools and Diakopoulos (2023)</li> </ul>
AI and journalism guidelines published by media groups, international organisations and research centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Paris charter on AI and journalism / Reporters Without Borders (RWB) together with 16 organisations</i></li> <li>● <i>Principles for the Future of Responsible Media in the Era of AI / World Economic Forum (WEF)</i></li> <li>● <i>Generative AI Diversity Guidelines. Six Principles for Responsible Journalistic use of Generative AI and Diversity and Inclusion / Institute of Media and English (IME) (Birmingham City University)</i></li> <li>● <i>Algoritmos en las redacciones: retos y recomendaciones para dotar a la inteligencia artificial de los valores éticos del periodismo / Consell de la Informació de Catalunya (CIC) (Ventura, 2021)</i></li> <li>● <i>Guidelines on the responsible implementation of artificial intelligence systems in journalism / Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (Council of Europe) (CE)</i></li> <li>● <i>Artificial Intelligence for Independent News Publishers –a guide by Madalina Ciobanu / Public Interest News Foundations (PINF)</i></li> <li>● <i>Global Principles on Artificial Intelligence (AI). News Media Alliance (NMA) (2023)</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>AI ethics guidelines. A starter kit for newsrooms</i> / Poynter</li> <li>● <i>Guidelines for Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Media</i> / Anadolu Ajansı Academy (Turkey)</li> <li>● <i>Principios globales del periodismo con IA</i>. Universitat de Valencia and Universitat Jaume I (Cano Orón &amp; López Meri, 2024)</li> <li>● <i>Decálogo para el uso ético de la IA en los medios de comunicación</i>. Asociación Vasca de Periodistas- Colegio Vasco de Periodistas y Diócesis de Bilbao.</li> </ul>
Initiatives on the ethical use of AI in Spanish media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>EFE agency</i></li> <li>● <i>Prodigioso Volcán</i></li> <li>● <i>RTVE</i></li> <li>● <i>El País</i></li> <li>● <i>Ctxt</i></li> <li>● <i>Newtral</i></li> <li>● <i>Jot Down</i></li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, the analysis of the selected academic materials (guide reviews) and professional materials (guidelines produced by different organizations) allows us to obtain an overview of the trends in self-regulation of the use of AI. As these are texts with different characteristics and scopes, we have included a overview of them in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Main characteristics of the sample of reviews and guidelines analysed.

Authorship	Description and main characteristics
Lima-Santos, Ngai Yeung & Dodds (2024)	Analyses 37 sets of guidelines from 17 countries, including traditional and legacy media, agencies, innovative companies, public media and groups. The majority are from Europe (20) and North America (12), and, to a lesser extent, from Asia (2), South America (2) and Oceania (1). For Spain, only Prodigioso Volcán is included.
Ventura (2023)	Analyses and identifies patterns in the Charter of Paris and 13 sets of media guidelines, mostly from Europe but also including some from the United States. From Spain, the <i>EFE Agency</i> 's guide is reviewed.
Cools & Diakopoulos (2023)	Reviews and analyses a total of 21 sets of guidelines, mostly from Europe (14), followed by North America (5), Asia (1) and South America (1). None of them is Spanish. It identifies prominent themes and patterns and offers a section of professional suggestions.
Organisation	Description and main characteristics
Reporters Without Borders (RWB) together with 16 organisations (2023)	Prepared by a working committee chaired by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa and made up of 32 experts from 20 countries. This is the main collaborative text on ethical principles for the use of AI in journalism.
Steering Committee on Media and Information Society. Council of Europe (CE) (2023)	Guidelines drawn up by a subcommittee of experts from the Council of Europe. It offers a key comprehensive framework for the ethical and responsible implementation of AI in journalism. It underlines the need for practical guidance for different groups involved in the application and critical assessment of the journalistic use of AI. And it provides specific recommendations to three professional groups: newsrooms, providers and political regulators.
World Economic Forum (WEF) (2024)	This white paper published by this international organisation, with the participation of 21 experts, includes five principles for the future of responsible media in the age of AI.

Institute of Media and English (IME) Birmingham City University (n/f)	A brief document which, based on a review of existing literature and guidelines, proposes six basic principles for diversity to be followed by the media and journalists.
Consell de la Informació de Catalunya (CIC) / Ventura (2021)	This guide, which predates the GenAI boom, offers an analysis based on an analysis of the literature, surveys of perception and degree of implementation, interviews and discussion groups with experts. Finally, it offers eight recommendations to provide artificial intelligence with the ethical values of journalism.
News Media Alliance (2023)	Document with 12 ethical principles aimed largely at developers and signed by publishing groups and international associations such as the European Publishers Council, News Media Europe or the World Association of News Publishers. Among the Spanish groups, the Association of Information Media and the Association of Magazines stand out.
Public Interest News Foundations (PINF) (2024)	Professional guide edited by this non-profit organisation, based on the cooperation of publishers from all over the United Kingdom. As a final result, it offers an overview of the main considerations, questions and opportunities associated with the use of AI in journalism.
Poynter (2024)	Proposes a template for newsrooms to establish a basic policy regarding the use of AI updated in August 2024, including core values and points to consider.
Anadolu Ajansı Academy (s/f)	The guide contains ten points established after a discussion forum at AAtölye, which brought together academics, journalists, media organisations from Turkey and industry representatives.
Universitat de Valencia and Universitat Jaume I (2024)	From the Chair of Audiovisual Analysis and Prospective at these Spanish universities, Lorena Cano and Amparo López Meri have developed an introductory guide to the use of AI that includes a section on ethical use with specific challenges and recommendations.
Asociación Vasca de Periodistas- Colegio Vasco de Periodistas y Diócesis de Bilbao	Decalogue with ten principles prepared by a working group made up of communication professionals, experts in Artificial Intelligence, representatives of some Dioceses, Universities and the media.

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, the analysis of the sample has allowed us to screen the principles and recommendations that repeatedly appear aimed at the media, offering a list of core aspects ranked in three levels, from highest to lowest degree of consensus.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Overview of trends in the self-regulation of the use of AI in journalism

The review of the qualitative sample of texts allows us to identify three levels of academic and professional consensus regarding the ethical use of AI in journalism: a first group that includes concepts that generate an almost general consensus in the publications (presence between 64-100% of them); a second group with a significant presence (between 42-63%); and finally, a third group of concepts with a complementary presence in the professional debate analysed (less than 35%). There follows a general overview of the data in Graph 1. The following sections give a detailed analysis of the professional concepts and principles present at each level.

**Graph 1.** Main recurring aspects in the texts on guidelines analysed.



Source: Own elaboration.

#### 4.2. Main consensuses in the academic and professional debate

Below we analyse the main aspects that appear most frequently. These are 7 concepts present in at least 10 of the 14 selected texts, generating a high level of consensus around them (presence in 66–100% of cases).

- **Transparency.** This is the only concept that appears in all the texts analysed, with clear unanimity in highlighting the importance of linking trust and ethics with transparency. Credibility, responsibility and truth are supported by transparency in journalism (Lima-Santos *et al.* 2024). Based on this more overall view, there are different readings of its application, ranging from the labelling of content generated by AI, to broader visions such as that of the Paris Charter (RWB, 2023) which establishes that any use of AI with a significant impact on content production or distribution must be declared and recorded by the media. However, the study by the Institute of Media and English (IME, n.d.) considers that the need to declare the use of AI will depend on how it is used and the topics covered. The Council of Europe (CE, 2023) also makes transparency a key aspect, stating that users of AI must give information about which systems have been implemented, what they are designed for, what values they reflect and what is being done to train staff and ensure adequate supervision, among other questions. Poynter’s guide (2024) proposes applying transparency both internally, facilitating conversation and creativity, and externally, promoting consumer education.
- **Human supervision.** There is almost complete unanimity that human supervision is an essential requirement. Lima-Santos *et al.* (2024) point to the clear recognition of the irreplaceable role of humans in the media process as a recurring theme in all the guidelines. The Paris Charter includes among its principles the idea that the media must give priority to humans, so human decisions must remain central, both in long-term strategies and in everyday editorial decisions (RWB, 2023). For the Public Interest News Foundations (PINF, 2024) human intervention is crucial in order to mitigate harmful risks, algorithmic

biases and inaccuracies. Some guidelines, like those from the Consell de la Informació de Catalunya (News Council of Catalonia-CIC) (Ventura, 2021), propose going further, indicating that supervision should include aspects such as conducting tests before the launch of new lines of news products.

- **Respect for journalistic principles and values.** The ethical principles to guide the use of AI are not created from scratch; they must be based on the ethical principles and values of journalism, and they must reinforce them. This idea runs through all the guidelines. It is, for example, the first principle established by the Paris Charter (RWB, 2023). The Council of Europe (2023) even establishes the need to align it with the values of journalistic organisation, so that the use of AI contributes to the media's journalistic mission.
- **Checking.** This appears linked to the need for human supervision and is considered a key aspect for building trust in the current context of misinformation. Concern for the way AI can amplify misinformation, and the risks this involves for society, is widespread in the texts. For example, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2024) highlights the dangers this entails for global economic stability.
- **Traceability and control of sources.** To a lesser extent and using different terms, the guidelines allude to the importance, and also the difficulty, of maintaining the traceability of content. The Paris Charter sets out as a principle the need for the media to guarantee the origin and traceability of their content, providing reliable details about its origin and the modifications made to it (RWB, 2023).
- **Compliance with the law.** Another focus of debate is the importance of complying with regulations. The CE (2023) points out that the decision to implement specific journalistic AI systems must be based on what is legally and technically feasible and this knowledge must be updated to reflect changes in the legal framework, technology and newsroom practices.
- **Data protection and privacy.** Data protection is not only an ethical imperative, but also an essential component to maintain public trust and comply with legal requirements (Lima-Santos *et al.*, 2024). The CIC urges the media to collect only the necessary personal data, anonymise it if it is not relevant and keep it safe from misuse by third parties (Ventura, 2021). When the data refers to subjects, compliance with privacy and data protection rules is an essential requirement (CE, 2023; Poynter, 2024).

#### 4.3. Other key concepts in the debate on ethics and the journalistic use of AI

At the second level, it is possible to identify 9 professional concepts and principles that appear in a very significant number of texts:

- **Ethical responsibility.** The guidelines speak of a responsible use of technology and also reference to the importance of content creators being responsible for their work and actions, as mentioned by the WEF (2024). This section has a conception that goes beyond respect for journalistic values by encompassing the broader perspective of social responsibility which, following García-Marzá (2017), is linked to the idea of responding in the double sense of giving reason to others for what we do and responding to the legitimate expectations of society.
- **Intellectual property and copyright.** Respect for intellectual property is a point mentioned in 9 of the 14 documents analysed. For example, the Paris Charter states that the owners of AI systems must credit their sources, respect intellectual property rights and provide fair compensation to the owners of the rights. The News Media Alliance (2023) emphasizes respect for copyright and payment for data used by technology companies and calls for efficient licensing models that can facilitate the development of reliable and high-quality AI systems.

- **Measures to avoid bias.** Bias is one of the main risks in the use of AI, so the guidelines emphasise the importance of being aware of it in order to avoid it and deal with the danger it poses to diversity (IME, n.d.). The EC (2023) states that the availability, fairness and quality of the information must be meticulously assessed in line with the idea adopted by the CIC to ensure the origin and diversity of the information and constantly check that it is representative (Ventura, 2021).
- **Need for AI training.** Organisations must empower and train their workforces, making sure they have sufficient knowledge of technologies (WEF, 2024) so that the training helps mitigate the risks of AI (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2023). The EC is particularly concerned with this aspect, stating that knowledge of AI must be kept up to date and that those involved in the process must have the necessary skills to make adequate, well-informed decisions. Journalists need technical and ethical training so as not to lose control of the processes (Venture, 2021).
- **Differentiation of authentic and synthetic content.** Beyond transparency, several texts make clear the need to establish a clear difference between content generated by AI. This is, for example, a key principle of the Paris Charter (RWB, 2023). To promote differentiation, Anadolu Ajansı Akademi (n.d.) proposes the establishment of a logo.
- **Accountability.** Seven of the texts explicitly refer to the term accountability, which is linked to transparency. The CIC states that transparency is a fundamental aspect of accountability –a concept that is increasingly highly valued in public life in general and in the journalistic world in particular (Venture, 2021). It is pertinent that the media acquire the commitment to be accountable and rectify when necessary (Asociación Vasca de Periodistas, s/f).
- **Need to update the guidelines.** Four of the texts indicate the importance of keeping the guidelines updated. Several of the guidelines analysed by Cools and Diakopoulos (2023) show humility in the face of rapid changes and emphasise that it is important for them to be adapted as understanding of the risks develop.
- **Responsible content customisation.** The use of AI to customise content poses clear ethical dilemmas, so this must always be done in a responsible and balanced way, giving users the option to change their selection criteria and/or to disable customised distribution (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2023; Poynter, 2024). The CE (2023) argues that just as recommendations, content, distribution models and prices are customised, subjects must have the right to responsible customisation. Several guides also warn of the risk of polarisation, so customisation must preserve the diversity of news (RWB, 2023; Ventura, 2021).
- **Editorial responsibility in the media.** Responsibility includes not only the need to act responsibly, but also to the attribution of responsibility for the content published. In this sense, the guidelines agree on indicating that the media maintain their editorial responsibility, even when they use AI in their work of collecting, processing or disseminating news (RWB, 2023; Cano-Orón & López-Meri, 2024).

#### 4.4. Diversity of viewpoints to complement the academic and professional debate

At a third level, we classify other concepts that generate certain coincidences, identified in at least 3 or 6 of the documents analysed but not unanimously.

- **Establishing guidelines and self-regulation mechanisms.** The guidelines themselves raise the need for this type of document. As AI began to be implemented more widely in newsrooms, it became clear that a set of guidelines would be necessary, both to ensure that experiments would not go wrong and to inform the public (PNIF, 2024; Poynter, 2024).
- **Cooperation with third parties.** The promotion of research appears clearly linked to cooperation to take advantage of the potential of AI and encourage the exchange of knowledge beyond the newsroom (Lima-Santos *et al.*, 2024). The CE (2023) brings together some of these coinciding aspects in its guidelines, when pointing out the importance of

having a space for diverse, multidisciplinary, interorganisational, interprofessional and participatory experimentation (Poynter, 2024).

- **Collecting best practices.** Best practices must also be publicised so that GenAI programmers build better models, according to the IME (n.d.), while the CE (2023) encourages the exchange of experiences and best practices.
- **Participatory process including those affected and/or the audience.** This is a point of particular concern to the CE (2023), which indicates that risk assessment procedures must include ways of integrating the experiences and perspectives of the people and communities affected. It also argues that the decision to implement AI systems in journalism must be a participatory process that involves and balances different interests and perspectives.
- **Risk due to the concentration of power at technology companies.** When referring to third parties the key issue raised is the role technology companies are playing and the importance of dealing with their accumulation of power (Lima-Santos *et al.*, 2024). The media show concern for the fact that innovation in AI is being driven by technology companies, which is why some of the guidelines, such as those from the CAC, encourage the media to avoid using technology firms or even the cloud. The deployment of AI systems by platforms should not be used to strengthen their market power, facilitate abuse of dominant positions or exclude rivals from the market.
- **Making use of AI to improve efficiency and quality.** With a constructive vision of AI, there are also coincidences about the importance of using it to improve. The WEF (2024) highlights the opportunity to reduce costs and increase efficiency by saving time on repetitive actions and highlighting the importance of also using AI to promote new business opportunities.
- **Interdisciplinary cooperation.** The successful adoption of AI technologies in newsrooms depends on effective cooperation between journalists and AI specialists (Lima-Santos *et al.*, 2024). The promotion of interdisciplinary teams is recommended, seeking complementary ways of thinking (Venture, 2021).
- **Regulation of own and third-party images.** The documents tend to prioritise the use of authentic images and recordings to describe real events (RWB, 2023) and limit the use of AI to certain news items, always with the appropriate information.
- **Promoting research,** both in the use of AI and when exploring the convergence between the technical efficiency of the systems and the values of ethical journalism (Venture, 2021).
- **Establishing clear limits on the use of generative AI.** Some of the guidelines specify which uses are permitted and which are not. Ventura (2023) includes initiatives ranging from not using it to generate or edit text to limiting its use and specifying clearly when it has been used.

Before ending the section, it is worth mentioning some aspects that appear in a guide but that have a relevant weight: (1) The need to subject the AI systems used to a prior and independent evaluation, a requirement included in the Paris Charter (RWB, 2023) that led the WAN-IFRA to decide not to promote the charter despite having collaborated in its elaboration because it considered it unrealistic<sup>3</sup>; (2) the concept of responsible acquisition prioritized by the EC (2023) that even develops a checklist with relevant considerations when acquiring them; (3) the commitment to citizen literacy (Poynter, 2024); or (4) the adoption of strategies to minimize environmental impact (Cano-Orón & López-Meri, 2024).

#### 4.5. Self-regulation initiatives in the Spanish media

In the Spanish media, various initiatives with a view to establishing guidelines to govern the use of AI have been detected. These are particularly diverse, ranging from the rules and brief

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<sup>3</sup> <https://wan-ifra.org/2023/11/wan-ifra-steps-back-from-endorsing-new-charter-for-ai-and-journalism/>

guidelines published by the native digital media *Neutral*, *JotDown* and *CTXT*, to the Prodigioso Volcán AI guide, including the updating of the EFE Agency's style guide and the editorial reflections of *El País* and RTVE. We will briefly look at each of these cases before relating them to the trends drawn from the guidelines.

In February 2024, the EFE Agency presented its *Nuevo Libro del Estilo Urgente*<sup>4</sup>, which updates the previous edition of 2011 and incorporates a section devoted to AI. It establishes the use of artificial intelligence as an aid but not a substitute for the work of journalists, and it notes the need to update the regulations in this respect in the face of rapid technological advances. It also clearly regulates when and how AI-generated images can be used. It states that when texts are generated automatically from sources such as sports leagues, stock markets or ministries, just like any other text they must identify their source and include an explanatory note at the end.

Meanwhile, in the first half of 2023 Prodigioso Volcán, the communications consultancy with headquarters in Spain and Argentina, published an update to its practical guide on the use of AI in journalism<sup>5</sup>. Although this is not an ethical guide, it includes a section on deontology in journalistic AI focused on the challenge of making AI processes transparent, reviewable and adjustable in order to improve it and on the current difficulties with the opaque ways in which these technologies work.

In May 2023, *CTXT* published a decalogue<sup>6</sup> which includes its commitment to the value of human beings in line with the “artisanal, slow media” model of journalism. It also established broad, defined limits for the use of AI. Specifically, it undertook not to publish content edited by AI or images “not even with clear notice,” or to use interviewing robots or tracking or breaking news technology or to customise content. The use of AI is restricted to grammar checkers and, in urgent cases, to translation technology. Meanwhile, the checking agency *Newtral* published its ethical guidelines on the use of GenAI in April 2024<sup>7</sup>, making three main points: (1) subjecting the use of AI to the media's mission to provide public service journalism, and particularly to use technology to help with checking; (2) protecting talent, understanding that no AI should replace human creativity; and (3) transparency. In this respect, it indicates that the media should use their own algorithms to control their architecture and content, undertaking to explain how they work. Following the same style of rules, the cultural magazine *JotDown* includes its positioning to use AI as an innovative medium<sup>8</sup>, but with a “cautious and transparent” approach. The guide specifies which uses are permitted, and under which conditions, and which are not. For example, it undertakes not to publish texts that have been edited or substantially modified by AI, maintaining the commitment to authorship and human work.

Moving to traditional newspapers, we find the initiative of *El País*. Its readers' advocate, Soledad Alcaide, published an article in June 2023<sup>9</sup> in which she explained the initiatives put in place (assignment of fieldwork to the Technology section and demand for reflection and training by the Editorial Committee) and recalled some of the criteria from the style book already applicable to AI, such as the prohibition on manipulated images, the ethical principle of transparency demanding the identification of origins and sources and respect for copyright. As for text, she argued that the editorial team has been using AI tools for years (correctors, tag generators, automated publication on social networks) without the readers being aware of this or understanding that it requires clarification.

The last of the initiatives analysed corresponds to the extensive reflection on the use of AI<sup>10</sup> carried out by David Corral, head of innovation at the Spanish public broadcaster RTVE. The

<sup>4</sup> Nuevo libro del estilo urgente. Agencia EFE | Instituto Cervantes.

<sup>5</sup> IA\_para\_periodistas\_2023.pdf (prodigiosovolcan.com).

<sup>6</sup> Un decálogo contra la IA y la industria del engaño | ctxt.es.

<sup>7</sup> Guía ética para el uso de la IA (newtral.es).

<sup>8</sup> Guías y directrices para el uso responsable de la inteligencia artificial - Jot Down.

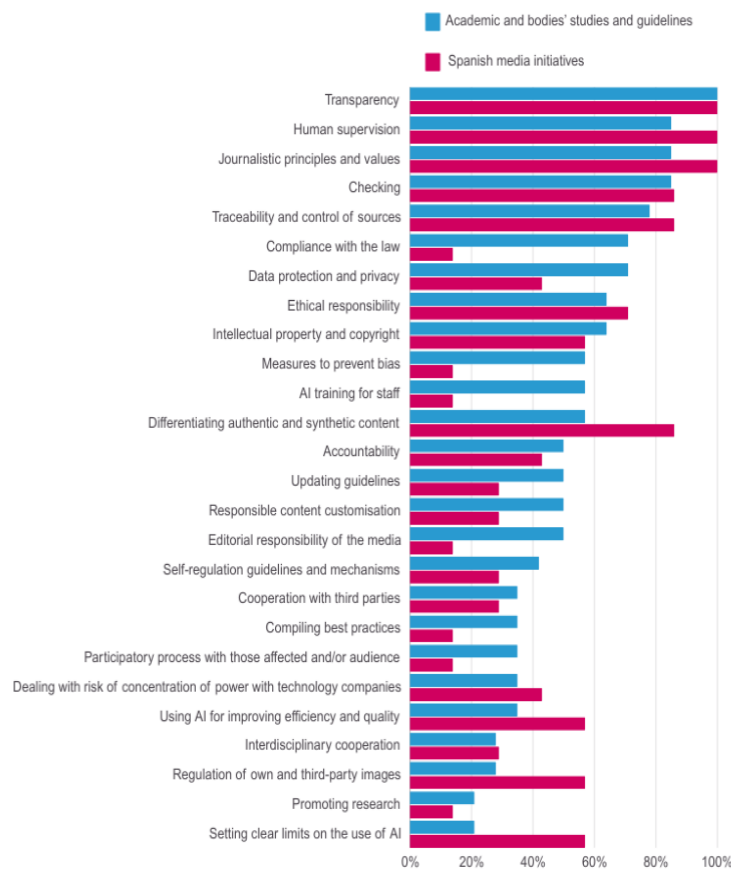
<sup>9</sup> ChatGPT: Aprovechemos la inteligencia artificial para el periodismo EL PAÍS.

<sup>10</sup> Publicaciones (rtveia.es).

text, which includes a proposed a framework of use, includes a broad view of the ethical aspects where progress is being made, addressing almost all the concepts extracted from the guidelines analysed, many of which are summarised in the need for the systems using AI to be “transparent, responsible, fair, explainable, understandable, impartial and secure, with guarantees of their legality, accessibility, quality, traceability, integrity and accountability” (Corral, n.d.). The text is intended to advance innovation and the positive uses of AI based on multidisciplinary teams, the cooperation of third parties, the establishment of alliances, the identification of good practices, active listening to the audience and other interested parties, training and continuous adaptation. In view of these advances, there is an interest in participating in the official certification definition of AI as a tool or service.

Although it is true that the Spanish initiatives analysed do not fully match the concept of ethical guidelines, they are significant in order to establish trends and compare them with the points in common compiled by the international guidelines, as shown in Graph 2.

**Graph 2.** Comparison between the main recurring aspects.



Source: Own elaboration.

The comparison reflects how some aspects are more strongly present in the Spanish media than in the documents analysed in the guidelines from international organisations and associations. This is the case of human supervision and respect for journalistic principles and values, which appear in all the initiatives reviewed. Beyond these aspects, which are predominant in both, a noteworthy difference is the greater presence in Spanish media initiatives of more practical aspects, such as the traceability of information, the differentiation of synthetic content, regulations on the publication of images and the establishment of clear limitations on the use of generative A. The Spanish media also tend to make a reading more focused on an interest in

making use of AI to improve efficiency and quality, an idea present in more than half of the Spanish initiatives analysed.

However, in other areas the percentages are very similar. In both cases, there is unanimity in the need for transparency. Checking, ethical responsibility and the protection of intellectual property are also highlighted. At an intermediate level, items such as data protection, privacy and accountability coincide, while less than half the initiatives include aspects such as facing the risk of concentration of technological power, interdisciplinary collaboration and with third parties, and the promotion of research.

Finally, Spanish initiatives refer less to issues that are highly present in the guides analysed, such as compliance with the law or data protection and privacy. Five of the aspects in which Spain seems less interested than the international guidelines are mentioned only in the RTVE text, which, as we have said, covers many issues. This is the case of measures to avoid bias, compliance with the law, the need for AI training for staff, editorial responsibility in the media, the compilation of best practices and the participatory process.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The review carried out offers an overview of the ethical guidelines that have emerged to govern journalistic uses of artificial intelligence, especially since the appearance of GenAI (O1). The media in the United States, and particularly in Europe, are leading the publication of this type of guidelines (*The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *USA Today*, *Wired*, *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *Reuters*, etc.), together with some organisations and professional coalitions and, to a lesser extent, research centres and government bodies. Regarding the latter, the importance and breadth of the guidelines drawn up by the Council of Europe's group of experts should be highlighted (CE, 2023). This provides a crucial, relevant frame of reference for the European media. In the case of Spain, ethical self-regulation initiatives by the media are still rare. Some digital native media, such as *Newtral*, *JotDown* and *Ctxt*, have pioneered the publication guidelines on the use they are making of AI. The update of the EFE Agency style guide also offers a practical view of the application of AI, while other media, such as *El País* and RTVE, establish a reflection on the matter but without, for the moment, including it in their regulatory documents. The Secretary of State for Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence (2024) points out that the Spanish media have not issued practically any manifestos of their own, but they have supported collective initiatives and refer to the global principles established by the News Media Alliance (2023).

Meanwhile, the analysis carried out has given us an idea of the main trends in these guidelines (O2), in which four main principles are identified on which there is a clear consensus. The first of them, transparency, emerges as a key ethical principle for the use of AI in communication, in line with the studies of González-Esteban and Sanahuja-Sanahuja (2023). In this sense, it is important to delve deeper into the specific way this is implemented (Ventura, 2021), as there are currently still no professional guidelines in this respect (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2023). Associated with this transparency, there are other aspects such as traceability, the differentiation of automated content and accountability (Sanahuja-Sanahuja & López-Rabadán, 2022).

A second concept that generates a broad consensus is human supervision. "Without journalists there is no journalism" was declared by the Spanish Federation of Associations of Journalists (FAPE) a decade ago (2014). And this central position of the human dimension runs through the ethical regulations around the use of AI, as a key factor giving value to journalistic activity as only human beings can contribute to the ethical perspective (Ventura, 2021). Supervision is linked to a third recurring concept: verification, a key aspect for building trust in the current contexts of misinformation, polarization and uncertainty.

"Without journalists there is no journalism and without journalism there is no democracy," added the FAPE (2014) and it is precisely this political function of journalism and its alignment

with its professional values that is the fourth most repeated aspect. The ethical use of AI does not begin from scratch and any technological advance must be based on upholding the classic values of journalism, such as the commitment to truth, checking, transparency and to forming informed, critical public opinion (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2003). Efficiency, the increase in productivity and the economic profitability made possible by AI must be subject to the fulfilment of clear journalistic values (CE, 2023; Codina *et al.*, 2024), defined as the basis from which this technology should be developed. As Beckett and Yaseen (2023) maintain, in a world of information created by machines –much of it highly unreliable– responsible, public service journalism must position itself clearly around these values in order to do its job.

Comparing these trends with the initiatives of the Spanish media (O3), despite the fact that the documents analysed are of different types, clear unanimity is detected in terms of the main established concepts: transparency, human supervision, alignment with journalistic values, verification and traceability of sources are crucial. The main difference is that in Spanish texts more practical aspects are detected, focusing on items such as the use of automated content, its limitations and its identification. With respect to other concepts not repeated not so often, it should be noted that the RTVE text addresses practically all the aspects indicated in the guidelines analysed, confirming the desire of the Spanish public broadcasting organisation to be a leader in the ethical use of AI in the media and in reflections on this (Corral n.d.; Sanahuja-Sanahuja & López-Rabadán, 2). Considering these few initiatives from the Spanish media, the guidelines from the Catalan News Council (CIC) published before the GenAI boom (Ventura, 2021) should also be highlighted as broad and pioneering.

Ethical guidelines are profiled as a useful tool for combining the benefits of automation with the preservation of journalistic integrity and the mitigation of risks (Lima-Sánchez *et al.*, 2024). In this way, it is possible to establish some recommendations for developing the guidelines based on this study (O4), such as the need to update them and connect them with the development of the sector. They must also not become a mere declaration of intent, and commitments must be made to look in greater depth at their practical application, with the idea of aligning them with the fundamental values of each newsroom through participatory processes. This process of adapting guidelines to the situation of each medium would help counter the risk of isomorphism (Kahn, 2024) which seems to be confirmed in the analysis carried out. As Diakopoulos (2019) points out, one of the decisive challenges for the media will be to be able to impose their own professional values on the use of AI so as not to be in the hands of the big technology platforms. On this point, ethical codes and guidelines can play an important role.

It would be interesting to reinforce this study with new phases that integrate the opinions of experts and propose an updated review of a second generation of guidelines and other professional documents. In addition, in view of the advances in the study of this type of document, the voices of those affected in a broad sense, from AI developers to the media and their audiences, could be particularly important and useful. The broad demand for ethical criteria in the face the risks and concerns surrounding AI has to take shape in the tools and responses implemented that allow them to be used in practice adapted to the true situation in newsrooms, helping safeguard responsible, reliable, quality journalism.

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