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<https://doi.org/10.35765/pk.2026.5403.11>

Ethics and Media Management in Romanian Journalism: A Longitudinal Analysis Based on the Worlds of Journalism Study

ABSTRACT

This article analyses changes in journalists' ethical orientations and professional values in Romania by comparing data from the second and third waves of the *Worlds of Journalism Study*, with particular attention to newsroom hierarchy. The study is based on surveys of 341 Romanian journalists in WJS2 (data collected between 2014 and 2015) and 365 journalists in WJS3 (data collected between 2022 and 2023), representing a cross-section of the media landscape (television and radio stations, newspapers, online outlets, independent newsrooms). Focusing on four core ethical statements—absolute professional standards, ethical standards with exceptions, situational ethics, and personal judgment—the article examines longitudinal changes and positional differences among journalists without managerial responsibilities, middle management, and top management roles.

KEYWORDS: journalism ethics, media management, professional standards, situational ethics, *Worlds of Journalism Study*

STRESZCZENIE

Etyka i zarządzanie mediami w rumuńskim dziennikarstwie: analiza oparta na badaniu *Worlds of Journalism*

Badanie opiera się na ankietach przeprowadzonych wśród 341 rumuńskich dziennikarzy w ramach *Worlds of Journalism* (dane zebrane w latach 2014–2015) oraz 365 dziennikarzy w ramach WJS3 (dane zebrane w latach 2022–2023), reprezentujących stacje telewizyjne i radiowe, gazety, serwisy internetowe, i niezależne redakcje. Koncentrując się na czterech podstawowych wartościach etycznych – standardach zawodowych, standardach etycznych z wyjątkami, etyce sytuacyjnej i osobistym osądzie – artykuł skupia się na zmianach w czasie i różnicach

Suggested citation: Anghel, G. & Matei, A. (2026). Ethics and Media Management in Romanian Journalism: A Longitudinal Analysis Based on the Worlds of Journalism Study. © ⓘ *Perspectives on Culture*, 3(54), pp. 177–192. <https://doi.org/10.35765/pk.2026.5403.11>

Submitted: 30.12.2025

Accepted: 28.02.2026

w stanowiskach wśród dziennikarzy niepełniących funkcji kierowniczych, średniego szczebla kierowniczego oraz najwyższego szczebla kierowniczego.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: etyka dziennikarska, zarządzanie mediami, standardy zawodowe, etyka sytuacyjna, badanie *Worlds of Journalism Study*

Introduction

Trust in the Romanian mass media has been in continuous decline in recent years. In 2025, the overall level of public trust fell to 26%, whereas in 2021 it stood at 42% (Radu, 2025). This alarming deterioration may also be attributed to the socio-political context in Romania, marked by recession, corruption, and instability, culminating in the cancellation of the 2024 presidential elections (Despa, 2026). The unfavourable situation facing the Romanian media is further reflected in the country's position in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, where Romania ranked 55th, down from 49th the previous year (Marica, 2025). Romania's media environment is classified as "problematic," with a diverse and relatively pluralistic media landscape, yet one marked by political pressures, media ownership influence, lack of transparency in media financing, journalists' sense of safety, and the absence of a national media literacy program, which encourages the proliferation of misinformation (*Europe—Central Asia: Romania*, 2025).

Romania does not diverge from the international context, where media consumption has become increasingly selective and specialised due to "the increasing abundance of options" (Książek, 2019) generated by accelerated digitalisation and the proliferation of social media. At the same time, the Romanian media market "is diversified but fragmented" (*Europe—Central Asia: Romania*, 2025). Botan (2024) highlights a significant shift in media consumption, indicating "a gradual move from traditional sources to online platforms and social media" (p. 10). The fragmentation of the Romanian media market also has a negative effect, as "editorial decisions are often subordinated to the interests of owners, transforming the media into a propaganda tool" (*Europe—Central Asia: Romania*, 2025).

Although the era of 'mogul media' has long passed in Romania's media landscape (Nicola, Călin, Anghel, & Oprea, 2023), owner influence remains an important factor that can undermine editorial independence and can shape ethical decision-making in newsrooms. A recent example occurred in 2023, when journalists from *Libertatea* and *Gazeta Sporturilor* accused Ringier management of owner interference in editorial policy. According to journalists, they were asked to submit in advance articles concerning certain betting companies and to establish a lobbying organisation for the betting industry, similar to one

operated by a Ringier majority-owned publication in Bulgaria (*Redacția Libertatea...*, 2023). The journalists refused, stating: “We wish to work together with you in a company that supports ethical journalism, not journalism subordinated to commercial or political interests” (Tolontan, 2023). The conflict ended with the dismissal of 20% of the journalists from the two publications.

Furthermore, the relationship between politics and the media is often problematic and has negative consequences for editorial independence, particularly for ethical decision-making in newsrooms. Some of the most common forms of political interference in the Romanian media include political pressures, intimidation, or non-transparent funding, all of which severely affect independent journalism. “Media funding mechanisms are often opaque, even corrupt” (*Europe—Central Asia: Romania*, 2025), resulting in situations where “millions of euros go non-transparently to certain websites [media outlets] as payment for the content which is not even marked as advertising” (*Report// The State of the Press...*, 2024). Thus, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the media industry received €50 million in public funds, and in 2023, “political parties in Romania allocated approximately 24.5 million euros in public subsidies to finance media activities or political propaganda” (Toma, 2024, p. 7).

From the early post-communist years to the present, aggression against journalists has remained a persistent feature of the Romanian political landscape (Oprea & Anghel, 2025), and this climate of hostility constitutes another factor shaping ethical decision-making within the profession.

All of the dynamics outlined above directly affect how Romanian journalists practice their profession and call into question the stability of the ethical norms that should guide journalistic activity. In such a context, it becomes essential to understand how Romanian journalists relate to professional standards, to what extent these standards influence everyday ethical decisions, whether their value orientations have changed over the past decade, and whether significant differences exist among journalists without managerial responsibilities, middle management, and top management. These concerns naturally lead to the following research questions designed to clarify how ethical orientations are articulated and negotiated within the Romanian media sector: RQ1: What ethical principles guide media managers and journalists from the Romanian press? RQ2: To what extent have media managers and journalists in Romania redefined ethical behaviour in journalism between 2014–2015 and 2022–2023?

Literature review

Journalism ethics is a concept that has been theorised for a very long time and is deeply rooted in universal philosophical thought, supporting values such as truth, objectivity, and freedom. From a pragmatic perspective, “ethics is applied

philosophy, and journalism ethics is philosophy applied to the practice of journalism” (Patching & Hirst, 2021, p. 157), on the basis of which one may define “what constitutes good work” (Wilkins & Brennen, 2004, p. 297 as cited in Oso, Adeniran, & Arowolo, 2024, p. 2). However, regardless of the conceptual approach, “inherent in ethics is the notion of responsibility”, because “mass media define social reality and this implies a lot of power to influence (...) public policy in general”, so journalists must be “answerable for their conduct and actions” (Oso et al., 2024, pp. 3, 6). Responsibility in journalistic practice is not attributed to a single individual but manifests itself across several levels. At the first level, journalists who produce the material are responsible for their own content, followed by “media owners and platform operators”—newsroom and platform operators—who share responsibility for published materials, and finally media users themselves, who must be responsible for reporting inappropriate content (Mast, 2018, p. 472). In addition to the responsibilities assumed by individual journalists, a substantial share of ethical accountability rests with media managers, whose decisions shape the organisational environment in which journalism is practised. Their role extends far beyond editorial decision-making, encompassing broader organisational areas such as human resource management, financial management, operational strategy, and interdepartmental coordination, making the role of managers considerably more complex (Albarran & Moellinger, 2017, p. 27). In essence, media managers “set the rules of the game,” because “they are actors in the process of creating social order in media organisations and, affected by societal expectations like values beyond a simple profit motive, contribute to the landscape of the media system as a whole” (Greck, Franzetti, & Altmeppen, 2017, p. 121).

Decision-making, regardless of organisational level, involves a combination of intrinsic values and extrinsic factors, grounded in professional norms expressed in various documents such as codes of ethics. These documents, which laid the foundations for the professionalisation of journalism, seek to establish clear standards of conduct for journalists to ensure ethical professional behaviour (Hujanen, Ruotsalainen, Vaarala, Lehtisaari, & Grönlun, 2023, p. 2672; Karlsson, Ferrer Conill, & Örnebring, 2023, p. 554). Nevertheless, “codes of ethics can never be more than a guide to action because circumstances will always vary” (Patching & Hirst, 2021, p. 4), and moreover, codes of ethics are often interpreted differently by journalists or newsrooms (Bucholtz, 2020, p. 4). Although ethical codes share certain fundamental elements, yet the most important, encompassing all others, is truth, which can be achieved only through accuracy, objectivity, fairness, balance, comprehensiveness, and related principles (Christians et al., 2024; Michailidou & Trenz, 2021; Oso et al., 2024).

Among the first codes to appear in the Romanian media landscape are *The Journalist's Statute* and the *Journalist's Code of Ethics*, adopted in 2004

by the Media Organisations Convention. Work on these documents began in 2002 (Radu & Thiemann, 2017, p. 2). The most recent revision was made in 2009. Additionally, the Union of Romanian Journalists published in 2018 its own code of ethics in 2018 (*CODUL...*, 2018), which was last updated in 2020 (*CODUL DEONTOLOGIC...*, 2020). Beyond these national codes of ethics, there are also internal codes that regulate journalists' professional activities within individual media organisations (see *Codul Digi24*, n.a.).

Although codes of ethics play an important role, Voakes (1997 as cited in Bucholtz, 2020, p. 25) argues that journalists' ethical decisions are influenced by a range of social factors. He identifies seven levels of social influence on journalists' ethical decisions: "individual, small group, organisational (internal rules, goals, demands, and values of the company), competitive (activities of rivals), occupational (professional norms and standards), extra-media (advertisers, PR, audience, information sources), and legal (law-related)." In Romania, the framework described by Voakes (1997) is evident in cases such as political funding of the press and owner interference, which justify a comparative analysis of journalists' ethical values over time.

Tsutsura and Valentini (2016) proposed a global model for understanding media ethics in journalistic decision-making that integrates intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Beyond individual characteristics—such as background, gender, and experience—and country-level influences like politics, economics, and socio-cultural norms, the authors emphasise that ethical decision-making is also shaped by journalists' personal, professional, and environmental values (Tsutsura & Valentini, 2016, p. 577). Personal values—such as love, friendship, family, belonging, and economic security—operate at a deeply individual level, while professional values like freedom, equality, fairness, balanced representation, and autonomy reflect the more objective norms embedded in codes of ethics (Tsutsura & Valentini, 2016, p. 576). Environmental values encompass both organisational and societal norms that tend to prevail a given context (Tsutsura & Valentini, 2016, p. 578). Scholars argue that media practice often absorbs the values of the surrounding society (Oso et al., 2024, p. 9), which suggests that in environments marked by corruption, journalists may be more inclined to compromise ethical principles. The same authors note that organisational culture, if strongly anchored in ethical norms, can positively influence journalistic practice, even in a corrupt society (Tsutsura & Valentini, 2016, p. 578).

This multilevel understanding of values can be complemented by Forsyth's (1980) taxonomy of ethical orientations, which explains how individual moral philosophies shape judgments about right and wrong. Forsyth identifies four ethical positions—"absolutism (rules are to be followed at all times), situationism (the situation decrees the most ethical solution), exceptionism (rules are generally accepted but may be waived if circumstances demand it), and subjectivism (moral judgments should depend primarily on one's own

personal values)” (as cited in Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad, & De Beer, 2019, p. 202)—that help explain why journalists who share similar professional norms may nevertheless approach ethical dilemmas differently. These orientations, formed through lifelong experience, add another layer to our understanding how Romanian journalists navigate ethical decisions in a context marked by political pressure and organisational constraints.

This theoretical framework suggests that journalistic ethics result from the interaction of personal, professional, and contextual values, and that in Romania these dynamics are amplified by political, economic, and organisational pressures. Based on these premises, the present study examines the ethical orientations of Romanian journalists and how they have evolved between the two waves of the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS 2 and WJS 3).

Methodology

The article is based on a comparative analysis of data collected in Romania as part of the international Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS); using samples from the second wave—WJS2 (341 journalists, data collected between 2014 and 2015) and the third wave—WJS3 (365 journalists, data collected between 2022 and 2023). Globally, the second wave (WJS2) included 27,500 journalists from 67 countries (WJS2: 2012–2016, n.d.), while the third wave (WJS3) contains data from 32,354 journalists across 75 countries (Lauerer & Grünewald, 2021, p. 8). The longitudinal comparability of these datasets is supported by a methodological framework with a common core established at international level (Worlds of Journalism Study, 2012; Lauerer & Grünewald, 2021, p. 8).

To ensure the integrity of the analysis, both stages of research adhered to the rigorous standards established by the methodological framework. In both waves, the eligibility criteria for participation in the study remained nearly identical: respondents had to derive at least 50% of their income from journalism or devote at least 50% of their working time to the profession. These criteria ensure that comparable professional populations were analysed over a nine-year interval.

The sampling procedure followed the same algorithm: (1) selecting media organisations based on clearly defined criteria (media type, ownership, and distribution) and (2) selecting journalists to ensure representation across all editorial roles. A standardised questionnaire was used in both waves. In both cases, the Romanian translation followed a validation protocol involving back-translation by multilingual experts. The response rate for WJS2 was 54% (Coman, Matei, Milewski, & Șuțu, 2016), and for WJS3, it was 26% (Vasilendiuc et al., 2025). Although the methodological framework remained the same, the application method evolved with technological developments: while WJS2 employed some direct methods, WJS3 administered the questionnaire exclusively online.

Both national samples were designed to represent the approximate population of journalists in Romania, maintaining a 95% confidence level and a maximum margin of error of 5%—a threshold required for data acceptance into the international database. For WJS2, the estimated population of journalists was 3,000 (Coman et al., 2016), while for WJS3, it was estimated at 5,000 (Lauerer & Grünewald, 2021). Data from both waves were analysed by the WJS Centre in Munich, which verified the reliability and internal consistency of the responses before granting access to the consolidated database. For the present article, we worked exclusively with the processed dataset provided by the WJS team and conducted a secondary analysis of the finalised variables and indicators, focusing on declarative ethical orientations rather than observed behaviour.

To capture Romanian journalists' ethical orientations, this article employed the *Worlds of Journalism Study*'s standardised measurement framework, which operationalises Forsyth's (1980) taxonomy of moral philosophies. This model classifies ethical orientations along two fundamental dimensions: idealism (the degree to which an individual believes that moral action should always avoid causing harm) and relativism (the extent to which universal moral rules are rejected in favour of context-specific considerations). By combining these axes, the four profiles used in the study emerge: situationism—the situation decrees the most ethical solution, absolutism—rules are to be followed at all times, subjectivism—moral judgments should depend primarily on one's own personal values, and exceptionism—rules are generally accepted but may be waived if circumstances demand it (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 202).

Within the *Worlds of Journalism Study*, these four ethical orientations were assessed through a set of standardised statements, using a five-point Likert scale to measure journalists' level of agreement (see Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 205). In this professional context, Forsyth's concepts are adapted to journalism. For example, absolutism no longer refers to universal moral rules in a broad philosophical sense, but rather to the unconditional adherence to professional codes of ethics. Thus, these orientations reflect the general professional ethics of journalists, in which moral decisions are evaluated in light of the tension between formal standards and the exceptionalism dictated by circumstances.

Results

Between 2014–2015 and 2022–2023, the profile of Romanian journalists shows both continuity and notable changes (Coman et al., 2016; Vasilendiuc et al., 2025). In terms of gender, women constituted the majority of journalists in both periods. In terms of age, in 2014–2015, Romanian journalists were remarkably young, with an average age of 30.65 years, while by 2022–2023, the average age had increased to 36.9 years, suggesting an ageing workforce and greater professional continuity.

Regarding education, the proportion of journalists holding a bachelor's degree remained relatively stable, while the share of those with a master's degree increased substantially, from 26.7% to 40.6%. In terms of professional status, 22.6% of respondents in WJS2 were senior and executive managers, 21.7% were junior managers, while 55.7% of the journalists held no managerial position. In WJS3, 66.5% of Romanian journalists held no management positions, 25.3% were in middle management, and 8.2% were in top management positions.

Romanian journalists expressed strong support for professional ethical standards in both periods, although with significant shifts over time. In 2014–2015, 91.5% of respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of the situation or context, compared with 78.9% in 2022–2023. The proportion of journalists who believed that ethics depends on the specific situation declined from 48.7% to 28.2%. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who considered ethics to be a matter of personal judgment decreased from 20.1% to 14.5%. By contrast, agreement with the statement that professional standards should apply unless extraordinary circumstances require them to be disregarded increased substantially, from 22.6% to 47.7%.

With regard to the organisational levels of Romanian journalists, data reveal differences in attitudes toward strict adherence to professional ethics across organisational ranks in both WJS waves. Agreement with the statement that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics regardless of situation and context was reported by 21.2% of respondents in top management positions in 2014–2015, but dropped sharply to only 6.3% in 2022–2023. For middle management, the percentages remained virtually unchanged in the two waves: 20.3% in WJS2 and 20.8% in WJS3. The highest levels of agreement were consistently observed among journalists without managerial responsibilities in both years (50.0% in WJS2 and 51.8% in WJS3).

On the other hand, data from the *Worlds of Journalism Study* allow a direct, longitudinal comparison of whether journalists and media managers believe that what is ethical in this profession should depend on the specific situation. Attitudes on this topic changed notably across all organisational levels, indicating a growing distance from situational ethics. Agreement declined over time in every category: among journalists with no management role, it decreased from 27.1% in 2014–2015 to 19.7% in 2022–2023; in middle management, from 11.8% to 6.6%; and in top management, from 9.7% to 1.9%. Additionally, disagreement increased substantially between the two waves: among non-managerial journalists, it rose from 18.9% in the second wave to 37% in the third wave; in middle management, from 6.8% to 16.5%; and in top management, it declined from 10% to 5.7%. Indecision regarding this issue remained relatively stable among journalists without management roles, but decreased among managerial ranks, from 3.2% to 2.5% in middle management and from 2.9% to 0.5% in top management.

The *Worlds of Journalism* data indicate a clear predominance of disagreement in both waves with the statement “What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment.” In WJS2, disagreement was most pronounced among journalists without management roles (31.0%), followed by middle managers and top managers (both with 14.2%). By 2023, disagreement increased substantially for non-managers (46.3%) and middle managers (18.9%), while it dropped among top managers (6.3%). Agreement with the statement remained comparatively low and declined slightly over time, particularly among journalists without management responsibilities (from 10.7% in 2014–2015 to 8.8% in 2022–2023) and among top managers (from 5.3% to 1.3%), while remaining relatively stable among middle managers.

Attitudes toward setting aside moral standards in extraordinary circumstances reveal differences across organisational levels and important shifts between WJS2 and WJS3. In 2014–2015, agreement with this statement was relatively low across all positions, with 4.7% of top managers, 3% of middle managers, and 15% of journalists with no management responsibilities expressing agreement. In 2022–2023, agreement doubled among journalists without management roles (31.2%); increased more than fourfold in middle management than in 2014–2015 (13.7%), and it dropped to only 2.7% in top management. Disagreement with the idea of setting aside moral or professional standards in extraordinary circumstances declined across all organisational ranks between the two periods. Disaccord was comparatively high in WJS2, particularly among journalists without management roles (24.7%) and middle managers (15%), and also notable among top managers (13%). In WJS3, disagreement declined across all categories, most visibly among middle managers (from 15% to 7.4%) and top managers (from 13% to 4.1%), though it remained relatively high among journalists without management roles (21.3%). Overall, while non-managerial journalists consistently expressed the highest levels of disagreement in both waves, longitudinal comparison indicates a general softening of opposition to ethical exceptions across all hierarchical levels.

Reflecting on the factors shaping their professional activity, Romanian media practitioners identified journalistic ethics as the most important influence in both waves (81.4% in WJS2, declining to 67% in WJS3). Similarly, the influence of personal values and beliefs decreased substantially from 71.2% to 38.6%. Among organisational influences, the importance of editorial supervisors and senior editors decreased slightly (41.2% to 37.2%), while the influence of business managers increased from 30.4% to 33%, and that of media owners from 25.1% to 29.6%.

Discussion

The distribution of respondents by organisational level shows a clear shift in the professional positioning of Romanian journalists between WJS2 and

WJS3. In 2014–2015, managerial roles were relatively evenly distributed, with 22.6% of journalists occupying senior or executive management positions and 21.7% holding junior management roles, while a majority (55.7%) reported having no management responsibilities. By 2022–2023, the proportion of journalists without any management position had increased substantially to 66.5%, indicating a strengthening of the profession's non-managerial core in Romania. At the same time, the proportion of top managers declined considerably alongside a reconfiguration of middle management roles, suggesting more limited access to senior decision-making positions within news organisations, as well as a restructuring of hierarchical positions over a short but intense period. Between WJS2 and WJS3, journalists have experienced multiple crises, beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a deeper impact on journalistic work practices more than any other crisis in modern peacetime (Backholm & Idås, 2024; Posetti, Bell & Brown, 2020). The pandemic brought economic, psychological and professional challenges not only to journalists but also to media managers. Across the world, they faced increased responsibilities, organisational downsizing or restructuring driven by financial constraints, and also the need to identify and implement adaptive strategies in real time (Perreault & Perreault, 2021).

The data indicate an important change in Romanian journalists' ethical orientations between WJS2 and WJS3, reinforcing the idea that journalistic ethics constitute a social practice that is constantly evolving (Baasbank, 2021). In 2014–2015, an overwhelming majority (91.5%) agreed that journalists should always adhere to professional codes of ethics regardless of situation or context. By 2022–2023, the unconditional commitment to professional standards had declined to 78.9%, indicating a more nuanced approach to ethical decision-making. These findings demonstrate a continuing, though evolving, commitment to professional ethical standards among Romanian journalists, differentiated according to hierarchical position within newsrooms (Șuțu, 2025).

The strongest endorsement of the professional ethical standards, regardless of the situation or context, is expressed by journalists without managerial responsibilities, reflecting the fact that they navigate through very practical professional situations and editorial decisions on a daily basis, and they are the ones who report experiencing professional pressures more frequently than those in coordination or leadership positions (Oprea & Anghel, 2025). Economic and societal factors shape both the internal dynamics of media organisations, including their workforce (Altmeppen, Hollifield, & van Loon, 2017). Accordingly, the lower and declining levels of agreement among top managers may indicate greater exposure to organisational, economic, or political pressures that complicate the application of universal ethical standards in practice.

Views on setting moral standards aside in exceptional circumstances point to a growing acceptance of a more situational approach to ethics among

Romanian journalists without managerial responsibilities. If, in WJS2, 15% of the journalists without managerial responsibilities believed that they should follow standards except in extraordinary situations, in WJS3 the number has more than doubled to 31.2%. Journalists' inclination to combine orientations (for example, absolutism and situationism) was noted by Thomas Hanitzsch et al. (2019) at the international level in the second wave of the *Worlds of Journalism Study*. In the third wave, Romanian journalists have also shown a greater inclination towards a situationist position, in which the circumstances determine the most ethical course of action, rather than absolutism (principles must be respected at all times), as they did in 2014–2015. However, the declining levels of disagreement and neutrality among managers, especially at the top level, regarding the idea that extraordinary circumstances may justify departing from professional standards may indicate a consolidation of ethical positions shaped by institutional responsibilities and strategic considerations as top management provides leadership for the entire media company, promotes organisational values and sets goodwill standards (Albarran & Moellinger, 2018).

While openness to extraordinary circumstances increased among journalists without managerial responsibilities, support for the view that ethics should be determined entirely by each specific situation declined considerably across all three organisational levels (top, middle and no management). Top management recorded the most important drop, from 9.7% agreeing that what is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation to only 1.9% in WJS3. This indicates a preference for ethics grounded in professional standards, while allowing for clearly defined exceptions. These findings are consistent with earlier qualitative research (Vasilendiuc, 2010), which suggests that Romanian journalists adhere to professional ethical norms, particularly with regard to the principle of political independence. Romanian journalists reported that they are generally not politically affiliated and do not promote political parties in their professional activities, not only because of organisational restrictions imposed by employers but also because of internalised professional codes of ethics.

The sharp rise in disagreement among journalists without managerial responsibilities regarding extraordinary circumstances (from 18.9% in 2014–2015 to 37% in 2022–2023) could reflect a growing awareness among Romanian journalists regarding the risks associated with ethical relativism in a media environment marked by political polarisation and declining trust in the news media (Radu, 2023; Radu, 2025). The *Worlds of Journalism* data also suggest a clear shift away from personal judgment as the basis for ethical decision-making, especially among top managers. In the second wave, 10% of the top managers agreed that what is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment, compared with only 5.7% in the third wave.

The WJS2 and WJS3 findings suggest that ethical orientations among Romanian journalists should be interpreted within the broader structural and political

context of the country. Taking into account both the factors shaping the professional activity and ethical orientations, WJS data show that journalistic practice is shaped by a complex interplay of professional norms, institutional frameworks, and organisational power structures (such as editors, business managers, and media owners), rather than by individual ethical beliefs alone. These patterns are consistent with recent evidence on the Romanian media environment, which points to increasing political and economic pressures, including the use of public funds to secure favourable media coverage, obstacles to investigative journalism, and attempts to limit press freedom (Radu, 2023; Radu, 2024).

Conclusions

Firstly (RQ1), data from WJS2 and WJS3 show that Romanian media managers and journalists continue to express support for ethics grounded in professional standards. At the same time, there is a decline in support for ethics based on personal judgment or situational relativism, especially among top managers, while journalists without managerial responsibilities have started showing some openness to ethical flexibility in extraordinary circumstances. Compared to WJS2, disagreement with the idea that ethics should be a matter of personal judgment increased substantially across all newsroom positions, indicating a consolidation of a more collective and institutional understanding of journalistic ethics. Secondly, these findings (RQ2) suggest that newsroom position (management vs non-management) significantly influences how professionals perceive professional ethical standards and extraordinary situations. Also, findings from WJS2 and WJS3 indicate that the ethical orientations of Romanian journalists and media managers have evolved as an adaptive response to media market instability, financial problems, digital challenges, political interference, and declining public trust in the media.

The present findings would benefit from further research, particularly qualitative studies that can capture potential gaps between declared ethical orientations and actual journalistic practices, or further substantiate the findings of the *Worlds of Journalism Study*. In particular, in-depth interviews with journalists across all organisational levels (e.g., journalists without managerial responsibilities, as well as middle and top management) could provide insight into how ethical principles are negotiated every day in Romanian newsrooms.

Acknowledgment

This publication is based on data collected as part of the *Worlds of Journalism Study* (WJS), a comprehensive international research initiative examining the state of journalism worldwide. The authors would like to thank

the members of the Romanian WJS team and the media professionals from a wide range of public and private media organisations for their invaluable contributions and support.

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