

Media ethics in the Pacific

Ethical challenges in the Marshall Islands

Abstract: Media ethics in the Pacific Islands varies considerably among nations in practice, as shown in scholarship. This case study of 16 Marshall Islands journalists aims to provide evidence of ethical decision-making in practice in one Pacific Island nation, and demonstrate the intersection of imported journalism values and local culture. It builds on survey work of Pacific Island journalists' roles by Singh and Hanusch (2021), the *Worlds of Journalism* study by Hanitzsch et al. (2019) and works by David Robie (2003, 2004, 2014 and 2019). Responses from 16 journalists in the Republic of the Marshall Islands who made ethical decisions during a journalism workshop facilitated by the newly established Pacific Media Institute at the College of Marshall Islands in June 2022 were analysed. First, the participants identified ethical conflicts in carrying out their professional duties. Next, they applied standard ethics codes from democracies (absolutism), to local scenarios. Discussion centered on how to address the core value of independence because of dominance of the church and the strongly influential chiefly system in RMI. Personal relationships were also factored in their ethical decision-making because the journalists considered the perspectives of all stakeholders in reporting on Marshallese culture and society. They were keenly aware of the consequences of their reporting on their community. They offered unique, locally derived solutions from different perspectives. They often exhibited an 'ethics of care', prioritising humanity and sometimes societal harmony.

Keywords: case study, cross-cultural journalism, culture, ethics codes, Indigenous, journalism ethics, journalism methodologies, Marshall Islands, Pacific Media Institute, talanoa journalism

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Introduction

MEDIA ethics in the Pacific Islands varies considerably in practice among islands because journalism is shaped by the political structure, laws, culture, religion and society in each country. Ethical decision-making among journalists in the Pacific is grounded in values that have been shaped by history, including colonisation, which has defined the roles of journalists. Scholars have studied journalists' perceptions around the world of their roles and ethical values, but it is difficult to generalise because of the complexity of each nation, region or group. This study focuses on ethical values and practices among

Marshall Islands journalists, which also provides insight into their perception of their role in society.

Singh and Hanusch (2021, p. 132) conducted a survey of 206 Pacific Island journalists from nine countries to provide profiles of Pacific Islander journalists and their professional views, such as their ‘role conceptions, ethical views and perceived influences’. Their study (p. 143) and previous studies have noted the difficult situation that many Pacific Island journalists find themselves in, facing pressure from governments to help build the nation while acting in a watchdog or monitorial role on the government and the powerful at the same time (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; Robie, 2004, 2019).

Robie’s influential body of work (2003, 2004, 2014 & 2019) on journalism and media education, particularly in the South Pacific, examines the impact of economics, politics, legal frameworks, culture and education on South Pacific journalism and media (2004, p. 8). His extensive work compares the education and training of journalists in the Pacific (2004, p. 219), and in particular, Papua New Guinea and Fiji, including their perceptions of their roles. He has demonstrated from a thorough review of scholarly literature and his own research that journalism is perceived as too ‘Western’ and not the ‘Pacific way,’ noting cultural insensitivities, the challenges to journalists’ watchdog role and the calls for more regulation (2004, p. 9). His research also suggests that journalists sometimes misuse culture as an excuse for self-censorship and restriction of freedom of speech (Robie, 2004, p. 30).

In his 2019 article, Robie explained that some scholars argue there is little difference between Pacific and Western approaches to journalism (2019, p. 2). Some journalism schools are too focused on Western media education, while others assert there is a distinctive style of journalism in Oceania with cultural variations based on the country where it is practised. This study of Marshall Islands journalists provides evidence of the latter—perhaps not of a distinctive style, but that culture has a strong impact on journalism. He argues ‘for a greater appreciation of the complexities of media cultures in Pacific nations’ and proposes ‘a more nuanced, reflexive approach to journalism and journalism education in the Pacific region.’ This is reflected in a ‘talanoa journalism’ model that he advocates as a more culturally appropriate benchmark than monocultural media templates (Robie, 2014, pp. 332-333; 2019, pp. 3-4). The ‘talanoa model’ is represented as a five-legged tanoa kava bowl used for ceremonial and informal dialogue. Each leg is one of five ‘estates’ or four pillars representing a normative democratic structure—Executive, Parliament, Judiciary, Press, and one called Cultural Hegemony, representing indigenous traditional *kastom*, a Tok Pisin word (Papua New Guinea creole language or Pidgin) (Robie, 2019, p. 4).

Journalists in the North Pacific also share the need for culturally based training to help them cover political, economic and increasingly environmental change.

Singh and Hanusch (2021) also note a desire among respondents to support cultural diversity among island journalists as well as bring awareness to and possibly advocate for social change. Respondents to their survey were less enthusiastic about support for national development, however. Singh and Hanusch noted that while respondents wanted to be watchdogs on the powerful, ‘they are not always able to, either due to cultural reasons that respect authority and authority figures, lack of whistleblower protections, punitive media laws, or even the lack of training, experience and qualifications. Younger and less experienced journalists may perhaps be more risk-averse in this context’ (2021, p. 143).

Robie (2014, p. 322) notes findings by Fiji-born journalist and researcher Christine Gounder that it was ‘difficult for many Fijian journalists to remain professional in their jobs because of strong cultural or ethnicity ties’ with supporters of a prominent failed businessman, George Speight, who led the 2000 attempted coup and has been in prison for more than 20 years for treason.

The ambitious *Worlds of Journalism* study by Hanitzsch et al. (2019), gathered evidence from journalists in 67 countries—but the Pacific Islands were not included, perhaps because of their diversity and remoteness. In that study, they noted that many studies reflected Western bias, which tends to connect journalism to democracy, and journalists as independent verifiers of fact-based information. They concluded, based on their results, that Western-style journalism within a democracy is actually experienced by a minority of the world’s population (2019, pp. 24-25).

The Worlds of Journalism study, however, is helpful in analysing this case. Hanitzsch and his colleagues (2019) advance a common understanding of three essential conceptual areas that underpin their study:

1. Journalism as a discursive institution. It exists in institutions in different societies, and is created through discourse that creates meaning.
2. Journalism culture, which is meant to embody the forms of journalism, differs depending on societal contexts.
3. Contextual influences on journalism culture are important.

The authors explain that attempts ‘to accommodate the local’ may make it theoretically difficult to do a meaningful comparative analysis among nations. However, there is value in studying individual countries, regions or groups to note the cultural, societal and contextual influence on journalists. This study of Marshall Islands journalists demonstrates the influence of culture, society and context on ethical decision-making practices. Journalists in the North Pacific also share the need for culturally based training to help journalists cover political, economic and increasingly environmental change.

Theoretical framework

This case study examines local journalism values by providing empirical evidence

of ethical decision-making values and practices, gathered through discourse among Marshall Islands journalists participating in a journalism ethics workshop. It is through discourse that these journalists are articulating their boundaries and standards of journalism ethics. This study documents the challenges these participants face and how culture and society influence ethical decisions.

The evidence in this study of Marshall Islands journalists supports Robie's 'talanoa' model that includes a 'Fifth estate'—a traditional cultural pillar, 'which is the counterbalance to all other forms of power, including the news media, or the Fourth Estate' (Robie 2014, p. 332).

Hanitzsch et al. (2019) also note that 'judgments about the extent to which journalists adhere to professional standards can be made meaningfully only from within their respective societies, based on criteria defined by local cultural expectations' (2019, p. 28), and not from a bias of a democratic Western perspective.

Hanitzsch et al. (2019, p. 204) identified four ethical orientations that were measured by survey participants who responded to four statements. These are ranked here from highest to lowest mean score:

1. Absolutism—adhere to codes of professional ethics regardless of situation and context. Highest mean score.
2. Situationism—What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation.
3. Subjectivism—What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment.
4. Exceptionism—It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.

Even though most respondents in the *Worlds of Journalism* study followed universal principles (absolutism), there was less consensus and more flexibility on the other three—that the specific situation and sometimes personal judgment were also taken into account. Also, sometimes moral standards could be set aside in extraordinary circumstances. (2019, p. 206).

Journalists' perceptions of their role in society also underpin their ethical decisions—whether they see themselves in a monitorial role, social responsibility role or participatory role. Preservation of harmony and respect for authority may be important in influencing their decision-making.

Research questions

Which ethical orientations do Marshall Islands journalists follow? What do their responses to ethical cases demonstrate about how they see their role as journalists?

The Republic of the Marshall Islands

This case study of ethical decision-making and values among Marshall Islands

journalists builds on the survey work and theories by Singh and Hanusch (2021), Hanitzsch et al. (2019) and Robie (2004, 2014, 2019). It focuses on Marshall Islands journalists' approach to ethical decision-making through an analysis of scenarios they created themselves as well as ones they responded to in a journalism workshop setting in 2022. It demonstrates the complexity of island culture and society, all of which affect their journalism practice, depending on the situation

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is one of three Pacific Island countries with a special relationship with the United States, and thus RMI has free speech and free press protections in its Bill of Rights in its constitution (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2023). By comparison, Fiji has a Media Industry Development Act (2010) that restricts press freedoms, yet it enjoys a robust free press in which journalists resist the limits (Singh, 2010; Robie, 2019). Differences among 206 Pacific Island journalists in their role perception—as watchdogs or development advocates—show up in the results presented by Singh and Hanusch (2021), but the authors do make a strong effort to generalise their results. This study shows the difficulty of generalising because each nation is so different, but it is still valuable to compare nations and groups to better understand their challenges and what they have in common as island nations.

Just three journalists from RMI were included in the 2021 study of Pacific Islands journalists, which demonstrates the difficulty of carrying out such research in a vast and diverse area. It's not clear whether these journalists were Marshallese, American or from other nations, such as the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati or Fiji, which could help or hinder their ability to follow standard Western codes of ethics (absolutism) guidelines, such as impartiality and independence, in practising journalism.

For example, an interesting finding of this study is that journalists working in the Marshall Islands who were not Marshallese had more freedom and independence to do stories that might involve personal conflicts of interest because they did not have genealogical (matrilineal) connections to chiefs and the power structure.

Culture, society and political structure

The Marshall Islands, one of three Freely Associated States, holds a special relationship with the United States deriving from its own Compact of Free Association. The Compact gives the US responsibility for security and defence for RMI, including military access to the islands and a US base on one of the islands. The US also provides grants. Citizens of RMI can enter the US without a visa to work, to live, attend schools, seek healthcare, or join the military.

Religion and church leaders are also a force in the islands, which has been primarily Protestant Christian (98 percent) since Christianity was introduced in 1857, most prominently by the United Church of Christ and the Assemblies of God. Some atolls, however, have strong Roman Catholic populations. There are

also other religious groups and schools, including Roman Catholic, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Muslims, Jehovah's Witness and others (US Department of State, 2022)

The chiefly system, in which status is tied to land ownership through matrilineal connections, also influences journalism, particularly the power and authority of the paramount chiefs. These chiefs lead in a customary system that exists alongside a modern Western-style democratic government. The paramount chiefs remain influential today and in 2022 celebrated the coronation of a paramount chief for the first time in 50 years (Johnson, 2022). Journalists produce stories by negotiating standard Western values and practices (absolutism) within this traditional system (situationism and subjectivism).

Purpose and method

This study evaluates journalists' responses during a journalism workshop to ethical case scenarios they created, as well as scenarios presented to them for discussion and decision-making. In the exercises, they applied an ethical decision-making model and the five core values of journalism shared globally in codes of ethics and in practice in democratic nations (absolutism). These are: Accuracy, Independence, Impartiality, Humanity, Accountability (White, 2015).

US-based codes of ethics were also discussed with the participants: Society of Professional Journalists, Radio Television Digital News Association and the National Press Photographers Association. All of these codes of ethics include the five standard ethical values

Sixteen journalists and public information officers attended a two-week journalism workshop at the Pacific Media Institute in Majuro in June 2022, hosted by the College of the Marshall Islands with funding from PACMAS (Pacific Media Assistance Scheme—ABC and the Australian government). Trainers were on Zoom, two from Hawai'i and one from Australia.

In the ethics section of the workshop, the first exercise focused on self-awareness of the individual's professional journalism role, shared by telling stories about their ethical dilemmas. Participants were asked to create scenarios in which they found conflicts between their personal and professional values in doing their jobs as journalists. The purpose of this exercise was to illuminate the influence of culture and society on ethical practice.

In the second exercise, participants were placed in pairs, with an older and younger journalist in each pair, and asked to select a scenario to discuss and make a decision. This also illuminated cultural and societal norms, as well as status relationships between elders and younger people.

The outcome of these exercises revealed that the journalists faced the most challenges in applying the core values of independence and impartiality in reporting while balancing cultural and societal norms. Participants discussed

anonymous sources, but not other investigative journalism techniques. Samples of most of the responses from each of these exercises were analysed, and themes discussed.

Results: Common themes are illustrated in individual examples.

Exercise #1: Self-awareness

What conflicts have you had between your personal and professional values in doing your job?

1. *Awareness of relationships at church:* Relationship with pastor. In this case, the journalist who was on a small island saw his pastor purchase some ‘Grizzly’ chewing tobacco, something that was considered unethical for clergy. The journalist was uncomfortable. The pastor simply slid money on the counter, and the cashier knew what he wanted without speaking. The journalist wrote:

On this point, I thought wow this is a really interesting story...I didn't talk about it...He is a pastor and a good one. However, others (might) take it the wrong way and involve the church or the community. So, I did not share the story, but somebody did. So, he was being questioned and got into a counselling by the other pastors.

Analysis: In this case, the journalist saw a potential story, but cared about the pastor and was concerned about accuracy if he shared the story. But he was also worried about what others would think of him.

Important values evidence in this case are: Accuracy, Independence, Impartiality, Humanity (caring). Subjectivism (personal judgment) may have also underpinned this.

2. *Awareness of one's status in a class society.* Not wanting to speak truth to power. ‘The Monarch (Iroij) class makes you mindful of what you say.’

Being a journalist is a profession that can put you in the very centre of a society where all the different classes of people look and hear you—there is always one or two classes that makes you mindful of what you are going to say. Here in the Marshall Islands, it is the MONARCH class.

Iroij is the Monarch...at the very top of the food chain that employs almost everything that is happening within and outside this island nation. The Iroij is involved in almost every issue on land, in politics, and social activities, including the Christian faith at every island. So, the CONFLICT situation for a journalist is often confronted by and with the Iroij class, whether it is directly or indirectly. The Iroij class is a PUPPET that influence the government to execute *whatever* and *however* policies and movements that are established and implemented in RMI.

The respondent explained that at the last Constitutional convention in RMI the outcome of a vote by the public's delegate members on the president's election was denied.

This scheme has indicated how the Iroij class was able to stimulate the outcome, and how most of the members of the ConCon were easily swayed to the interest of the Iroij class.

Then, everyone was aware of what had happened, and yet not one raised it, even the media.

Analysis: Culture and situational context influenced coverage of ConCon. The media deferred to tradition and the Iroij class. Absolutism in adhering to standards gave way to situationalism and possibly exceptionism. In an extraordinary event, culture and the traditional power structure took precedence. This is also clear evidence of talanoa—Robie's traditional cultural pillar.

3. *Confronting royalty*, the chief leadership system and the custom of *kòkkunāna* (giving; donations to the chief).

One conflict that I am aware of is the lack of voicing our concerns regarding the leaderships of chiefs. This is due to the fact that we are heavily cultural-based and that our society is male-dominated. For generations, we are taught to indefinitely respect the royalty. As a result, we do not have the ability to express our concerns....

Culturally, as a Marshallese society, we have to abide by the rules the people of royalty give, one of which is *kòkkunāna*. This term refers to the people giving or donating whatever the chief wants for a special occasion (expensive gifts) . . . If I were to speak against this practice, as a journalist, I would be chastised by my fellow Marshallese due to our culture and beliefs. On the other hand, I would come up with a solution by working with the community to host fundraisers to accommodate the chief's expenses.

Analysis: Culture and tradition again are dominant forces in shaping journalism. Personal relations and a fear of being criticised would also be a factor. Rather than write about the issue and give voice to those suffering because of this cultural practice, the journalist sought solutions.

4. *Conflict of interest in leadership position:* A participant was asked to take a leadership position at an institution, but was also doing media for a student club that discussed politics and climate change. The student realised the conflict, and stopped doing club activities; was aware to be careful about posting on social media about the institution and not using a personal account to share any school activity.

5. *Conflict of interest at student newspaper:* A student became a student council leader but was also editor of the school newspaper. The student

saw the conflicts and resigned as newspaper editor.

Analysis of Nos. 4 & 5: In both cases absolutism prevails, and the individual followed the ethics guideline of independence in both situations to avoid a conflict of interest.

6. *Personal relationship*: This is a small island. The reporter is at a beach party with friends. After the reporter leaves, a close friend's two-year-old daughter wanders away from the family after dark and drowns.

As a journalist that was a story. It was a good story—a story that would have taught readers to pay extra attention to kids on the beach; learn the basic first-aid skills to prevent tragic events like this. Although it was a good story, I worried about the mental (health) of the mother, because I knew that society would have blamed her. Had I [written] up the story and had it published, I would have made it harder for her . . . I know as a journalist it is my responsibility to report, but I couldn't bring myself to do the story.

Analysis: The journalist saw the importance of doing this story, but realised she had a conflict of interest (independence) because of her personal relationships with the family. She demonstrated humanity and an ethics of care by considering the harmful consequences of publishing a story. Solutions discussed included writing a story on keeping kids safe at the beach; or having someone else do the story, although the mother may have been harmed by that story too. Situationism and perhaps subjectivism (personal judgment) prevailed, but absolutist values of independence and humanity were also honoured.

7. *Journalism is not an easy job*. It takes courage.

It takes a lot of courage and risk putting out your work in public for the whole world to hear and see . . . it is very crucial to know not only the images but to think about both sides of each theory before putting it out in the open because there are consequences . . . It is the journalist's duty to protect the people and not harm, meaning they have to be very careful not to upset the audience.

Analysis: In this case the core value of humanity takes priority over other absolutist values. Consequences of one's actions are key.

8. *Threats to the journalist's life*. This journalist is not Marshallese. A journalist was covering a stabbing and a few days later he realised his family's security was at stake. The perpetrator was a Marshallese man who was deported from the US back to RMI after serving his sentence. He stabbed someone in Majuro and was immediately arrested.

I was the first to report on the stabbing issue and especially highlighting deportees as a stigma that may not go well with some of

them, in particular the one who was arrested and locked away in police custody.

Later, the police advised them to be careful. ‘Not only that, but we are foreigners in the Marshall Islands and we could be in danger here.’ The perpetrator was released. The reporter was afraid for his family’s safety and didn’t want to continue to cover the issue, but decided in the end to keep covering it. ‘The concerns and safety of the community outweighs my other personal values.’

Later still, the issue was laid to rest after the government and responsible authorities took on the matter, perhaps because of the reporter’s tenacity. Another journalist also mentioned this incident, and people were worried about their safety.

Analysis: In this case the reporter adhered to the standard values (absolutism) despite fearing for himself and his family. His personal values took a backseat to his professional values. It’s possible that because he was not Marshallese, he had more freedom to be independent.

9. *Pressure of religion on Marshallese families:* A journalist wanted to discuss the pressure that church leaders put on families to donate beyond their means to support church events. The journalist’s conflict is that a family member is a church leader. He is driven to give a ‘voice to the voiceless.’ He wants to write about this conflict, ‘but to do this is suicide.’

Analysis: This is similar to No. 3 in which donations to the chief are expected. However, the church has similar power to extract from its members. The journalist wants to speak out because he believes this practice is hurting families financially, but faces a personal conflict.

10. *A journalist learns of political corruption and misuse of funds:* The consequences of revealing this are broad as well as personal.

With these issues, a plethora of eye-opening stories can be put out to the public. I could put pen to paper and write, but since this is a very tight-knit community, everyone knows each other, and most of the time, that person is a relative or friend. There’s that issue, but then again, because of the proximity of the situation, you come to find out that there are other players involved, also related. Not only that, but when you start gathering information, that information could affect a number of people. People you once had good relationships with, start to turn their back on you. And you could be labeled as unreliable because of the “gossip” you are spreading.

Do I publish and break those bridges, or let it slide? How will it affect the community whose been suffering because of these actions?

Analysis: In this case, the reporter, like others, is concerned about the consequences of the story on the community. This is an ‘ethics of care’ situation, and the power of a close-knit community greatly influences journalism. Situationism and subjectivism are also relevant because of the personal relationships . . . fear of people ‘turning their backs’ on the reporters.

11. *Photos of dead people.* Should a TV station show the body of a missing fisherman who died? The journalist felt sick when he saw the video of the dead fisherman and felt very conflicted about running it.

I was given photos of the deceased body, and it felt very wrong. I don’t know if it was my moral compass or because of my religious beliefs, but working on a video knowing the public would later see just felt wrong; it just made me sick to my stomach that we had to show his condition on which he was found.

Analysis: The issue of showing a dead body is common in any newsroom. Considering different perspectives—victim, newsroom, society etc. can help journalists make decisions about whether to publish. Is a published image necessary to tell the story? Probably not. The codes of ethics include humanity—caring for the victim and the public unless there is a justifiable need to see. In this case the journalist decided that showing it wasn’t justified.

Conclusion: The first exercise above, as well as the next exercise in ethical decision making, demonstrated the following:

The word ‘courage’ was mentioned frequently. It takes courage to follow ethical standards (absolutism) in a small community where the consequences of one’s actions will be felt and known. However, culture, context and situation enabled these journalists to effectively produce journalism.

Personal and professional relationships could cause conflicts when applying Western standards, but they also shaped journalism that supported this community. Journalists understood their social responsibility, and followed an ethics of care in order to maintain harmonious relations.

Exercise #2: Scenarios

Application of ethical decision-making steps or process

In the second exercise at the end of the workshop, participants were asked to choose one scenario from a list of five cases discussed with their partner. Some teams came up with different answers for the same case. This gave them an opportunity to share with the group and make connections. They realised that they had shared common struggles and could learn from each other.

Here are some examples of possible scenarios, followed by the responses of the participants.

Case #1: Releasing the name of the dead

A former president of the country (a chief) dies in a small plane crash flying to Majuro from Kwajalein. The pilot survives, but the former president's son also perishes in the crash.

Visiting foreigners near the crash area take photos with their phones and send them to the *Marshall Islands Journal*, hoping to make some money. The newspaper is about to go to press that day, but still has time to remake the front page and add this news story and photographs. The family members have not yet been told by the police about the accident. Bodies have not officially been identified.

Do you publish the photo? Also, would your decision be different if you chose to publish this information immediately on social media? Or if you worked in TV or radio and received a photo or video?

Decision-making process

1. Define the ethical issue(s): Whether to a) publish the photos and b) whether to name the victims before the police have notified the family and forensics officials have confirmed their identities.

- *Do you immediately post the information/photo on social media suggesting the identities of the victims?*

Responses: 'I will not post or publish any information or news even if I have a few on hand from individuals. I would gather all confirmed information from relevant sources, i.e. hospitals, law enforcement, and immediate members of the deaths (dead) before posting/publishing. Any false and hurtful information published will not benefit any news media for the community, and readers/viewers will be offended as well since the victim(s) are society's leaders and people respected.

Other participants said they would also wait for details from authorities and then gather, update and correct information. They wanted to protect the privacy of the family.

- *Should you publish the photos in the Marshall Islands Journal?*

Responses: 'Only the photos of the aircraft and the scene, but no bodies. 'Yes, I believe publishing some kind of visual aid will help explain and tell the story better, therefore I would publish photos in the *Marshall Islands Journal*.'

- *Do you include in your story previous child abuse allegations about the former president from 10 years ago?*

Responses: ‘... wouldn’t add more to his or her story because I would respect the current situation and wait until the right time to do further stories if needed, and if previous allegations are valid and did hurt members of the society.’

‘I would not publish previous child abuse allegations about the former president from 10 years ago because I think that the president’s past life and decision has nothing to do with the incident; rather support the family using kindly manner...’

2. *Who are the stakeholders who will be affected by your decision? List them and describe their perspectives.*

Response: Participants listed family members of the former president, who probably wouldn’t want the images published; news organisations that would confirm the information but then publish it but maybe not images; the public, and people from the president’s home island; their church pastor, and the council of chiefs, who might think it’s disrespectful.

3. *What would you do and why?*

- Apply guidelines from the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics (<https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>), the National Press Photographers Association (<https://nppa.org/resources/code-ethics>), or the Radio Television Digital News Association (<https://www.rtdna.org/ethics>) and any conflicts with traditional and personal values.
- ‘I would not publish any information to the public. I would first gather all the accurate information. Even though publishing pictures would be a problem for some, I would just do it accordingly.’

Summary: In this case, participants agreed to hold off on reporting, be cautious and not report anything that isn’t from an official source and can be confirmed, out of respect and support for the president and his family. Hold off until the officials contact the family. There’s no benefit to the news media or community. They don’t want to offend readers/viewers. Yet one said if he knew the victims, and the police weren’t on the scene yet, that he would contact the family. Either way, the family is put first before the rush to publish. The value of humanity was the most important among most of the participants.

Not all agreed on publishing the images. One participant said that even though publishing pictures would be a problem for some people, ‘I would just do it anyway.’ They recognised that this was a balance between releasing information that could cause harm and the public’s want or need to be informed.

Case #2: Anonymous sources: Verification of information

- You are the editor/owner of a popular Marshallese language blog about life in the Marshall Islands. Readership is growing quickly, and you are

becoming one of the most powerful social influencers in the country. You are also in talks with a number of companies about significant sponsorships of the blog. If that happens, you'll finally be making a lot of money from the three-year-old blog.

- You receive an email from an anonymous source alleging that the pastor of the country's largest UCC Protestant Church, who is well known for his Sunday sermons warning sinners of a life in hell, has a second family in a small city in the US mainland. The email includes an attachment of the smiling pastor with his arm around a woman (who appears to be Marshallese), surrounded by three young children. The woman is named, as are the children in the photos.
- This pastor, whose Sunday sermons have become popular as podcasts, has openly criticised your blog as being sinful because it shares salacious gossip. You have developed a strong personal dislike of the pastor, whom you consider to be sanctimonious. Everyone knows that you and the preacher dislike each other.
- Participants were asked: What do you do when you receive the email from an anonymous source? Is it newsworthy? How do you prove the allegation is true?
- Apply SPJ, NPPA or RTDNA guidelines and discuss any conflicts with traditional and personal values.

Participants offered these solutions: Verify the photo from other sources, such as social media. Ask the source to give you other sources who might be able to go on the record. 'I will verify the email first just to make sure the photo or email is not manipulated by asking my connections in the states who know the pastor's so-called second family to investigate them.'

Another said she would find other sources who may be linked to the photo. 'Check relatives/friends of the woman in the photograph, and find out her occupation, then check with co-workers.'

One participant would be vigilant in fact-checking. 'First, I would make sure the email sent to me isn't a virus, and after, check if people in the photos are legit. Secondly, I would ask the anonymous source what his intentions are and also ask how he know about his alleged second family. Thirdly I would take advantage of our Marshallese tradition of knowing everyone in the Marshallese community and ask my sources in the States to investigate and confirm if it's true.'

Participants also said they thought this story was newsworthy because the pastor is an example for his followers and the community. One commented that the pastor 'himself is sinful for engaging in extramarital affairs. His morals are not superior to that of his followers. If it's true, I'd publish giving the pastor the same treatment as the criminals or convicts whose names are published in the *Marshall Islands Journal*.'

Q. Is your well-known personal feud with the pastor a factor in decision-making?

Participants were mixed on whether a personal feud with the pastor would be a factor in the story:

My personal feud with the pastor won't be the primary factor in my decision; it will be common sense and critical. By hitting him back with the doctrines he preaches by telling my readers that he doesn't live by what he preaches and blinding his followers to provide personal fundings that are for his personal benefit.

Another said it would be a factor because his criticisms would be answered, and gossip would become facts. Yet other participants said that from a moral standpoint, should the wife and church followers be told? What would the community think of this? They were worried about harm to the community.

Other cases were also presented for discussion. These issues were covered: When is being 'objective' irresponsible because one side won't comment; dilemmas faced by journalists in the midst of disaster coverage when victims need help; reporting on crime and corruption; reporting where everybody knows your name.

Conclusions

Journalists in this workshop demonstrated the role of culture and society in their daily decisions about how to do journalism. Rather than culture being seen as an 'impediment' to journalism (Layton, 1995, p. 119) when an absolutist standard is applied, this group showed how they navigated ethical decision-making within the context of their society, cultural norms and institutions.

In this workshop, the young learned from the older participants, even when they had different perspectives and approaches, as demonstrated in their responses to the last two cases.

As Hanitzsch et al. 2019 (p. 29) noted: 'Young journalists mostly learn and understand these rules in terms of a cultural consensus as to 'how we do journalism,' rather than as an explicit code of conduct.' It's less about their personal value, and more about doing journalism that's natural to their culture.

Workshop participants were dedicated to fact-based reporting in an effort to get to the truth. They valued accuracy through verification of information, and demonstrated this in their approach to decision-making in the cases.

Independence—freedom from influence—was difficult because of close relationships in the community. As a result, it might be assumed that these journalists would find it hard to be impartial and neutral; however, they found ways to be fair by reporting multiple sides to a story and verifying information. However it depended on each situation (situationalism). Age was also a factor, with older journalists being more willing to challenge authority than younger ones. Young journalists were more risk-averse, particularly the females. However, one young

male participant was particularly bold.

The journalists in this study were Marshallese, but they also came from other island nations or had experience living in the United States. Being Marshallese is more challenging when doing stories about people they know or are related to, so some suggested that the solution to a conflict of interest might be asking a non-Marshallese reporter or someone not related to do the story.

Practising an ethics of care: Many of the journalists were concerned about humanity and protecting chiefs and people they knew, but how far they would go in protecting someone depended on the case and the newsworthiness of the story. They suggested that the best way to report on powerful individuals who were engaged in corruption was to verify information, check facts using multiple sources, or ask a foreign reporter to do the story if they feared retaliation or being blacklisted.

Where the church is the subject of the story, Marshallese journalists found themselves facing a conflict of interest; however, they were willing to expose corrupt or unfaithful pastors who were not practicing what they preached; not adhering to Christian morality.

They also believed in being accountable for their work by putting their bylines on stories.

Dimensions of journalism culture

In the Worlds of Journalism study, Hanitzsch and his associates (2019) use four dimensions to test key differences against broader contexts of journalist culture: politics, governance, socioeconomic development and cultural values systems (p. 285). Their comparative analyses yielded four models of journalistic culture: monitorial, advocative, developmental and collaborative.

RMI journalists face the biggest challenges in implementing Western-based core values of journalism (absolutist) when carrying out their monitorial role, but have managed to negotiate journalism practices within their Marshallese cultural value system and governance structure. This is evidence that supports Robie's 'Pacific Way' tradition (2019), which introduces 'indigenous tradition or *kastom*, to use a Tok Pisin term, as a critical agency.' The influence of the chiefly system on political coverage played a role, with journalists possibly unwillingly in a collaborative role. Future research could include surveys of these journalists and a broader sample.

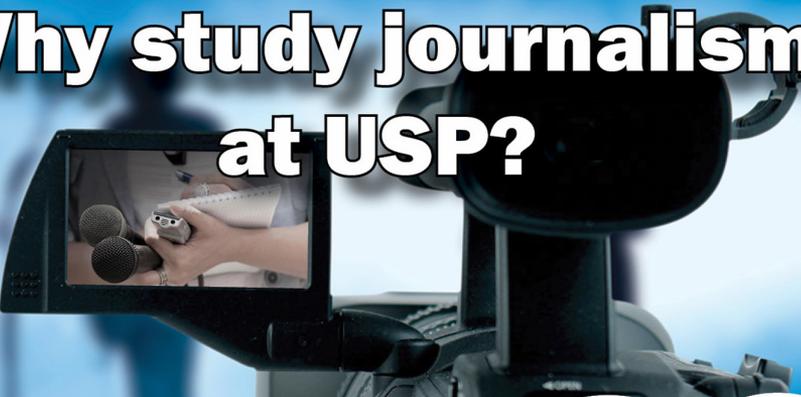
Through the discourse in this workshop, journalists of all ages shared their challenges and experiences. They agreed to meet more often and continue the conversations; this would ultimately forge a collective professional identity about what it means to practise journalism ethics in the Marshall Islands.

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