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Autonomy in Local Digital Journalism:

A Mixed-Method Triangulation Exploration of the Organizational Culture and Individual Moral Psychology Factors of Digital News Workers

Dr. Rhema Zlaten
Assistant Professor of Mass Communication

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Escalante Hall, Room 125, 12:30-1:30 pm

This mixed-methods study examines the shifting digital news industry. The study design drew from media ethics, media sociology, and moral ecology to better understand how organizational structure and individual moral psychology factors influence the autonomy levels of digital media workers. High levels of autonomous agency in news workers are an essential indicator of how journalism work is (or is not) fulfilling its role as the fourth estate in American democracy. To study my research questions, I completed a participant observation, an online survey, and in-depth participation interviews with the editorial staff at The Golden Gate, a hyper-local digitally native news organization. My data collection resulted in several themes concerning organizational structure, leadership, socialization, and autonomy. For my results, I found that The Golden Gate staff expressed a high level of freedom from top-level oversight as they shaped the voicing and coverage of their city. The staff also conveyed tensions between journalistic ethics and the audience-first focus of their company.