

SOI: [1.1/TAS](https://s-o-i.org/1.1/TAS) DOI: [10.15863/TAS](https://dx.doi.org/10.15863/TAS)

International Scientific Journal
Theoretical & Applied Science

p-ISSN: 2308-4944 (print) e-ISSN: 2409-0085 (online)

Year: 2025 Issue: 07 Volume: 147

Received: 24.06.2025
Accepted/Published: 30.07.2025 <https://T-Science.org>



Nana Vasadze
Caucasus International University
PHD student,
Media and Law researcher,
master degree in journalism and law

TITLE: CRIME COVERAGE IN CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION MEDIA – ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Abstract: Contemporary television plays a significant role in crime coverage; however, this process is often marked by sensationalism, giving rise to ethical dilemmas and legal challenges. Social media further intensifies these tendencies as algorithms and user engagement often amplify emotionally charged and dramatic content. This article aims to analyze the ethical dimensions of crime reporting on television, examine the role of social media in shaping these practices, and explore their impact on public perception.

Key words: Social media, ethical dilemmas, impact.

Language: English

Citation: Vasadze, N. (2025). Title: crime coverage in contemporary television media – ethical dilemmas and challenges of social media. *ISJ Theoretical & Applied Science*, 07 (147), 1-4.

Soi: <https://s-o-i.org/1.1/TAS-07-147-1> **Doi:**  <https://dx.doi.org/10.15863/TAS.2025.07.147.1>
Scopus ASCC: 3300.

Introduction

The Role of Television in Crime Coverage

Television remains one of the primary means of mass communication. It is distinguished by its unique ability to combine visual and auditory elements. This capacity allows television to simultaneously reach and influence a broad audience, making it a powerful instrument in shaping public opinion.

Television plays a leading role in forming societal attitudes, largely due to its communicative characteristics that distinguish it from other media platforms. By combining visual and auditory elements, television provides a unique opportunity to disseminate information and influence public perception.

As Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan noted, "Television creates the feeling of direct participation in events, fostering a personal connection to the content being conveyed." Television overcomes spatial and temporal boundaries, offering audiences an illusion of presence, even when events occur at a great geographical distance. This sense of

involvement enhances viewers' emotional engagement.

According to McLuhan, electronic media serve as an extension of human consciousness. They break down the barriers of time and space, enabling individuals to be present everywhere simultaneously. This communicative power makes television effective in reaching diverse demographic and social groups in different geographic locations.

Prominent media theorist Denis McQuail described television's capacity to be mass-oriented and universally accessible as follows:

"Television has the ability to attract a diverse audience. It attempts to speak to everyone at once and, in doing so, specifically addresses no one. Yet, in that address, everyone sees themselves reflected."

Beyond its mass appeal, television's accessibility is another defining characteristic, particularly in the context of crime coverage. Television can transcend the simple delivery of facts through the use of imagery and the emotions those images evoke. Yvonne Jewkes refers to this feature as television's "visual and emotional immediacy."

Impact Factor:	ISRA (India)	= 6.317	SIS (USA)	= 0.912	ICV (Poland)	= 6.630
	ISI (Dubai, UAE)	= 1.582	ПИИИ (Russia)	= 0.191	PIF (India)	= 1.940
	GIF (Australia)	= 0.564	ESJI (KZ)	= 8.100	IBI (India)	= 4.260
	JIF	= 1.500	SJIF (Morocco)	= 7.184	OAJI (USA)	= 0.350

According to Jewkes, "Television's visual and emotional immediacy makes it a uniquely powerful tool for constructing crime narratives that go beyond merely reporting the facts." She argues that the portrayal of crime on television may be more compelling than the real event itself when it is dramatized through music, visuals, and text. Ultimately, this creates distorted public perceptions regarding the nature and frequency of crime.

Television's influence is closely tied to its visual and linguistic characteristics, which are critical in determining how viewers receive information and what emotional reactions it evokes. These features take on particular significance in the context of crime reporting. Visual techniques are not merely vehicles of information; they also serve as potent transmitters of emotion.

The use of dramatic lighting and color schemes, which are often associated with crime, along with specific editing choices, such as close-ups of victims and shadowed portrayals of suspects, creates an aura of mystery and contributes to a heightened emotional tone. Sound design, including suspenseful music and sound effects, further amplifies this emotional experience.

These visual strategies can influence viewers' attitudes toward events, even when additional context or sources are absent. Research by Barnett supports this idea. For example, Barnett found that:

"Viewers who saw the accused in prison attire and handcuffs rated them as more dangerous criminals than those who were only described verbally, without visual footage."

Thus, while visual techniques can improve the quality of a report's storytelling, they may also hinder critical audience engagement and an accurate understanding of real circumstances.

Higgins refers to the television camera as a "crime scene," suggesting that images and video footage are powerful tools that bring audiences closer to crime, both geographically and emotionally. However, these strategies often reinforce negative stereotypes by shaping fixed and enduring public images of what a "criminal" looks like.

Furthermore, the emotional portrayal of victims through visual elements often evokes empathy and a desire to help, especially when the victim is perceived as vulnerable. Studies show that close-up footage of personal belongings or emotionally charged details, particularly in cases involving children, has a powerful impact on audiences. The media often leverage these techniques for emotional resonance.

This practice is rooted in the well-known psychological phenomenon of the "identifiable victim effect," which explains why people are more affected by the suffering of specific individuals than by abstract statistics.

However, while these techniques can foster empathy and help audiences understand the severity

of crimes, they may also re-traumatize victims and their families, creating a significant ethical dilemma for the media.

For this reason, media codes of ethics in nearly all democratic countries recommend exercising caution when using visual material, especially in cases involving victims of crime.

Sensationalism and Crime Reporting

In the modern media environment, sensationalism has become a powerful and widely used journalistic strategy. According to Yvonne Jewkes, sensational coverage involves dramatizing events and presenting them in an exaggerated manner that often exceeds their actual scope. The intent is to deliberately shock the audience and provoke an inflated sense of threat.

Researchers Maria Grabe, Shuhua Zhou, and Brooke Barnett have extensively examined the influence of sensationalism on television viewers' perceptions, as well as the related issue of media responsibility. They define sensationalism as follows:

"A journalistic practice that favors dramatic, shocking, or emotionally distressing content to increase audience engagement, often at the expense of objectivity, accuracy, or in-depth analysis."

According to these authors, the media strategically employs elements specific to television in order to capture and retain viewer attention.

"Sensational features, such as dramatic visuals, emotionally charged music, and evocative language, are systematically used to heighten audience engagement, even when they compromise the informational value of the news content."

Professor Nganje, a noted scholar on sensationalism, ethical journalism, and the media's role in crisis situations, writes,

"Sensationalism in journalism encompasses both content and form, including pacing, music, and visuals, which are aimed at eliciting strong emotional reactions."

A defining feature of sensationalism in crime reporting is the use of an emotionally charged tone and language. Media outlets often describe crimes such as murder, robbery, rape, and car accidents using terms like "horrific," "tragic," "gruesome," and "devastating," which lends a sensational quality to the story.

Sensationalism is closely linked to the commercial interests of media organizations, creating a significant contemporary challenge. Since many media outlets rely on advertising revenue, they depend heavily on audience size. Higher viewership translates into higher ratings, which increase advertising income.

In his influential work, *Market-Driven Journalism*, John McManus analyzes the impact of commercial interests on journalistic content. He argues:

Impact Factor:	ISRA (India)	= 6.317	SIS (USA)	= 0.912	ICV (Poland)	= 6.630
	ISI (Dubai, UAE)	= 1.582	ПИИИ (Russia)	= 0.191	PIF (India)	= 1.940
	GIF (Australia)	= 0.564	ESJI (KZ)	= 8.100	IBI (India)	= 4.260
	JIF	= 1.500	SJIF (Morocco)	= 7.184	OAJI (USA)	= 0.350

"Journalistic content is increasingly commodified and tailored to market demands while journalism itself functions as a system that serves advertising interests."

This market-driven approach to media revenue fundamentally conflicts with traditional journalistic values such as protecting the public interest, maintaining ethical standards, and upholding objectivity.

The Influence of Social Media

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok play a significant role in crime coverage. Users frequently share information and videos that are potentially inaccurate and emotionally charged. Algorithms that prioritize shocking and sensational content further amplify these tendencies, reinforcing a culture of sensationalism. This undermines journalistic ethics and contributes to the creation of a "digital courtroom," where facts and legal principles are often replaced by swift public judgment and speculation.

Ethical Dilemmas and Journalistic Responsibility

Notably, social media users have engaged in criminal investigations, initially intending to assist. However, social media often creates a so-called "digital courtroom" in which facts and legal standards are replaced by "instant verdicts" and public speculation. This practice violates the presumption of innocence and the professional responsibility of the media.

Social media frequently infringes upon the privacy of victims and their families.

- Users often share personal photos and videos without the consent of those involved.
- Family members' social media profiles become subjects of public scrutiny as people investigate and discuss their pasts, relationships, and education.
- In some cases, the identities of minors and adolescents are exposed, which exacerbates the ethical consequences.

Ethical journalism teaches that working with traumatized individuals requires exceptional sensitivity and a humane approach. Yet, in social media contexts, these individuals are often reduced to mere "content objects."

Traditional media also finds itself under pressure from social media trends. Journalists are often compelled to respond to viral TikTok videos, and sometimes use social media content as a primary source. However, a fundamental distinction remains:

- Journalists are bound by professional responsibility and accountability, such as editorial oversight, standards, and codes of ethics.
- Social media users, on the other hand, act individually and often without consequences.

Can social media be ethical?

Theoretically, yes. However, achieving this requires several key conditions.

1. **Platform self-regulation:** Algorithms should prioritize credibility over shock value.
2. **Media literacy among users:** The public must develop the ability to critically assess and differentiate information.
3. **Strengthening Professional Journalism:** Media organizations must consistently monitor social media and verify facts before publication.
4. **Refinement of Legal Frameworks:** Legal protections for personal data and the presumption of innocence must be upheld in digital spaces.

Conclusion

The coverage of crime on television, coupled with the influence of social media, presents a range of ethical challenges that demand adherence to journalistic standards and prioritization of the public interest. Media outlets often favor shocking and emotionally charged content to capture audience attention and boost ratings. However, this approach often undermines objectivity and accuracy, potentially fostering distorted perceptions of crime in society.

Social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of information but often lack thorough fact-checking mechanisms, thereby exacerbating the spread of misinformation. This contributes to the erosion of journalistic credibility and heightens public confusion.

Both traditional media and social media platforms must approach crime reporting with a heightened sense of responsibility to avoid violating privacy, spreading disinformation, and inciting moral panic.

References:

1. Barnett, B. (2003). The Framing of Victim Stories: A Narrative Analysis of Television

Crime News, *Journal of Communication*, 53(4), pp. 678–694.

Impact Factor:	ISRA (India)	= 6.317	SIS (USA)	= 0.912	ICV (Poland)	= 6.630
	ISI (Dubai, UAE)	= 1.582	ПИИИ (Russia)	= 0.191	PIF (India)	= 1.940
	GIF (Australia)	= 0.564	ESJI (KZ)	= 8.100	IBI (India)	= 4.260
	JIF	= 1.500	SJIF (Morocco)	= 7.184	OAJI (USA)	= 0.350

2. Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J., & Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan.
3. Higgins, K.C. (2022). Camera as Crime Scene: Affective Economies and the Photographic Coverage of Violence, *Crime, Media, Culture*, 18(3).
4. Grabe, M. E., Zhou, S., & Barnett, B. (2001). Explicating Sensationalism in Television News: Content and the bells and whistles of form, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(4), 635–655.
5. McManus, J. H. (1994). *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware*, SAGE Publications.
6. Kogut, T., & Ritov, I. (2005). The Identifiable Victim Effect: Causes and Implications, *The Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(3), pp. 213–217.
7. Jewkes, Y. (2015). *Media and Crime* (3rd ed.), London: SAGE Publications.
8. Wayne, M. (2023). Television News and the Symbolic Criminalization of Young People, *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(2), pp. 240–257.