

DATA PRIVACY IN THE NEWSROOM:
THE ETHICAL JUSTIFICATIONS OF USING
USER DATA IN THE REPORTING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes website privacy policies used by major news corporations and attempts to understand the newsroom ethics policies as applied to protecting personal information collected about readers. The confluence of the legal and ethical questions revealed a conflicting relationship that possibly exposes news organizations that publish user information to liability while still practicing within the accepted limitations of traditional journalism ethics.

Journalists tend to be indignant about the protections they afford to personal information collected on their site, unless the user is a public official using their pseudonym to discuss public issues behind a veil of secrecy. In this situation, journalists not only justify their actions under their ethics policies, but are possibly unknowingly breaching a contract made with each and every reader.

In order to protect against liability, news organizations should change their newsroom practices to allow for the disclosure of user information in a very narrowly-constructed situation and amend their privacy policy to align with traditional journalism ethics as applied to privacy situations.