

EXAMINING THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF VIRTUAL REALITY IN JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

This professional project aimed to uncover the ethical challenges in virtual reality and journalism. After interviews with a number of journalists, media ethicists and academics it was discovered that VR journalism doesn't require a new set of ethical standards, and instead should seek to adapt existing journalistic standards to fit this medium. However, VR presents unique challenges in upholding the values of maintaining accuracy, providing context and reducing harm to audiences. Journalists using VR should consider that the medium can trick its audience into believing what they see in an immersive experience is apart of their own lived experience. This means that the chances of inducing post-traumatic stress or implanting false memories at a heightened level, especially when covering stories involving conflict and violence. It was also discovered that the newsroom values in creating VR stories revolve around transporting individuals to a location that is hard to access and to establish a sense of presence through interactivity.

The professional component of the project involved a four-month fellowship at the Associated Press in New York City where I was a part of the strategy team. Here, I co-authored an industry report on how VR is changing the approach to storytelling. This report was titled "The Age of Dynamic Storytelling: A guide for journalists in a world of immersive 3-D content." The report primarily focused on volumetric capture, a technology that enables journalists to produce vibrant 3-D models of people, places, and events. Other responsibilities at the AP included working with startups through a media accelerator called Matter to integrate their skills into the AP's workflow.