

**Pulitzer Ethics Project “Livestreaming and Ethics”:
Timothy Young, Salisbury University**

Live broadcasting through a variety of mediums has become a large ethical issue due to its growing use by the public and journalists, creating a high possibility of being improperly used.

[New forms of technology](#) have continued to advance and become more used by the public. New features continue to be developed, but with them comes equal amounts of [issues](#) that are addressed as they appear. One issue is the growing use of live broadcasting apps and networks for general use.

Back in July, a [Minnesota woman](#) opened Facebook Live, a new social media feature that can livestream video directly to followers, and streamed a police traffic stop that resulted in the shooting of her fiancé. The video was graphic in nature and could be viewed by anyone that saw the link with no warning of the content.

While the stream increased the amount of awareness of the controversial shooting, there was no warning given to viewers that they were about to see a dead man on their social media timeline.

The pros and cons of livestreaming depend heavily on the context of the media being streamed. If people are not careful, they could easily be exposed to [graphic material](#) popping up all over social media. The ethics being called into question is simply the audience consenting to content of sensitive materials.

A journalist’s use of livestreaming tools can be beneficial by creating transparent methods of distributing information. Salisbury University multimedia technician Mike Camillo said that live material can be used to prove that the content distributed has not been edited to sway opinions or promote false information.

“There’s a greater risk of being accused of being unethical when something is taped rather than running it live,” Camillo said. “If you don’t fact check something that was taped and it turns out to be false, that can get you in some trouble with your audience and advertisers.”

Camillo said that simply knowing the environment being broadcasted will significantly reduce any chances of inappropriate media being seen by an unknowing audience. If the broadcaster isn't sensitive to context there are likely to be issues, especially with the chance of running into trouble with [police](#) and legal issues.

Former police spokesperson and crime beat reporter Haven Simmons said that crime scene tape very rarely does its job anymore.

"You really just have a bunch of amateur reporters running around everywhere with cellphones documenting everything," Simmons said. "By the time the professional journalists arrive on the scene, everything is already online with different, biased conclusions."

Because journalists are rarely first anymore in spreading information, they need to change tactics if they attempt to use new mediums like livestreaming. Delmarva Public Radio news producer Don Rush said that journalists need to stay relevant in media, but should be careful in doing so. Journalists are held to a much higher standard than any other individual trying to livestream content.

"Journalists used to be the gatekeepers of information," Rush said. "They made sure that the information being broadcasted was factually correct and remained unbiased. Now that everyone has a camera and the internet in their pocket, they can put whatever they want online, true or not."

One possible solution that could be applied to livestreaming is a form of delay that could decrease the chances of sensitive materials being broadcasted to an audience. Broadcast delays already see use in sports games and other live broadcasted events like presidential debates and reality shows.

There is ideally a thirty-second delay that a producer has control over. The user could "dump" the last thirty seconds of media before it could be broadcasted, preventing any unexpected sensitive material from reaching an audience.

However, no system is perfect. Mike Camillo said that in the current age of technology, digital delays are often expensive to implement, often leaving many broadcasting studios without much room for error.

“We saw just last year those field reporters that got shot by a coworker,” Camillo said. “The whole thing was filmed live and it took the likely shocked producer several seconds to cut the live feed. It was too late at that point.”

Livestreaming isn't going away any time soon. It is likely to see more use as the technology advances, and people realize the power that their smart phone has. Journalists are encouraged to use these same tools because it promotes new methods of information distributing and gathering. However, when it's live journalists should be more careful than ever that they are being accountable, sensitive, and transparent.

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