Media Ethics: Choosing the Right Way to Serve

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ABSTRACT

"We must remember that in time of war what is said on the enemy's side of the front is always propaganda, and what is said on our side of the front is truth and righteousness, the cause of humanity and a crusade for peace."Walter LippmannThis paper presents an overview of the vital role the media which it can play in positive social change, particularly with respect to the Ethics. It deals with the issues regarding to those area of society where the military is most important. It shows that the media popularity can have a very big impact on societal change such as bringing the literacy level regarding the operations of the military up to a certain mark Media ethics is the subdivision of applied ethics dealing with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, print media and the internet. The field covers many varied and highly controversial topics, ranging from war journalism to Benetton advertising. As social media usage continues to rise, it's only natural that statistic correlations will be made about the individuals who use the medium. This isn't a bad thing; it's common to deep-dive into demographic information and behavioral data. While there will always be exceptions to the "correlations" that emerge from such data, universal truths about social networking usage and user behavior can be valuable.

Keywords: Media, Ethics, Social Networks, Social Responsibility, Privacy

Introduction

In order to understand any potential connection between ethics and social networks, it only makes sense to step back and discuss what ethical behavior means. Jay Shepherd, author of the book *Firing at Will: A Manager's Guide*, sums up unethical behavior with a sentence.

"It's like pornography: You know it when you see it. It's as simple as knowing the right thing to do, then doing the wrong thing."

Harned adds that perceptions of ethics are influenced by many things. "One influence is the values that we learn as children. But another aspect is the influence of people along the way in our lives," she says. "It could be that there is something about the conversations and the world view that comes through the connections of social networks that influences employees' views about what is right and wrong."

Is There a Logical Connection Between Ethics and Social Media?

There is some skepticism about trying to draw conclusions about ethics based upon social networking usage. Shepherd suggests the study perpetuates old-school thinking. "The idea that social networkers are more apt to be unethical is absurd. It's just that you're more likely to hear about it. In my experience, social media participants are likely to be more advanced in terms of relationships and thoughtfulness not less."

One definition in the study that drew attention was the classification of "active social networker" as one who "spends 30% or more of their work day participating on various social network sites." Shepherd says his reaction was, "Seriously? That's a ridiculous amount of time. Those employees aren't even working; who cares what they think?"

Maybe it's exactly this time-wasting factor that creates the perception toward connecting social networking and ethics. Dwane Lay, human resources director at Missouri Baptist Medical Center, also feels the connection might not be directly causal. "Social media tools are the latest in a long line of time-stealers in the workplace, following in the footsteps of March Madness brackets, afternoon golf games, morning water cooler gossip or cigarette breaks," Lay explains. "But social media like Twitter and Facebook are more visible from a distance (of both time and space), so they are easier to criticize and quantify."

Should Ethics Blend Into Social Policies?

Both ethics and social media are important in the workplace, so the question becomes: What is the best way to manage them? Should they be treated as two distinct conversations? Or should ethics be addressed in social media policies? Shepherd recommends keeping it simple. "My social media policy is just two words but covers everything: 'Be professional.' Unprofessional employees are going to act unethically whether or not they're plugged in to social media."

Kristen Fyfe, senior communications manager at training and development association ASTD, points out the component that both ethics and social media must have in common to be successful. "Clarity is the most effective element for both ethics and social media policies," Fyfe says. "Companies that have not incorporated behavior expectations into their employee handbooks should make that a top priority."

Ensuring Both Ethics Compliance and Social Media Success

Whether you choose to incorporate ethics into your social media policy or handle the topics independently, there's agreement that setting expectations, conducting training and holding people accountable is necessary. Lay shares some practical advice on how to ensure employees are in compliance with corporate ethics, but it really applies to any policy, including social media.

"First of all, read the policy. Not fun, granted, but educational," he says. "Second, remember that if you identify yourself as a member of a company or organization, you are always on stage. Act like it. How you respond online will have as much or more resonance than in person, so either be on your best behavior or don't act as a brand advocate."

Ethics of journalism

The ethics of journalism is one of the most well-defined branches of media ethics, primarily because it is frequently taught in schools of journalism. Journalistic ethics tends to dominate media ethics, sometimes almost to the exclusion of other areas. Aspects covered by journalism ethics include:

- o **News manipulation.** News can manipulate and be manipulated. Governments and corporations may attempt to manipulate news media; governments, for example, by censorship, and corporations by share ownership. The methods of manipulation are subtle and many. Manipulation may be voluntary or involuntary. Those being manipulated may not be aware of this.
- o **Truth.** Truth may conflict with many other values.
- o **Public interest.** Revelation of military secrets and other sensitive government information may be contrary to the public interest, even if it is true. However, public interest is not a term which is easy to define.
- o **Privacy.** Salacious details of the lives of public figures are a central content element in many media. Publication is not necessarily justified simply because the information is true. Privacy is also a right, and one which conflicts with free speech.
- o **Fantasy.** Fantasy is an element of entertainment, which is a legitimate goal of media content. Journalism may mix fantasy and truth, with resulting ethical dilemmas.
- o **Taste.** Photo journalists who cover war and disasters confront situations which may shock the sensitivities of their audiences. For example, human remains are rarely screened. The ethical issue is how far one risk shocking an audience's sensitivities in order to correctly should and fully report the truth.
- o **Conflict with the law.** Journalistic ethics may conflict with the law over issues such as the protection of confidential news sources. There is also the question of the extent to which it is ethically acceptable to break the law in order to obtain news. For example, undercover reporters may be engaging in deception, trespass and similar torts and crimes.

Ethics of entertainment media

Issues in the ethics of entertainment media include:

- The depiction of violence and sex, and the presence of strong language. Ethical guidelines and legislation in this area are common and many media (e.g. film, computer games) are subject to ratings systems and supervision by agencies. An extensive guide to international systems of enforcement can be found under motion picture rating system.
- Product placement. An increasingly common marketing tactic is the placement of products in entertainment media. The producers of such media may be paid high sums to display branded products. The practice is controversial and largely unregulated. Detailed article: product placement.
- Stereotypes. Both advertising and entertainment media make heavy use of stereotypes. Stereotypes may negatively affect people's perceptions of themselves or promote socially undesirable behavior. The stereotypical portrayals of men, affluence and ethnic groups are examples of major areas of debate.
- Taste and taboos. Entertainment media often questions of our values for artistic and entertainment purposes. Normative ethics is often about moral values, and what kinds should be enforced and protected. In media ethics, these two sides come into conflict. In the name of art, media may deliberately attempt to break with existing norms and shock the audience. That poses ethical problems when the norms abandoned are closely associated with certain relevant moral values or obligations. The extent to which this is acceptable is always a hotbed of ethical controversy.

Media and democracy

In democratic countries, a special relationship exists between media and government. Although the freedom of the media may be constitutionally enshrined and have precise legal definition and enforcement, the exercise of that freedom by individual journalists is a matter of personal choice and ethics. Modern democratic government

subsists in representation of millions by hundreds. For the representatives to be accountable, and for the process of government to be transparent, effective communication paths must exist to their constituents. Today these paths consist primarily of the mass media, to the extent that if press freedom disappeared, so would most political accountability. In this area, media ethics merges with issues of civil rights and politics. Issues include:

- Subversion of media independence by financial interests.
- Government monitoring of media for intelligence gathering against its own people.

Media ethics and media economics

Media economics where things such as -- deregulation of media, concentration of media ownership, FCC regulations in the U.S, media trade unions and labor issues, and other such worldwide regulating bodies, citizen media (low power FM, community radio) -- have ethical implications.

Media ethics and public officials

The media has manipulated the way public officials conduct themselves through the advancement of technology. Constant television coverage displays the legislative proceedings; exposing faster than ever before, unjust rulings throughout the government process. Truth telling is crucial in media ethics as any opposition of truth telling is considered deception. Anything shown by the media whether print or video is considered to be original. When a statement is written in an article or a video is shown of a public official, it is the original "truthful" words of the individual official themselves.

Intercultural dimensions of media ethics

If values differ intercultural, the issue arises of the extent to which behavior should be modified in the light of the values of specific cultures. Two examples of controversy from the field of media ethics:

- Google's self-censorship in China.
- The Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy in Denmark, and subsequently worldwide.

Theories of Models for the Press

As forms of communication evolve, avenues of news reporting increase, and the scope of media influence expands, media ethics becomes an increasingly important issue in modern society. People are exposed to television news, radio broadcasting, newspaper articles, and now digital media as well. The mass media is an intrinsic part of everyday lives. What exactly drives the powerful Western media government mandates, social responsibility and the quest for truth, or is it the financial goals of large media corporations?

In the book, *Four Theories of the Press* written in 1963, Wilbur Schramm, Fred Siebert, and Theodore Peterson present four different models of the media. Two of them are relevant to the Western media today, the social responsibility system and the Libertarian system. The former has its roots in mid-twentieth century society and revolves around ethics in the media, but has always existed as an ideal; the latter is more prevalent today, and by nature threatens media ethics.

The Social Responsibility System for News Reporting

In the social responsibility theory of the press, the media is driven to benefit the public. It expects journalists to answer society's need for truth, requires an open and diverse debate on public issues, and honest updates of current events. In this model, media ethics is automatic because the press is free to serve its purpose for the public, as opposed to special interest groups or advertisers. Another condition of the social responsibility model, is that news reporting cannot be dependent on groups that may encourage bias and unethical practices in exchange for financial support.

The Libertarian System of News Reporting

The Libertarian model is more popular in Western media than the social responsibility model. In this system, the freedom of the press is endless; it is not constrained by the government, by society, or by media ethics. Instead of being a sea of different ideas, opinions, and voices however, news reporting in the Libertarian system is indeed restricted. It may not be as limited and biased as the media found in an authoritarian society, which would serve the government's interests, but it is still constrained by its financial dependence.

Western media outlets, particularly television stations, rely heavily on advertisers for money, and therefore design their news reporting to support and never conflict with the will of their financial supporters. Also, because of the deregulation movement of the past fifteen years, Congress and the FCC have allowed more freedom within the telecommunications field, loosening laws that were at one time designed to ensure social responsibility and ethics in the media. Today, a large percentage of Western media outlets, especially those in America, are part of a handful of media conglomerates, companies which have to focus on increasing their profits every year.

The Independent Media: A Myth

For those who have inspected the facts, it is clear that the mass media has failed to generate genuine public awareness of the nature of Western policy. Majid Tehranian, Professor of International Communication at the University of Hawaii and Director of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, points out that:

In their scholarship, William Appleton Williams, Noam Chomsky, Richard Falk, Ramsey Clark, Ali Mazrui, and other critics of US foreign policies have provided an abundance of evidence to support the charges on the counter-democratic role of the United States in much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In an extensive study of the US-UK special relationship, British historian Mark Curtis, former Research Fellow at the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London, finds that:

Mutual Anglo-American support in ordering the affairs of key nations and regions, often with violence, to their design has been a consistent feature of the era that followed the Second World War... Policy in, for example, Malaya, Kenya, British Guiana and Iran was geared towards organizing Third World economies along guidelines in which British, and Western, interests would be paramount, and those of the often malnourished populations would be ignored or further undermined. Similarly, US interventions overseas – in Vietnam, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Chile, and Etcetera – were designed to counter threats to the Western practice of assigning the Third World to mere client status to Western business interests. British and US forces have acted as mercenary – and often extremely violent – mobs intended to restore 'order' in their domains and to preserve the existing privileges of elites within their own societies.

Development specialist Dr. J. W. Smith, who is Director of Research for the California-based Institute for Economic Democracy, is even more explicit:

No society will tolerate it if they knew that they (as a country) were responsible for violently killing 12 to 15 million people since WW II and causing the death of hundreds of millions more their economies were destroyed or those countries were denied the right to restructure to care for their people. Unknown as it is, and recognizing that this has been standard practice throughout colonialism, that is the record of the Western imperial centers of capital from 1945 to 1990... While mouthing peace, freedom, justice, rights, and majority rule, all over the world state-sponsored terrorists were overthrowing democratic governments, installing and protecting dictators, and preventing peace, freedom, justice, rights, and majority rule. Twelve to fifteen million mostly innocent people were slaughtered in that successful 45 year effort to suppress those breaks for economic freedom which were bursting out all over the world... All intelligence agencies have been, and are still in, the business of destabilizing undeveloped countries to maintain their dependency and the flow of the world's natural wealth to powerful nations' industries at a low price and to provide markets for those industries at a high price.

It is obvious that the media has failed to accurately portray the real nature of Western foreign policy to the public. The question is, why do the media conform to the dubious agenda of the government and corporate elite?

The answer lies in an analysis of how the media works. Probably the most thorough analysis is *Manufacturing Consent*, written by two leading US academics, Edward Herman (Professor Emeritus of Finance at Wharton School in the University of Pennsylvania) and Noam Chomsky (Institute Professor of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT).

The principal reason to begin with this study is that it contains arguably the most thoroughly researched and empirically verified model of the media available. Herman and Chomsky's landmark book is recommended by America's leading national media watchdog, the Washington D.C.-based research group Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR). The Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID), affiliated to the U.S.-based Community Media Centre (CMC) also recommends the book as an "essential resource for media literacy". The Oxford-based research and publishing group Corporate Watch describes the study as "one of the most incisive critiques of the media's role in society". The respected journal *Publisher's Weekly* gives the following review of *Manufacturing Consent*:

Herman of Wharton and Chomsky of MIT lucidly document their argument that America's government and its corporate giants exercise control over what we read, see and hear. The authors identify the forces that they contend make the national media propagandistic – the major three being the motivation for profit through ad revenue, the media's close links to and often ownership by corporations, and their acceptance of information from biased sources. In five case studies, the writers show how TV, newspapers and radio distort world events… Extensive evidence is calmly presented, and in the end an indictment against the guardians of our freedom is substantiated. A disturbing picture emerges of a news system that panders to the interest of America's privileged and neglects its duties when the concerns of minority groups and the underclass are at stake.

Indeed, according to the leading US media scholar Robert W. McChesney – Research Professor in the Institute of Communications Research and the Graduate School of Information and Library Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign – any significant attempt to comprehend the structure and operation of the mass media *must* begin with Herman and Chomsky's study.

Conclusion:

The victims of the system of global apartheid in which the Western powers control the world's resources while the majority of the population toils under regimes of extreme oppression and deprivation propped up by the international community are becoming increasingly intolerant of the inhumane conditions in which they are forced to attempt to survive. If we are to genuinely stop such acts of terror from being repeated, then we must dismantle the unjust system that creates such inhumane conditions from which individuals arise with so little hope that they feel compelled to use violence. A US response calculated to label and target everyone not "on our side" indiscriminately parroted and trumpeted by a corporate-dominated media which is institutionally dependent upon the elite agenda and based on the same elite strategic principles and economic interests will only exacerbate the systematic injustices of world order and create conditions conducive to a spiral of violence and war, from which no one will benefit. It is our responsibility to challenge media lies, and thereby challenge the ideological base of legitimacy that the media grants the unaccountable activities of the self-interested corporate elite. In doing so, we are challenging the very foundations of US/Western imperial policy throughout the world. Over time, the free market based Libertarian model has resulted in a number of problems, from corporate and political censorship, to media bias. Stories, that would logically be important are not always reported, and are in fact substituted with more entertaining news. For example, major world issues, such as the ongoing conflict in Somalia, are seldom covered in the news, while media outlets become saturated with sensationalist news such as the death of Michael Jackson. Also, without the requirement of social responsibility, the Western media tends to cover only the political candidates that can afford advertisements, limiting the coverage of various political movements.

These tendencies result in a lack of media ethics and a deluge of entertaining information, but not necessarily the most important information. Major humanitarian issues can go unnoticed for years, environmental problems are covered intermittently, and many voices remain unheard. Media continues to change however. With the internet, there are new opportunities for information to be spread and knowledge to be shared. The media system of the future may not fall into either the social responsibility or Libertarian model, as the public is no longer dependent on mass media sources for news. What role media ethics will play in the new system only the future can tell.

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