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MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION ETHICS

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Abstract

The paper deals with media and communication ethics. The paper presents contemporary concepts of communication and media ethics. Communication ethics has historical roots in rhetoric and argumentation analysis, while Media ethics is a branch of ethics that deals with moral issues related to the collection, preparation, storage, presentation, dissemination, and reception of information through mass media. Ethical issues faced by media practitioners are becoming increasingly important. It can only follow that ethical expectations and practices for the media will vary from country to country in accordance with differences in media laws. Media ethical standards also differ depending on cultural expectations and assumptions. Mass media includes print media (newspapers, magazines, and books), recordings, films, and electronic media (radio, television, and computers). The goals in rhetoric as traditionally understood lay the foundation for what later developed as communication ethics. Given the persuasive nature of rhetoric, ethical inquiry outlines the parameters of persuasion. The question arises as to what the moral limits of persuasion are.

Keywords: ethics, media, communication, media ethics

Introduction

When discussing communication ethics, it is important to understand what is meant by “ethics”. Sometimes people confuse ethics with behaviour in accordance with social conventions, religious beliefs, and the law. And sometimes the terms ethics and morality are used interchangeably because both are clearly related to “right” and

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“wrong” behaviour. However, they are not the same thing at all. Communication ethics is therefore an offshoot of the emphasis on rhetorical studies and the relationship between rhetoric and ethics. The pace of change in today’s media means that when ethical issues arise, not even an editor may be sure what to do. Every professional creates their own credibility, and the credibility of each individual is crucial for establishing the credibility of the media as a whole. For example, when journalists “dig” into someone’s life, their decision to publish, often uncomfortable details, is often justified by the “right of the people to know.” The problem with this kind of justification is that it does not answer the question of exactly what the people have a right to know, and above all, why people have a right to know such information. So, there is a great opportunity for the media to contribute to advancing peace, prosperity, and progress. Media ethics seeks to assist media practitioners in addressing various moral issues that arise in all areas of media communication: journalism, advertising, public relations, and entertainment. The media strongly and complexly influence the public’s perception and understanding of the world, and, consequently, the formation of the personality of each individual and the interaction among individuals.

Certainly, the question of ethics arises. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that seeks to address questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right, or wrong, etc. Today’s impact of technology, media, and ethics places an emphasis on the fundamental values of ethics in the new digital world, on the media, and their impact on society because when it comes to technological development, these factors in economic, social, and educational terms affect our daily lives. Ethics is not just a matter of a code of conduct (plus or minus sanctions), and it is not just a matter of rules to follow. It relates more to principles that concern the right and wrong of human behaviour, principles that have some reasonable theoretical basis and are therefore applied objectively and impartially.

Contemporary Society and Media Ethics

The discussion on media ethics has intensified in recent years, mainly driven by the standards of journalistic and media practice. The role of practitioners has taken a central place in determining what constitutes ethical and socially acceptable practices and behaviours, both for the public and for practitioners and intellectuals. The discursive relationship between the production and consumption of information is a central discussion on moral behaviour, especially in

the context of media commercialization. Since media institutions operate in an environment of intense competition, the value of information and its appropriate quality has started to be critically evaluated in terms of ethical understanding.

Media ethics is a branch of ethics that deals with moral issues arising in connection with the acquisition, preparation, storage, presentation, dissemination, and reception of information through mass media. Scientific media ethics aims to assist media practitioners in addressing various moral issues that arise in all areas of media communications, including journalism, advertising, public relations, and entertainment. The media strongly and intricately influence the public's perception and understanding of the world, and, consequently, the shaping of each individual's personality and interactions between individuals. News and reports, advertisements, soap operas, and movies all have more or less subtle long-term impacts on people's attitudes, choices, and behaviours.

The field of international media ethics is not easy to define, in part because of the practical and philosophical relationships between law and ethics, differences in cultural expectations of ethical behaviour, etiquette, morality, taste, and aesthetics, and each country's or region's stance on the appropriate role of the press.

New forms of communication are reshaping the practice of the once-local, regional, or national craft of journalism. Today, news media use communication technology to collect text, videos, and images from around the world at an unprecedented speed and with varying levels of editorial control. This same technology allows media to disseminate this information to audiences scattered across the globe.

News media serve a radically pluralistic global community, where the impact of their reports can have far-reaching effects, both positive and negative. News, via satellites or the internet, reaches people around the world and influences the actions of governments, military, humanitarian agencies, and warring ethnic groups. Responsible global ethics are needed in a world where news media bring together a multitude of different religions, traditions, and ethnic groups.

The scope and role of ethical codes

In spite of these global trends, most ethical codes contain standards for news organizations or associations in specific countries.

International journalist associations exist, and some have developed declarations of principles. However, most major journalist associations and news organizations have not adopted a global code. Before posting on any social media platform, it is essential to carefully consider personal comments to ensure they align with the Code of Ethics. The most professional and collegial approach is to refrain from derogatory comments. If you are concerned that you or your colleague may have crossed the line in using social media, even if it may not lead to a violation of the Code, there are several practical options to consider. While the law is often based on accepted moral rules of behaviour, the focus of media ethics differs from media law. Laws establish rules of conduct that must be followed under the threat of state or civil sanctions or shame. Ethics limits or inspires behaviour by establishing principles and standards that should be adhered to because it is the right thing to do. Media laws vary greatly from country to country, and when the boundaries of media law differ, the boundaries of media ethics also differ. For example, behaviour or practice that might be legally regulated in one country might remain legally unregulated in another country and therefore becomes solely an ethical issue. Journalists, like doctors, sometimes cross ethical boundaries. Similarly, journalists who learn research, analysis, and communication skills can use them to hold people accountable, but also to expose the lives of innocent individuals and subject them to public ridicule. Expanding the ethical question for some would be whether the codes, formal and informal, emerging from the culture, are strong enough to subject those who violate them to punishment for breaching professional standards. Such an attitude was, if the literature of the time is to be believed, the favourite way to make journalism one of the professions, bringing prestige and avoiding restrictive laws by legislators frustrated with journalistic excesses.

Serving the public

Applied ethics, or applied moral philosophy, deals with specific areas of human concern and activity that pose their own specific ethical and moral dilemmas. Examples of applied ethics include business ethics, medical ethics, environmental ethics, sexual ethics, computer ethics, as well as legal, political, military, media ethics, and bioethics. Interestingly, the “just war theory” falls into the category of applied ethics. However, it is argued that the transformation of war in the 20th century and the way it affects human existence is so dramatic and profound that the decision of when and under what conditions participation in war is justified belongs to the realm of theoretical

philosophy and is not just an application of a particular set of moral principles.

Global journalism ethics can, therefore, be seen as an extension of journalism ethics - that the journalistic "public" is considered citizens of the world, and that ethical principles of objectivity, balance, and independence are interpreted internationally. Journalism ethics becomes more "cosmopolitan" in tone and perspective.

In the context of journalism, "ethics" can be described as a set of moral principles or values that guide the behaviour of journalists. Ethics is essentially self-restraint that journalists must practice voluntarily to preserve and promote the trust of the people and maintain their own credibility. Freedom, democracy, truth, objectivity, fairness, and privacy – these five criteria represent the basis of every ethical system, including that of professional journalists.

The primary loyalty of a global journalist is to the information needs of the world's citizens. Journalists should refrain from defining themselves primarily as loyal to factions, regions, or even countries. Serving the public means serving more than just local readership or one's country's audience. A consistent theme throughout this principle is that journalists can practice ethical journalism by ensuring the information they report is accurate and true. They can do this by using original sources when available and fact-checking information in the process. Furthermore, journalists should never engage in plagiarism but always attribute their sources.

Passive and active public

Media literacy is one of the most important projects of the international community aimed at educating citizens about both traditional media and the new digital age. The issue of media literacy is considered a key problem in the development of a democratic society and social equality. The goal of media literacy is to transform passive audiences into active citizens. Media literacy depends on the media and cultural policies of each country, as well as the responsibility of civil society to take responsibility for an equal relationship with the media. Another aspect of media literacy concerns the protection of citizens from harmful media content, such as violence, excessive and unethical advertising, and the stereotyping of social relationships, which can have adverse effects on minors and children. International regulatory bodies and communication experts agree that civil society should monitor the work of the media, while the media resist such oversight.

Dependency is our fault

New technologies are changing, or better said, decentralizing society. Everything is accessible to everyone, and it is possible to handle information in whatever way someone wants. It is essential to know that this handling must be ethical and moral, especially in the journalism profession, which aims to report faithful reproductions of events truthfully and fairly. In line with these changes, the question arises: does this ethics change in parallel with changing technologies and media? Theoretically, no, but in practice, it is a slightly different story. Information and computer ethics rely on a broad range of values, in addition to freedom as a value. Approaches related to theories of the good life require a value-oriented integration of IT into society and an individual's life. The ease of manipulation on the internet, social media, and forums is one of the reasons why theory is not used in practice. Of course, that is not an excuse because every person carries that ethical norm within them, which does not allow the use of any medium for unethical purposes. "In any case, technology - new media - is not to blame for various excesses. Most decisions are the result of an individual's previous communication practices, beliefs, and the use of e-communication for certain purposes. If individuals see e-communication as a playground for expressing their views towards other people, it will sooner or later reflect in their communication," emphasizes Danijel Labaš in his work "Interpersonal Communication, New Media, and Ethics." This means we are responsible for what we say and do on the internet. Dependency is also our fault because social media does not force us to log in and comment on someone's posts. Starting from there, ethics must remain the primary and unquestionable item in new media because that is the only way we can live well and use the information provided. The need to be constantly online and inform friends about what is happening (or not happening) while sitting at the computer is what leads us to addiction problems and issues that arise when we need interpersonal communication instead of using the computer. The internet is good as long as we do not become dependent on it, just like anything else. It is essential to know that nothing can replace face-to-face communication, and ethics must not be compromised by anything, not even the drastic changes that await us in the future. (Ana Milas, 2013.)³

³ Milas

Conclusion

Moral questions relate to the essence of what someone could, can, and should do to achieve a specific goal. Like most human actions and behaviours, ethical acts involve a subject or agent who decides to do something in a certain way to achieve a specific goal. There is an agent, a way of doing something, and there is a goal. Some moral theories have focused on the moral agent or actor because they assume that the how and the goal are not essential to the overall moral character of the act. The media has a significant impact on society and greatly contributes to connecting different parts of the world. Thanks to technological advancements in recent decades, news is transmitted more easily and quickly, allowing easier access to desired information. New technologies like the internet do not bring changes to fundamental ethical questions, which are encountered in other media besides the internet, even before the internet existed.

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