

Example of essay on ethical issues surrounding the london riots

[Countries](#), [England](#)



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Introduction

In August this year, the United Kingdom (UK) was rocked by a series of riots. Initially, these riots were ignited by public outrage toward the Tottenham police force. Specifically, the controversial police killing of Mark Duggan, a 29 year old black man and a father of three. The official police report, initially alleged that Mark resisted arrest and shot at the police and hence his untimely demise. But, investigation revealed that both shots fired were consistent with police issue armament. The quest for justice spiraled to widespread looting and arson leading to destruction of private property and the loss of lives. These riots spread from London to other cities including Birmingham, Salford, Liverpool, Nottingham, Leicester, Manchester, Wolverhampton, West Bromwich, Gloucester, Chatham, Oxford, and Bristol. A majority of people involved in the riots were the youths and they used social networks to ignite inciting emotions that contributed to the spread of riots. This paper explores most of the ethical issues around the riots both in terms of the causes and the actions contemplated by the government.

London Riots and Social Networking Technologies

What made the London riots go viral and unmanageable had little to do with the law enforcement's unpreparedness. It had most to do with social media that gave the looters and arsonists a platform to plan and execute the riots without police involvement. Twitter, Facebook and the Black Berry Messaging (BBM) service were most instrumental in the riots. However, the most problematic proved to be BBM due to its privacy policy and thus cannot be accessed by external parties. When the government finally realized this, attempts were made to block social networking technologies available to the London residents. This move was opposed by both legal practitioners and human rights activists. This is because the move was seen to infringe on rights to information and communication and hence illegal and totalitarian to some extent. The government on the other hand justified the move by citing underlying threats to national safety and most specifically private property. Was the government ethically justified?

The attempts by the UK government to block social network platform is totalitarian. In a bid to block the social networks, they also blocked access to information and freedom to communicate which are violations of the Bill of Rights. The same tactic has been successfully used by renowned dictators to curb revolutions as recently seen in Tunisia, Egypt and some select Arab countries. Thus the move would have exposed also exposes the double standard on the government part. When tyrannical authorities blocked there citizens from accessing the social networking platform, the UK was at the forefront of terming the move unethical. But, when faced with a similar

situation, the government contemplated using the same oppressive tactics characterized by authoritarian regimes. This is not only inconsistent with UK's values and ideals but also seen to kill the democratic space. Based on the above arguments, then, the government's strategy to curb the strikes was unwarranted and illegal in every sense of the word.

In fact, the buzz on the social media was first created by the need to mourn the aggrieved rather than to riot. Rioting only became an option when the government took the people for granted. So in essence, the breakdown of communication between the government and the public is to a large extent to blame for subsequent looting, theft and arson that was later witnessed in the protests. Blocking social media and the BBM service is equal to the proverbial case of cutting a serpent's tail while ignoring the more lethal head. Social media had nothing to do with the root cause of the riots. It also had nothing to do with the reaction of people towards Mr. Duggan's murder. There are many underlying factors which are mostly government related that are to blame. That's the reason why many, I included, read mischief in the government attempt to block BBM service and social media access. This is why, I strongly support Black Berry's stand on the attempted move to block access to social media. Instead of the government blindly blocking everyone's access to these services, they should target specific individuals. Besides that, the targeting should be instigated by previous investigations. This line of thought was clearly unethical and illegal.

However, it must be mentioned that it is the government duty and it's within its jurisdiction to protect both private and public property. Thus the ethical

dilemma was balancing the ethical duty of the government and respecting ethics of communication and privacy. It is natural for them to explore every possible avenue to fulfill this mandate bestowed unto them by the people. To be able to do this, they rule by and within the law. Thus the escalation of the riots to encompass destruction and loss of private property necessitated some form of response from the government. Though, the approach taken was misleading, ultimately something had to be done. The loss of property to the tune of 200million pounds warranted the counter reactive measures proposed and finally implemented after much deliberations. Then, the bone of contention now and before is the nature, speed and motives behind the proposed measures to halt the riots. It must be said that, just as social media fueled the riots; it also played a crucial role in quelling them. In fact, the police were on record stating that social media has in the past been instrumental in the fight against crime. As stated earlier, it is a tool whose impact is determined by the motives of the user.

The ethical issue contributing to the London Riots

The government was quick to blame technology. This was mainly because a majority the participants in the riots were the youth. This haste to make conclusions without substantive evidence clearly pointed to some cover up. Also, the government's intervention was mainly stimulated by a bid to protect London's image in the wake of the forthcoming Olympic Games. The above reasons point to insincerity on the government's part and that's why the subsequent clean up exercise were a success mainly due to the publics' involvement. That's why, eventually the number of arrests made were not

even close to representing the severity of the riots. Given that the age bracket of the rioters and the fact that the majority of those arrested were first time offenders, this points to social and economic stimulants. This school of thought is further supported by the fact that the rioters were from the underprivileged cadre of the society. This point to deeply entrenched social issues that have been propagated and upheld by the government of the day.

Investigations indicate that the root causes of the riots were the social condition and the economic challenges that the citizenry are subjected to. It will be unfair to strictly relate these challenges to the current government. This is so because this has been the trend for a couple of decades and even centuries in some cases. These factors include social exclusion, poverty and unemployment. This was expressed by a majority of the protesters interviewed after the riots. They widely expressed the feeling of exclusion and lack of involvement in the day to day activities of their respective communities. This feeling is strongly backed by the fact that the current UK societal stratification is on the basis of material wealth. Coupled with the recent recession of which most communities have found difficulty bouncing back from.

The unemployment rate in Tottenham stands at a staggering 8.8%. This figure is double the national average. Tottenham is the 18th most rundown out of the 354 boroughs existing in the UK. It must also be mentioned that the working class is also facing a lot of economic challenges due to the global recession experienced in the recent past. Due to this, the gap

between the rich and the poor is widening by the day. For instance, the uppermost 1% of the UK population is valued at approximately £2. 6million while the bottom most 10% is valued at £8, 800 inclusive of the cars owned. Thus the poorest member of the top cadre represented by 1% of the population is actually 300 times wealthier than the richest of the lowermost 10%. The society is further stratified by race. If a British Christian man is compared with a Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim man of the same age, qualification and occupation, it is found that the Pakistani/ Bangladeshi earns 13-21% less than the Briton. The case is even worse when the comparison is made with a Black Christian of similar characteristics. This implies that non-white foreigners must work twice as hard as the whites. In fact, over 50% of the Pakistanis live in abject poverty.

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