

# The media and its responsibilities



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Malcolm X captured it best when he stated, " The media's the most powerful entity on Earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses. " Media is defined as the use of any form of communication to reach and influence people such as radio, television, newspapers, movies, and magazines. The media has become an integral part of our society that has much psychological influence on the viewers.

Relativism should be largely revered in the minds of all persons involved in the media business to better help them practice the deontology theory which follows the Golden Rule of treating others how you would want to be treated. It can be detrimental for the media to abuse its influence in such a manner that it results in an absence of morals in society. People turn to the news media to stay informed of the latest information on many issues.

The SPJ Code of Ethics states that journalists should be accurate in their reporting, verify that a source is reliable, avoid oversimplifying, avoid imposing values on others, avoid stereotyping, and distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. It is unethical to omit certain details in the reporting with the intention to influence a thought or feeling to the viewer or reader. Over the course of time, lines have been blurred as to what is considered to be the public's right to know versus what is considered as newsworthy.

The people have the right to know what decisions our government is making, what accidents happened, all weather related information, local and national sports scores, local and national rallies or movements, space exploration

information, education information, stories of success, and other information that would be useful to protect or look out for the best interest of the people. People look to the media to investigate and to hold accountable the truthfulness of any political figure regardless of what political party he or she is affiliated with.

The media have severely taken advantage of adding a personal commentary to the degree of “bashing” people or groups they are opposed to, or better known as defamation or slander. During the latest 2012 election and on many television stations, it seemed as though journalists were doing the campaigning for President Obama. Rather than reporting facts and figures to the people to allow them to make their own decision, it felt as if the journalists were telling the people who to vote for. Unbiased reporting would have been to give each candidate an equal amount of news time.

Included in the SPJ Code of Ethics contains a statement regarding unbiased political reporting. The problem biased reporting presents to the people is a brainwashing effect. Some media have even been accused of misinformation in an effort to be the first to report. Others have been accused of purposefully omitting certain key details in order to portray a certain scenario which in essence, is censorship. Two examples demonstrate this point, the first being a journalist that worked for CNN that was fired and The Today Show edit of a phone conversation of George Zimmerman.

Amber Lyon was a journalist who worked for CNN but was fired because of her refusal to “report fake stories and delete unfriendly stories adverse to the Obama administration.” (Obama Hustle, 2012). In the example of

George Zimmerman, the show on NBC called The Today Show edited a crucial piece of evidence to unfairly portray Mr. Zimmerman as racist towards Trayvon Martin. NBC issued an apology but the damage was already done. Under the 6th Amendment in the Constitution, American citizens have the right to a fair trial by an impartial jury. (Cornell, n. d.

This demonstrates how incorrect reporting can damage people or situations and possibly even infringe on the rights of the citizens. The media outlets have a responsibility to report the truth, to ask the difficult questions, to watch out for the people, and to hold accountable every political figure in a fair and balanced manner. Failure to adhere to the SPJ Code of Ethics compromises the integrity of the journalist resulting in a failure to the people. Television shows are another aspect of the media that should have an ethical obligation to the viewers.

In the 1950s to the 1970s, television shows showed viewers of what a normal family looked like. Shows such as " I Love Lucy", " Father Knows Best", " Bewitched", " The Brady Bunch", and " Leave It to Beaver" were shows from this time period. All of these shows depicted the husband working while the wife stayed at home to tend to the domestic duties and care for the children. All the characters in the shows dressed a certain way, one that modern times would refer to as overly modest.

Though in the 1970s there were television shows such as " The Partridge Family", " The Mary Tyler Moore Show", and " One Day at a Time" that showed married women that it was possible to work and care for their children after a divorce. In the 1980s to the 1990s, television shows altered

the look of the normal family. Shows such as “ Family Matters”, “ The Cosby Show”, “ Cagney & Lacey”, “ Charlie’s Angels”, “ Cheers”, “ CHiPs”, “ Ellen”, and “ Sex and the City” were shows from this time period.

To whereas before the wife would stay at home, now both parents were working to make ends meet. In some of the shows such as the last 6 mentioned, the women were not only single but had careers. This concept seemed to demonstrate to impressionable young lady viewers that not all women needed to live a “ normal” life of marrying and staying home to raise children. In the television show “ Ellen”, Ellen DeGeneres made history by revealing that her character on the show was a lesbian. This led the way for many Americans to become more open regarding their sexuality.

Currently there are shows such as “ Parenthood”, “ Two and a Half Men”, and “ iCarly” (which recently ended in 2012) showed an alternative form of families. In “ Two and a Half Men”, a divorcing brings his son with him when he goes to live with his brother where his dysfunctional mother comes to visit all them from time to time. In “ iCarly”, there are no parents in which a teen girl lives with her guardian who is her 29 year old brother. All of these examples show how television has a great impact on what our society deems as acceptable or normal.

It is because of this reason, the television networks should give more thought to the content of the television shows that are produced that might encourage ethical problems such as bad behavior, conspiracy to commit a crime, corruption of minors, and corruption of morals. The final aspect of the media that should reconsider its direction of ethical influence on society is

movies and video games. One example is a movie called " Easy A" which features a high school student that continually lies to other students compelling them to believe she has sex for money in an attempt to raise her social standing. IMDb, 2010).

This ingrains a message in the minds of viewers in which a young person who chooses to remain a virgin would be considered old-fashioned and boring. Another example is a movie called, " Gattaca" in which people choose the genetic traits their unborn babies will have that will predetermine their careers and lifestyles. Vincent is the main character of the story and his application to the space program is denied solely based on his genetic predisposition.

He ultimately bargains with another young man who is eligible for the space program but does not want to pursue it and uses his genetic material to pass himself off as the other man. He even goes so far as to murder the director of the space program who discovers him to ensure his plan will succeed. (IMDb, 1997). This movie poses ethical questions to genetic tampering, along with conspiracy to commit murder for a cause, and deceit. A big ethical concern certain movies and video games poses to our society is the desensitization of violence to all ages.

Movies such as " Django Unchained", " Terminator", and " The Expendables" feature nonstop killing throughout the movie. The murder is masked in the movie in the form of an unlikeable character that the viewer might think deserves to be killed in the name of justice. Video games such as " Medal of Honor", " Call of Duty", " Fallout: New Vegas", and " Assassin's Creed

Brotherhood” present their own share of violence that is experienced by children and adults. All of the killing experienced in the movies and video games desensitizes people from the real-life experience of killing another human being.

In reality, people do not retaliate by killing other people in the name of justice or revenge, grievances are surrendered to the criminal justice system. The movies and video games that encourage killing present ethical issues to our society with bad language, conspiracy to commit a crime, and murder. A study conducted by the Majority Staff Senate Committee on the Judiciary in the state of Indiana on September 14, 1999 concluded, “ By age 18 an American child will have seen 16, 000 simulated murders and 200, 000 acts of violence. Out of the three classical theories being utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics, it is in my opinion that deontology would best resolve any ethical problems of the media. The reason I selected deontology was because of the Golden Rule ideology that it follows. The Golden Rule states that we should treat others as we wish to be treated which seems logical and fair. In the context of the media, it not only applies but should be essential in regards to the way the media approaches its sources.

The media should not regard their sources as “ a means to an end, or goals” as Immanuel Kant stated in Chapter 1 of our textbooks. (Mosser, 2010).

Another example of how the Golden Rule applies to the media would be not to lie or murder. I am certain members of the media would not want people or sources lie to them or murder them so they should not present their material in this manner. Relativism adds another dimension to the ethical

problems of the media. Relativism states that what is acceptable for one society or culture might not be acceptable to another.

With this in mind, it is easy to see how tempting a member of the media could quickly pass judgment or influence the opinion of the public rather than taking the time to explain why the subject chooses a particular action. Let us give the example of the gun debate issues that have recently been in the news. There are some people that do not wish to own a gun and think they are dangerous to our society but on the other side of the debate are people that have grown up with their families using guns along with the “right to bear arms” taken from the Constitution.

This should be a debate that the citizens vote on, or maybe even the political figures that represent the people. Instead there are many journalist that give their commentary in an effort to sway the opinion of the public which could be considered to be a form of relativism. I identify myself with deontology because of the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is a basic rule that many of us learn as children, to treat others as we would want to be treated. We all want to be treated fairly, with consideration, respected, and not to be lied to.

It should not be any different for the many forms of the media. The media should stand strong in its morals and ethics to protect and respect the people. As of recently the people do not think very highly or respect the media mainly for many reasons such as not being trustworthy, too much violence, too much bad language, or lack of morals. That is quite the opposite of fulfilling the Golden Rule. When the news media fails to adhere to



its Code of Ethics, their methods become unethical resulting in damaging their credibility and the integrity of the source.

The media holds great power in its reporting that could make a person or a cause famous or it could destroy a person or a group. It brings to mind the words of Peter Parker's Uncle Ben in Spiderman, " With great power comes great responsibility" (IMDB, 2002). The media should have no place for unethical behavior but instead should live by the Golden Rule which is to treat people as they want to be treated in return. The media is a reflection of our society so when the media is without its sense of morals, society mirrors the lack of morality.