

Name and surname of the author(s): Dejan Donev, Ph.D.

Affiliation : Assistant professor for the subject “Ethics in journalism” on Institute for journalism, media and communication, Faculty of law “Justinianus I”, on University “St.s Cyril and Methodius”, Skopje, R.Macedonia

ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

ABSTRACT:

Advanced technologies had changed the way on which communication is creating, transferring, disposing and keeping safe, and also opened the space for a phenomenon called “new media”.

In the era of new media, the “social media” took a significant and special place, which with their own interactive character, are the most efficient form for reversible communication allowing the public’s opinion to be heard .On this way, social media becomes corporative, and the use of interactive nets as a form of social media marketing, is a new brand and top theme.

Therefore, the companies that rely on such marketing and PR move, believe that the same would bring them a good image (style) and would allow them to spread their brand and production portfolio to increasing number of users.

But, as traditional, so does social media confronts with ethical dilemmas. Placing a profile of some social medium for one company, more than anything else represents relationship with their users, a relationship undoubtedly based on “trust”. But does, beside simultaneously declared intention in their communication with the users, the relationship is also based on the key ethical principles: truthfulness, frankness, transparency, respect and responsibility? At the same time, what happens with the platforms for discussion and the erasing of “bad comments”, then the respectability on the privacy for the members, the question of social needs and interests of the members, the reality of social excluding. . .

This is just a part of the ethical dilemmas with whom the social media confronts with, and the ones that the author explores in the text.

KEY WORDS: Ethical dilemmas, social media, new media, trust, transparency, respect.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

In the last decade of 20th century, there were drastic changes in production, distribution and usage of information. The same are consequences of the rapid technological process, which contains enormous quantity of potential for expansion in it. More precisely, like Anthony Giddens notes, *“the last decade of the past century finished with what we can call “a media revolution”, which implies a new way of introducing informatics technologies, at the same time imposing new rules and different way of exploring. Dramatic communication explosion is not showing any signs of stopping, especially on the open multidimensionality – The Internet”*. (Gidens 1998: 249-250).

This speaks that the developed technologies changed forever, until then known way of creating, transporting, placing and keeping communication. Thanks to the progress of technology and the quick spreading of the Internet (like a medium platform) - which are at the middle of communicational revolution - the traditional form of communicating itself, begun to change faster and faster. Classical media (the radio, TV, telephones) went through one deep transformation, according to which: *“they still take central place in the process of informing and communicating, but their way of acting and organization started changing.”* (Eid & Ward 2009: 1-4)

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So, at the end of the 20th century a connection, a union was made between traditional media like movies, pictures, music, speeches, the written word with interactive power of the computer, and the most important of all – the Internet. The New Media or the so-called “Third Media” (which have evolved as a result of Web 2.0 concepts and new media technologies), are now seen like a part of the changes which have happened and still are happening on social, technological and cultural level, presenting one part of the new tehnculture. In general, *“the basic idea of the whole process is to overcome the human’s communication to a certain level – to get down from communicating with one medium, to a one-time communicating with several media, using large number of human receptors.”* (Sapunar 1994: 201)

It is so, because they offer possibility of accessing based on user's will towards the content, anytime, anyplace, on whatever digital device, and so on interactive feedback, creative partaking and creating communities connected through medium's content. The thing that separates new media from traditional ones "*it's not the digitalization of the content of the media's bits, but also the dynamic life of the content of new media and its interactive relation with media's consumers*". (Гроздановски 2011: 24). That as a cause, but more important as a consequence, have multiple faster spreading of the information.

Another important expectation from new media is the "democratization" of the creation, the publishing, the distribution, and the consumption of medium's content. In this sense, "*movies presented through out digital television with high definition on LCD screens, is still an example of traditional medium. Respectively new media are not new, only if they don't contain technologies that offer digital interactivity, like for example graphical marks which contain links*". (Manovich 2003: 24)

From these assertion a scientific discussion arise, above all, those of Douglas Kellner, Callum Rymmer, and James Bohman – that new media, especially Internet, provide potential for democratic postmodern public sphere, in which citizens would get the opportunity to participate and be well informed without any hierarchical behavior while debating in relation to their social structure, which means "*new media are kind of computer technology used like a platform for distribution*". (Manovich 2003: 16-23)

With this, the progress of new media, defined like "*further improving of the electronic devices for communicating*" (Sapunar 1994: 201), with a help from the traffic on Internet, increased the communication among people all around the world. That gave people a possibility to express themselves through out blogs, web-pages, pictures and other media created by the users in so called "*virtual communities based on-line and which exceed geographical borders, eliminating social barriers*". (Flew 2002: 3)

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In the era of so called "new media", "social media" took its special and more significant place. In the mass of mixed, contradictory, antithetic and almost in larger percent confused assessments - what, in fact, are these "social media"? Like Blossom defines them, it's about:

“any highly scalable and accessible communications technology or technique that enables any individual to influence groups of other individuals easily.” (Blossom 2009: 29)

This leads us to an entry for social media like media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as *"a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content."* (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 59-68) Businesses may also refer to social media as consumer-generated media (CGM). A common thread running through all definitions of social media is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value.

But, let's start from the neologism which is formulated by these terms: “social” and “media”. Etymologically, the first term is from Latin origin – “socius” - which means a friend, a partner, while the second one comes from antique mythology and signifies mediator, communicator. Differently said: *“social media are one of those phrases that many people think they should know because it combines two familiar words. I suppose that anyone know what social means. After all, people are social beings, relying upon one's abilities to interact with and influence others in order to survive. To be social is a desirable thing. The word connotes something good. Now let's take the word media. In a traditional sense, media includes things such as newspapers, magazines, and television. While the word media does conjure up images of news organizations, it also brings up impressions of how the news is delivered: via print, audio, video, and photographs. Each is an important medium used to engage an audience by telling a compelling story or sharing important news”.* (Safko and Brake 2009: 3)

For the first time, the term, in this context and knowledge, was used by Tina Sharkey in 1997, using it on a form of internet's contents which contain members from one community, on what she based and registered in the domain “socialmedia.com”. Later, the same is popularized by Chris Shipley, in context of uniting blogs, wiki-applications, social networks and related technologies in one new form called “participating media”.

All previously said explains the fact that social media refers on tools and platforms which people use on the Internet with purpose to share thoughts, views and what so ever other information on to each other. According to Lon Safko and David K. Brake, *“social media refers*

to activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios". (Safko and Brake 2009: 6)

Differently from traditional media (radio, TV, newspaper) which function like an one-way "street" because of the fact that the story we may see, hear or read, and the possibility for sharing a reaction of the same, is very small – social media, with their interactive character, are the most efficient form of two-way communication allowing "public's altitude" to be "heard".

Depending from the content and from the way of communicating, there are several basic kinds of social media: social networks (Facebook, MySpace), blogs (Twitter), social bookmarks (Digg), sites for sharing pictures (Flickr, YouTube), sites that contain traveling guidance (TripAdvisor, WikTravel) etc. In another words, the most popular social media are the blogs, forums, podcasts, wiki-applications and many more forms of social networking.

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In accordance with the thesis that in modern society, public communicating is performed with mediation from media, and from here the task of the media to give information to the public and to allow her free exploring of the thought for certain themes of general interests - in modern society, like the one we live today, it asserts that the public operates in an open communicational space in which the same those communicators intend to charm their own public as much as possible for accomplishing special goals and interests. The very same today can be accomplished through new media, especially the new form – "social media", which represent a channel of modern on-line communication, transforming the way of reestablishing relations and the using of the Internet.

This indicates that social media are efficient where there is a strong grouping or great interest, which already exists in physical world. That sort of grouping people has already existed in physical world and these social media may come as a help for the same group of people for striving something to accomplish or organize. There can rarely be found some groups that would be interesting for the on-line world, and then be transported in physical or off-line world.

Exactly in that sense can be found the “big meaning”, but also and the danger from these media, which temporary, relatively young and maybe still not enough explored, but from the amount of usage in modern world, quite popular – they become rapidly increasing internet segments which finds their place and become integral part of the PR and Marketing strategies to a large numbers of companies and corporations, sport clubs, agencies and even traditional media. The same becomes more aware for the meaning and role that social media have, at the same time not viewing them as competitors, but as one parallel channel for sharing their own stories to the highest possible number of public, and as a possibility to see who reads them and what kind of opinion have for the same.

It’s own social networking¹ is based on creating “virtual communities” – which are founded on certain web-site, and they usually start with one group of so called “admins” when they invites members on their lists, co-workers or some friends to join them. In the meanwhile, the new members repeat the same process, increasing the number of knots and links in the net.

That net presents a new kind of objectivity, transparency, which now becomes a subject of trust, and where the biggest attention should be dedicated on building and postulating new forms of protection of the privacy rights. By that, we put an accent on increased necessity of ethical consideration and moral deliberation of our own and others acts, in relation to these media. What’s more, because of the weak control to what is written or posted on these media, there is one enormous space opened for manipulation and negative usage. In this sense, *“the use of new media and social networks (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Habbo, Twitter, Nexopia) has implications for society, culture, and politics that has encouraged researchers to investigate a variety of related issues such as: social identity, privacy, distance learning, social capital, socio-psychological effects of the web, misuse of cyberspace, Diaspora, social status, and access to information. There have been also numerous incidents of misconduct that have led to negative and harmful situations, such as: political deception of constituents, suicide, libel and breach of privacy, cyber-crimes, and so on”*. (Eid and Ward 2009: 1)

¹ The term “social networking” is certainly a part of what is produced as “social media,” but it does not cover every form of social media. As more and more publishing products offer functions that enable people to keep in touch with one another and have conversations, I think that we’ll see the term “social networking” being used to address a commonly available feature in a number of different types of technologies.

In another words, good ethics leads to trust and friendships, while a lack of them can leave you looking over your shoulder. Social media is no exception. From here the question: does the current media ethics can answer on these new forms of challenges which appears with this new form of social connecting, or there should be found a new ways that would help ethics to act, be implemented, with one cause and above all – protecting everyone’s dignity as a participant, as well as the objectivity of the same process?

The possible fields of ethical dilemmas should simultaneously be located, crystallized and sorted, like this:

1. **the abuse of personal data**, which distracts from the thought of creating a profile, beside the fact that, for example, 77 % from the poll conducted on the younger population on the University of Minnesota, declared that they have a profile mostly because of the opportunity to make new acquaintance, communicating with friends from overseas countries and getting information related to education. (“New Study Examines Use of Social Media in the Classroom” [http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases /2008/06/080620133907.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080620133907.htm).) This tells that in the ethical deliberation of these media, a special place should be dedicated, from one side, to privacy rights as a value, and from another, to privacy like a legal concept, especially on database and general privacy in the cyberspace².
2. **the usage of interactive networks like a form of social media marketing** because they are new trend and top theme. Advertising marketing, or form of interactive marketing which becomes more massive, but also totally personalized and targeted – is the most powerful up till now!

Social media like Facebook, Twitter and others, have offered to the users a possibility for interaction and potential influence on thousands of people. Undoubtedly, social media with their easy-availability and simple techniques of using, and also more economical then the traditional ones – for a lot of organizations, became a tool for communication with massive and global auditorium. Some of the biggest corporations even recruit external consultants and gurus for social media, which are developing several strategies and techniques for more efficient appearance.

² For a illustration, 2010 was alarmant year in relation with privacy on Facebook, when the same was indangered by Google.

As we can say, a lot of people and firms owe their success to one of those social networks, where they advertised themselves. For example, on the big informative market, these media offer marketing services for advertising your firms through creating and implementing efficient strategy for appearance on social media. The goal is developing reversible communication with consumers of your product, service, company or brand and often accomplishing high financial gain for you against recipients and their ethics.

What's interesting is that in the era of Google, Twitter, Facebook and other similar to them, the customers have control of the information as much as the sellers. Earlier, the buying process was a one-way interaction between the informed salesman and the interested customer, and the action was taking place on the market. Today, social media have enormous influence on customer's behavior. In one research, (Stelzner 2009) even 49 % of the sellers have expressed that social media are the key for their success. Nowadays, everything is much easier and available, respectively – companies decreased stake “time”, financial resources and energy, but increased their results.

Simultaneously this means that even as Social Media has quickly become integral to corporate communications strategy, it also presents a very, very new model, with new challenges. As in any new endeavor, questions arise about ethical boundaries. Those boundaries are rarely marked by a bright line. “Shades of gray” need exploration. The companies that use social media should be aware that their communication with all users should be based on few key ethical principles (basic for all other ways of communication): truthfulness, sincerity and transparency, respect and responsibility. The truth of the sent message can be checked easier than ever, and selling lies underestimates and offends the public, which may results as a boomerang coming back and destroying company's image. Also, the fact that they “play on home court” or better said “own field” on the medium, doesn't give them the right for bombing with ten or more times repeated message or link for new products or services. Aggressive communication against moderate one, isn't helping, but hinders! That kind of communication is treated like spam, and the spam is never welcomed! We all want to promote our companies and their products, but there is a difference between reaching out and spamming Twitter and Facebook with links and promotional messages. At the end of the day, social medium is one public sphere where, like in every other place, the contamination is not acceptable.

The platforms for discussion are the best place on social media, for debates related on company's themes. And erasing "bad" comments it's not ethical at all. Why, when even "bad critics can be good ones"?

All previously said, only confirms that computers and internet network totally change the business scene, the way of experiencing, practicing and managing the marketing.

- 3. the larger freedom for expressing through out social media, contributes for developing debates and raising a general consciousness.** In some occasions, posted opinions and elaborations are positive enough, and useful, but in more of the occasions, the users, and even quasi-journalists from these media, "abuse" rights for discussions on taboo-themes, to reveal business secrets, to direct slanders to exactly known profiles, to spread lies and insults, and with that to ruin the equilibrium of the dichotomy truth – lie. This leads to a burning clash of interests which for those on which some rights or some ethical norms are hurt is real, while for those which violates them, it is imposed, imagined breaking it. In any case, all that leads to destruction of communication and informing course, to chaos and mixing of values and criteria in the field of communication, causing national, religious intolerance and hostility, anacrones and anti-civilization views on world.

It's about the dilemma of quantity toward quality. That is to say, with increasing of the volume of information, the quality decreases. For example, if at the beginning, blogging was a challenge which journalists, writers, academics etc. had accepted, today, having a blog is nothing different from having e-mail. On blogs, everyone can write anything, without self-introduction. That's why on a lot of blogs we can read conspiracy theories, appearance of aliens, the end of the world, questions about "high politics", and all of these laical and speculative brought, as well as so called "daily-political" questions as a space for provoking hate-speech against efforts for creativity, exact journalism and critical contents, which are not excluded from almost every country on Balkan peninsula³.

- 4. the possibility, in accordance to cultural environment, communicational and political environment in which we live - to exist and spread hate-speech,** because in this sphere is really difficult to find a way to control or limit this kind of speeches. This is one real

³ In Macedonia a typical example are the cites „Чиста Македонија,, „Да собереме 10.000.000 луѓе кои ја мразат Грција,, „Нож, жица, Сребреница,, Само мртов Шиптар е добар Шиптар,, etc.

significant ethical dilemma because we are witness to tendency of tolerating these provocations based on excuse that is all about excess situations “in the name of political spark”, or, for enlarging the definition of the term “hate-speech” – which in both cases leads to the unwell!

The cure for this appearance, which is totally opposite from the spirit of ethical communications, are the aware users like the best filter on social networks, which, report these kinds of troubles to admins on social networks, who erase or block those groups or that man, whoever is responsible for spreading hate-speeches or whatever other kind of speech that ruins ethical regulations in communicating processes. The danger that lurks, of course, are the journalists hungry for “sensation”, that use these kind of situations received by social media for posting sensational information to the public, leaving one of the postulates of journalist profession – the credibility and the relevance of the information.

5. **today’s experience regard the political praxis, speaks that there is a possibility of abusing social media, which increases negative relation.** Having in mind the fact that big percent of the citizens visit social networks, the possibilities for their political manipulations are even bigger – posting ordered results from polls, for hiding the truth and offering curved picture about the reality; government’s campaigns with contents close to citizens interests to enchant the same; presenting political programs based on lies and imagination. Simply, in these media, you can find anything, and because of the citizens weak will, they are often valuated as correct and necessary and we build attitudes upon them. All this suits to those which, not paying attention on morality, egoistically care for their own interests.
6. **what’s objective and truthful information and who decides for that, where is and what is the journalist role in social media?** In other words: Can journalists play around on “The Dark Side” (stuff that can’t be verified and thus can’t be published) and still maintain their ethics, integrity and duty to the public? Is this a case of applying the rules of a traditional medium to a new one - Journalism 2.0 that retrieves for new social media ethics?
In this context, till recently, a lot of world’s editor’s offices started creating new, or making changes to the already existing, above all ethical codes and regulations for using social media. As Jane Kirtley, from the Faculty of journalism and communications from Minnesota University claims, “*media’s companies have to have clear rules, that must pay attention on whether journalists can use social medium as for personal so does professional usage, who*

will they have as friends, what material can they post on their profiles” (Betancourt 2009)..., which opens a series of ethical controversies in relation to regulations which should be carried out by the editor’s offices⁴.

7. one of the most important ethical dilemmas is the question of **on-line socialization**: Is it possible to have some form of socialization and real experience of some real action without physical presence of subjects and objects and for what kind of experience it is about - in a qualitative sense? The consideration of this dilemma is an attempt to address **the problem of human alienation**: does humanity has begun to alienate before the emergence of social media (and their appearance is just an attempt, a way to save humanity, communication in the 21st century) or it leads to escapism?

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The last two decades have witnessed a rapid transformation of traditional media into new media that encompasses digital, computerized, and networked information and communication technologies. Thus, the progress of computer technology in the last twenty years began to create a number of ethical dilemmas in all professions and spheres of life. *“This shift has raised concerns and discussions around the positive and negative implications of the new media, and other issues such as control of information, volume and speed of communication, Habermasian democratic public sphere, the global influence of media conglomerates”.* (Eid & Ward 2009: 1)

While traditional media have developed their own mechanisms about the credibility of their information, the new media, i.e. social media, these and many other fundamental questions (raised by the practices of Internet and on-line communications) like questions about institutes, laws, habits and ethics, develops in very different contexts of modernity, where *probability* is a privileged category.

⁴ In addition to ethical commitments, Facebook recently launched a new direction in the operations and determined that it will strive to become well known and relevant media, something which can be trusted just like on CNN or BBC. To that end, Facebook established voluntary system of journalists, people who are well known in the world of journalism and who accepted to share information from their environment and to worry about the ethics of information shared under the slogan: “He who possesses the information is the richest man. But the possibility of having the information means an opportunity for their abuse. That’s why ethics is the one that should have the main role in possessing and transporting information”. This page is officially createdd by Facebook team - <http://facebook.com/journalist>.

Thus, the appearance of the corpus of ethical dilemmas in social media, especially in relation to current understanding of privacy and protected rights, plagiarism, piracy, tapping, freedom of expression ... - should be reviewed and more than likely to be redefined. Both professional journalists and citizen journalists should struggle to re-invent media ethics, and debate whether and how to adapt existing norms, such as accuracy, verification and objectivity, to the new media environment. However, despite an initial clash of values, increasing numbers of responsible journalists offline and online are developing a media ethics that integrates traditional and new media practices.

The previously speaks that the growth of new media means that journalism ethics is undergoing a difficult transition from a traditional, professional ethics to a mixed media ethics. It is about the necessity of an upgrade of media ethics, particularly in the part of social media, ethics which should be more rigorous toward the traditional, and more successful toward dealing with ethical dilemmas in social media. It is about a stronger ethics of responsibility toward facing with the possible consequences!

It is so, because - in an era in which information travels 20 seconds from one to the other end of the world - today's media, especially social media, stand in front of a difficult moral dilemma: the field on which they are key actors is the right approach for reviewing the trust and moral principles on which function not only media, but the entire modern society.

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