

## Research Article

# Ethics in the New Media, Print Media and Visual Media Landscape

**Maumita Chaudhuri**

Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Joint Coordinator, Department of BBA, Barrackpore Rastraguru Surendranath College, Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal-700120, India  
E-mail: [chaudhuri.maumita@gmail.com](mailto:chaudhuri.maumita@gmail.com); [cmaumita@gmail.com](mailto:cmaumita@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The ethical dimensions of investment in media activities are becoming increasingly important especially as use of electronic media pervades our lives. Until recently, it has made sense to consider different types of media more or less independently. Now however, the lines are blurred and the worlds of television, newspapers and the Internet overlap considerably. Similar ethical issues apply across the types of media activity. In such a changing environment, it is important that the church in general develop a methodology to apply to media-related ethical issues. It is particularly important for the CFB to do this as media related companies account for at least 20% of the whole market. How is the rise of new media and online journalism affecting the traditional journalistic standards of objectivity, accuracy, and verification? How can the media show that it remains committed to a strong ethical code and to effective self regulation in a rapidly changing media environment? This paper surveys the media-related sectors and identifies some common and particular themes. A methodology is suggested for examining media issues from an ethical investment perspective. The pros and cons of new media have been suggested and some case studies have been given as examples of ethics, whether a myth or a reality.

**KEYWORDS:** Journalistic privilege, Media landscape, Newsmakers, Qualitative judgment, Responsible journalism, Self-regulation

### INTRODUCTION

If someone had to pick a color for that line between the ethical and the unethical, it should be gray. Not a bluish gray, not gray with purple undertones or sunny gray with yellowy steaks or even a metallic gray. It's just gray. It's never defined as strictly black or strictly white, but always somewhere in between. The world of media thrives on that gray line and its description. Naturally, the media is all about communication. Actually, they are all about selling communication. As we are seeing over the past couple of years in Great Britain, celebrities, politicians and "newsmakers" alike are turning the tables on the media for the gray-toned actions of the paparazzi and even the more mainstream reporters. This comes in the wake of the News of the World scandal and the alleged criminal activities of the media in going well over that line into the unethical and even immoral – all for the sake

of the story. Maybe we should define "media gray" a bit differently from "standard gray." Its how an organization builds a better, more ethical workplace (Barrett, 2011).

The Internet does raise a number of ethical issues. Many see the absence of regulation as a positive: it prevents government censorship. Indeed, it is one way in which human rights groups publicize their case. On the other hand, many are worried about the possibilities for the transmission of information that in other media would be considered libelous or defamatory. It is concerned not only with websites, but with other Internet characteristics such as "chat rooms". This usually occurs in a public arena observable by others, but users can agree to retreat to a "private" room, not observable by a third party. There is concern that pedophiles are using some of these facilities where they pretend to be fellow children and lead conversations onto sexual matters.

Internet browsers often contain security software that can screen certain material (if properly labeled or containing key words). This helps to prevent children from accessing inappropriate material. In practice, they will probably know how to circumvent such controls. ISPs often offer a similar service to parents. Producing – or even transmitting – pornography for example, is not seeking the good of their customers, even if it is meeting a demand. This fact should cause us to be wise in our judgments. We should recognize however, that no society is morally neutral. Without purification it can tend towards corruption and immorality. If we are to be “salt and light” in the world, we need to be prepared to resist trends to more explicit images of sex and violence, while recognizing freedom of choice (Tambini, 2010).

### Methodology

This paper surveys the media-related sectors and identifies some common and particular themes. A methodology is suggested for examining media issues from an ethical investment perspective. The pros and cons of new media have been suggested and some case studies have been given as examples of ethics. This methodology is mainly based on literature survey, internet survey and content analysis. Four cases have been studied thoroughly and some basic questions have been made from those specific areas in three perspectives i.e. micro – issues, middle-range issues and macro-issues to judge ethics in journalism, whether a myth or a reality.

### Two Views on New Media and Journalism Ethics

There are two opposing views on new media and journalism ethics. On one side, professional journalists tend to argue that new media undermine professional ethics. Bloggers flout the rules, in turn putting more pressure on journalists to rush stories out and take less care in sourcing stories and policing conflicts of interest. For professional journalists the solution to the problem is to tighten up: update the journalism codes and apply them to new media and as for the bloggers, try to include the best of these imposters in the professional fold, and teach them how to work like the professionals. And for the rest: all we can do is make sure that the public understand that they are being sold lies, rubbish and plagiarism by these so-called ‘citizen journalists’ (Tambini, 2010).

On the other hand, the bloggers and tweeters argue that that new media are developing their own ethical systems based on distributed intelligence and the wisdom of crowds. That new media come with new ethics, not less ethics, and that ‘journalistic professional ethics’ have always been a bit of a myth anyway. The debate has at times descended into an exchange of insults: Established journalists say the bloggers have no standards and are responsible for spreading lies and insults. And on the other hand bloggers and citizen journalists roll their eyes and point to the latest scandal involving ‘so called professional journalists’ and failures of ‘so called self regulation’. Of course, neither of these groups is entirely right, but they each have a point. The argument is that we need a little bit of theory, and a much wider perspective to understand what is going on here, and to think about some solutions to the current predicament: The impact of new media on journalism ethics, The ways in which a journalist’s privileges may come with responsibilities attached, How society redefines journalists rights and responsibilities – for example in response to cases like the recent phone hacking scandal in the UK. (Barrett, 2011)

### Why do journalists act ethically (Or unethically)?

In one view journalism ethics comes down to individual conscience and integrity. This of course raises the problem of ‘human error’. Not everyone is a saint, and given the frequency of ethical failure, we have to accept that there are various incentives at work, not all of which spur journalists to act within the rules. Some see it as a legal necessity to act ethically. But in Europe at least the law tends to police only the outer reaches of what is appropriate reporting. Journalism ethics sets a higher standard. Most ethical codes go beyond ‘not breaking the law’ to outline a social role for public interest journalism. A third group says that journalists will not act ethically in the absence of effective professional self regulation. Whilst these are not of course mutually exclusive, it is the last group that is closer to the truth. This raises the question of what effective self regulation is and why it exists. The main point here is *that self regulation is only effective when there is a clear collective and individual self interest in making it work. More often than not, the collective interest for professional journalism is provided by the threat of state regulation.* In the past 60 years in the UK we have seen a repeated dance of threat and retreat

between the state and self regulation of the media: when Parliament expresses outrage, self-regulation tends to be tightened as it was after the death of Princess Diana for example, and as it likely will be after the phone tapping scandals (Tambini, 2010).

### **The Dance continues**

In London, the UK Parliament turned on the press. It is worth repeating what one MP said. “Here we sit in Parliament, the central institution of our sacred democracy, between us some of the most powerful people of the land, and we are scared. They, the barons of the media (...) are the biggest beasts in the modern jungle. They have no predators, they are untouchable, they laugh at the law, they sneer at parliament, they have the power to hurt us and they do so with gusto and precision.” Tom Watson MP to the UK Parliament 9th September 2010. Breaking the law – in this recent case hacking into private voicemail – is only one extreme form of ethical problem for journalists. For ethical codes do more than reflect and codify what is illegal. They establish a higher standard of responsible journalism. The phone hacking scandal was a breach of the law, and also of self regulatory codes. Whether such practices have been curtailed by the legal and self regulatory fallout remains to be seen. We cannot really understand the current situation of journalistic ethics without understanding the institutionalized framework within which journalism operates – a framework that is challenged by current changes in the industry, and in particular competition from platforms that exist outside self regulation. Journalistic Freedom – including journalistic privilege itself – will quickly be removed, often with public support, if basic ethics are breached (Tambini, 2010).

It helps because the impact of new media is to bring a whole lot of new people to the party. These newcomers are getting access to the rights and privileges of journalists: Bloggers are now getting access to news events (for example ‘lobby passes’), protection of sources, freedom of expression and public interest defenses – for example when they are accused of defamation or invasion of privacy. They don’t get all the privileges, in part because they don’t self regulate effectively. (Judges often tend to defer to self-regulatory bodies so in effect it could be argued that journalists enjoy enhanced free speech rights

compared to non – journalists) (Tambini, 2010).

But are the newcomers also sharing the responsibilities? Are they obeying the rules, and sharing the costs of implementing them, and are they taking part in the work of protecting media freedom? Ask a working journalist and she will say no. Bloggers have none of the burden of double sourcing, conflict of interest codes, source protection, professional ‘ethics’, and as a result they are running away with the story and sparking a ‘race to the bottom.’ But ask a blogger, citizen journalist, networked journalist and he will say yes: that they are acting in the public interest, ethically, adopting the traditional ‘watchdog’ role of the journalist and should therefore enjoy journalistic privilege. New media ‘journalists’ do have a different take on ethics. Take the fundamental value: “Truth” or “Accuracy”. Traditional journalists know that mistakes are sometimes made – they sometimes commit to printing corrections when they are made – but the ultimate value is – in theory at least – to print or broadcast what is true. ‘New media journalists’ are much more likely to have a ‘publish first – correct later’ approach to truth and accuracy. In an interactive medium where readers are also writers and sources, publishing can be a form of verification. If readers have the ability to respond, stories can be corrected quite quickly. This is a fundamentally different approach to the ethics of publication (Tambini, 2010).

So the problem is to codify a new set of rules, not to force the new media to conform to the old rules. This may be about articulating a new set of rules that suit the new medium. It is ten years since Cyberjournalist.net published a Blogger Code of Ethics – and even that was probably not the first. Not many have signed up. The problem with these codes is partly that they are not enforced and that there is no threat of external regulation, or countervailing power that forces the bloggers to self regulate. And it is partly that they have not really articulated the new ethics of the new medium. They have (and this might not be surprising to some people) simply copy and pasted the ethical codes of the old media and changed a few words (Barrett, 2011).

### **Survey of media by sector**

**Television:** The television industry is undergoing a transformation. There are some broad ethical issues

which include:

1. An emphasis on the trivial aspects of life in an attempt to maintain ratings. This “dumping down” fuelled by the preponderance of channels, has led to program content preoccupied with money and image.
2. Programming tied closely with products. Specific examples can be found in programming for children, where some programs are essentially extended advertisements for toy merchandise.
3. Invasion of privacy and use of deception. This can only be justified when it is in the public interest. The Broadcasting Standards Commission has strict guidelines relating to this sort of programming. Such methods do appear to be more prevalent in newspapers.
4. Sex and violence. Of particular importance to ethical investors is the extent to which sex and violence are shown on television in a voyeuristic manner. This issue involves most producers and distributors. The nub of the issue is access. Television increases the number of people exposed to ideas and images. These can be harmful or beneficial and the personal ethics and morals of producers, writers and directors can be influential. Occasionally channels break regulatory guidelines regarding program content. Following complaints, the relevant authority usually intervenes (Media Ethics, 1999).

**Film and video:** The issues relating to quality of output for film and video are similar to those for television. In particular, they are close to pay-per-view cable channels, in that a specific choice has to be made to watch them. Production or distribution companies that relied upon a significant proportion of films/videos containing sex or violence would be a cause of concern. The sale of videos would concern the CFB in the same manner as the sale of pornographic magazines in newsagents. (Media Ethics, 1999)

**The Internet:** The Internet has been likened to a new “Wild West” and therefore it is perhaps not surprising that the lack of regulatory control has resulted in sites of a sexually explicit and violent nature being established. It is important to recognize that the only people responsible for such sites are the people who make them available. No organization has overall control, and there

are no controls on who may access the information. The Internet Service Providers (ISPs)-the gateways to the Internet-often claim they are simply “common carriers” similar to telecommunications companies and are not responsible for the content contained on their servers. These claims have not often been tested in court however, as in practice ISPs are keen to avoid trouble with the police and often take steps to discourage inappropriate material. This perhaps has especially been the case since the German managing director of OSP CompuServe was convicted following police raids on ISPs. It is worth noting that illegal material continues to be illegal when in electronic form. Convictions are not always easy, as usually the offending material has been published in another jurisdiction (Media Ethics, 1999).

**Computer software:** Many computer games involve some degree of violent action on screen and may also include sexually provocative images. Games are different to other visual media currently available in that they require the player to actively participate. When this involves simulating a violent action (with consequent images) this must be some cause for concern. In the past, the relatively low resolution of computer graphics and poor sound quality has insulated the industry from ethical concerns. However the technology has much improved. Some games have parental guidance labels attached. Before long computer games will have near cinematic imagery. Where this is used for violent scenes there should be some ethical concern, especially where children can have access to such games (Media Ethics, 1999).

**Printed media:** The newspaper industry has seen some consolidation since media ownership regulations were changed, though restrictions still apply. Not only are “top shelf” pornographic magazines of concern, but some of the more mainstream publications should also be considered. Titles such as Loaded, Maxim and FHM promote certain images of women and certain lifestyles, as do Cosmopolitan. Christian commentators have regarded ‘The Face’ as the ultimate example of a post-modern periodical. Overall, these magazines promote a sexual and lifestyle ethic removed from the Christian orthodoxy. The newspaper industry is also guilty of displaying soft porn images (e.g. The Sun). In addition,

newspapers are often criticized for invasion of privacy where no public interest is concerned (Media Ethics, 1999).

**Advertising:** The images used in advertising can raise ethical issues, particularly the sexual imagery used. Of more interest to the CFB may be the publications in which respectable companies choose to advertise. If we regard a publication as on balance unethical, we should also be concerned if a company part-owned by the CFB advertises in that publication (Media Ethics, 1999).

### Constructing a methodology

The approach with regard to media stocks should be the same. We would regard a continuous service, such as a pornographic channel, as of greater concern than a one-off broadcast of a soft porn movie, though we might wish to ask why it was necessary to broadcast such a film. In all cases we also make a qualitative judgment. Important questions to ask are:

- To what extent is the activity unethical?
- How important-in financial terms-is the unethical activity to the company and to the market within which it operates?
- How important is the activity with regard to the way in which the company projects itself?
- How important is the activity with regard to the public perception of the company?
- Is the company a producer or distributor of the product/service? Our answers to these questions should assist in developing a rigorous response to the issue under discussion.

We need a new compact between journalists-all journalists, including those operating on the new media outside traditional journalism and society. Once we understand that the media are involved in a social compact in society-and those journalists' rights are conditional on responsibilities-it does alert us to the fact that changing that compact and incorporating new media within it is going to be difficult. It is not just about "tightening up" the rules so they can be applied online. And it is not just about relying on some vague notion of the wisdom of crowds-when it turns out they are not always so wise-judging by blog comments. Applying the old ethical standards in competition with blogs and social media may be a bit like maintaining the

gold standard in the age of global derivatives markets. Or it may simply be commercial suicide. But to let standards slip will lead to irresponsible journalism, and to the public questioning the legal and other privileges that are enjoyed by journalists. It is decisions that are taken now that will determine on the one hand whether a new media ethics which may set out a framework of rules and responsibilities that will ensure a higher level of responsibility than will be provided by the market, or should be provided by law. The problem is that these rules-the social compact between media power and society-have been won over a very long period of time and are very difficult to change. But it is now possible to look at some traditional ethical challenges, and articulate the areas where new media ethics will remain foreign and those where a compromise-a common code will be possible. For example:

- Protection of sources is now accepted in many countries as a key tenet of journalistic privilege. We face the question of whether new media journalists should enjoy this privilege, and how, if they are to enjoy it, journalists should be legally defined as such.
- Responsible journalism tests and public interest defenses. Arguing that a journalist was doing responsible journalism in the public interest, according to established professional standards will sometimes persuade a judge that speech is worthy of protection (Media Ethics, 1999).

### Case Study 1:

#### Nine Days in Union: The Susan Smith Case

On October 25, 1994, a nationwide manhunt began in Union, South Carolina, for two young boys after their mother claimed a man stole her car with her children inside. Susan Smith, 23, said the man got into her car when she stopped at a red light, forced her out, and drove off with Michael, 3, and Alex, 14 months. Sheriff Howard Wells called in state law enforcement, the FBI, and the media to the 200-year-old mill town to help search for the two young boys and the alleged carjacker. Soon, the media and the nation would become transfixed by the case. The story began with an emergency call to 911. "There's a lady who came to our door," the caller told the operator. "Some guy jumped into her car with her two kids in it and he took off." "And he's got the kids?"

“Yes Ma’am, and her car. She’s real hysterical, and I just thought I need to call the law and get ‘em down here.” Susan was the only eyewitness (Duhé, 1994).

She described the carjacker as a black man in his twenties, wearing a dark-colored cap, a plaid jacket and jeans and armed with a handgun. Smith told police the subject told her to drive northeast on Highway 49, just below the John D. Long Lake. Then, the man told her to stop and ordered her to get out of the car. When asked about getting her children out, the man said, “I don’t have time, I won’t hurt them,” and then he proceeded northeast on Highway 49. Tearfully, Susan told the media, “When he made me get out of the car, you know I tried to get my children, I begged him please let me take them. He said, no, he didn’t have time because they were in car seats and it was going to take time to get them out.” He had a gun, and my big thing is they were screaming, crying, and hollering, and I’m just scared he lost his patience or something.” Within hours of the first report of the missing children, Union became besieged by the growing press corps, including the tabloid television shows. Television live trucks and cable lined the street in front of Union’s courthouse—all waiting to hear something about the missing boys (Duhé, 1994).

But after day one, Susan went into seclusion. Still, the media reported on the search for the African–American suspect and the missing boys. With no new information about the search, the media’s attention began to focus on Susan and her troubled life. Stories about Susan’s relationships began to surface. Her marriage to David Smith, an assistant manager at the Winn-Dixie, had fallen apart in August. The two had met while working at the local supermarket. They married in 1991 and had Michael seven months later. Just one year after the birth of their second child, Susan and David’s marriage was virtually over. Divorce papers had been filed in September. Susan had been working as a secretary at Conso Products, a textile plant. She had been having an affair with the boss’ handsome 27-year-old-son, Tom Findlay. A week before the boys disappeared, he wrote Susan a letter on his computer. He wanted to be with her, he said, but he was not ready for the responsibilities of a ready-made family. After news spread of the crime, Findlay printed out a copy of the letter and gave it to police. “At no

time,” he said in a statement, “did I suggest to Ms. Smith that her children were the only obstacle in any potential relationship with her” (Duhé, 1994).

Although neither the media nor the public were aware, by day three of the search, an investigator asked Susan why she had murdered her children. Susan strongly denied the allegations. On day four of the search, Susan was asked to take a lie detector test. Sheriff Wells publicly called the results “inconclusive.” The manhunt continued. Day five, day six and day seven passed. Still, there were no signs of the boys or calls for ransom, but evidence began to point toward Susan. NBC news had even captured video of agents wearing gloves going into Susan’s home. By day eight, Susan’s image in the media was deteriorating. Reporters knew of two failed lie detector tests and a troubled marriage and also had learned that a portion of her original story was untrue. Under increasing scrutiny, by day nine, Susan came out of seclusion. She appeared on all three network’s morning news programs. With her husband David at her side, Susan made sorrowful pleas as the television cameras rolled. “I can’t even describe what I’m going through. It just aches so bad. I can’t sleep. I can’t eat. I can’t do anything but think about them.” Susan pleaded that the kidnapper feed and care for young Michael and Alex. An artist’s sketch of the black man she described as the carjacker was also broadcast nationwide (Duhé, 1994).

That same afternoon, Susan broke. Sheriff Wells told Susan there was surveillance at the intersection where she said the carjacking occurred and that he knew she wasn’t telling the truth. Susan asked the sheriff if he would pray with her. Finally, Susan confessed to murdering her two sons. She had driven her car into Union’s John D. Long Lake and left Michael and Alex inside-strapped to their car seats. Outside the courthouse, gasps could be heard as Sheriff Wells announced the news. “Susan Smith has been arrested and will be charged with two counts of murder in connection with the deaths of her children, Michael, 3 and Alexander, 14 months. The vehicle, a 1990 Mazda driven by Smith, was located late Thursday afternoon in Lake John D. Long near Union.” The car was exactly as Susan said. Both children were strapped in the back seat—Michael on the driver’s side and Alex in his car seat on the passenger side (Duhé, 1994).

“In her confession, Susan wrote, “I felt I couldn’t be a good Mom anymore, but I didn’t want my children to grow up without a Mom. I felt I had to end our lives to protect us all from any grief or harm. I’ve never felt so lonely and sad throughout my life.” “. . . I dropped to the lowest point when I allowed my children to go down that ramp into the water without me.” “. . . I broke down on Thursday, November 3, and told Sheriff Howard Wells the truth.” On July 22, 1995, a jury convicted Susan of murdering her two sons. Although cameras were barred from the courtroom, coverage of the trial drew as much attention as the search itself. For many, the trial brought back the horror of those nine days in Union. A broadcast reenactment of the drownings used by the prosecution made the memories even more vivid. Days later, that same jury took only two and one-half hours to decide against imposing the death penalty. Susan is serving a life sentence in the Women’s Correctional Institution in Columbia, South Carolina (Duhé, 1994).

#### **Micro Issues:**

1. Should the media have converged upon Union, South Carolina, to cover the disappearance of Michael and Alex Smith?
2. Should the local, regional and national media have televised Susan’s plea to get her children back?
3. Should the media have aired the artist’s sketch of the alleged carjacker?
4. Should the media have been allowed to air the prosecution’s drowning reenactment?

#### **Middle-range Issues:**

1. Should the media have print and broadcast information about Susan Smith’s troubled relationships?
2. When should the media use artist’s sketches of alleged criminals?
3. Should the television media be allowed to air the reenactment of an incident where a death has occurred?

#### **Macro Issues:**

1. To what extent should the media play a role in the search for missing persons?
2. What responsibilities do news people have regarding a news source’s personal life?
3. What guidelines should the media follow when

showing artists’ renderings of alleged criminals?

#### **Case Study 2:**

##### **Filmmaking: Looking through the Lens for Truth**

“Who Shot JFK?” asked the headline in the cinema section of the December 23, 1991, issue of Time magazine. The story coincided with the release of JFK, director Oliver Stone’s \$40 million film that promoted a conspiracy theory of John Kennedy’s assassination. The screenplay centers on New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison’s unsuccessful attempt to prosecute New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw for conspiracy in the murder. Garrison was the only US legal official to try someone for suspected involvement in the assassination. Garrison even appears in the film, in the role of former US Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren. Scenes for the film were shot in Dallas, New Orleans and Washington, D.C., at the actual sites of the assassination and the trial. Stone interposed real documentary footage and photographs (including the Zapruder film of the actual assassination) with new scenes shot in black and white, making it virtually impossible for viewers to detect the difference between the actual 1963 scenes and the reenactments. Stone told interviewer Richard Heffner that his technique was like sending “splinters to the brain.” He added “We have 2,500 cuts in there, I would imagine. We’re assaulting the senses. We admire the MTV editing technique and we make no bones about using it. We want to. . . get into the subconscious. . . and seduce the viewer into a new perception. . . of what occurred in Texas that day” (Mckee, 2012).

Heffner concludes that much of the criticism leveled at Stone was because he represented a new type of historian, “fully determined to have his own way with the pictures inside our heads.” Stone was criticized for casting box-office hero Kevin Costner as Jim Garrison. The role Costner plays is very different from the real-life person, both in terms of characterization and action. Stone told an interviewer in the December 13, 1991, Newsweek: “Filmmakers make myths. They take the true meanings of events and shape them...I made Garrison better than he is for a larger purpose.” The film is roughly based on Garrison’s book *On the Trail of the Assassins* and Jim Marrs’ book *Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy*. But Stone says he also relied on the

work of other researchers and theorists to concoct the conspiracy theory that underlies the film's plot. Stone openly advocates the theory throughout the film. In the interview in the promotional press kit for the film, Stone explained the purpose for the film he called "one giant jigsaw puzzle," saying, "I think we're trying to create an alternate myth to the Warren Commission, to kind of explore the true meaning of the shooting in Dealey Plaza, what the murder of John Kennedy meant to his country, why he was killed." Later in the interview, he added: "I think in the Warren Commission, they smell a rat. I think they're going to like this movie, and I hope to God it will come to be seen by the young as an alternative explanation to JFK's death" (Mckee, 2012).

The film's mixture of conspiracies sharply contrasts with the findings of the Warren Commission empaneled by President Lyndon Johnson seven days after the November 22, 1963 assassination. The panel spent nearly 10 months compiling a 26-volume document that concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when he killed the president and seriously wounded then-Texas governor John Connally with one bullet. Thirteen years later, a government investigation did suggest that a conspiracy could have been involved in the assassination plot. The Congressional committee's investigation spanned more than two years, from September 1976 into December 1978. Its seven-page report concluded that while Oswald was implicated in the murder, others were also involved. The committee did not, however, indict or name anyone. Stone's film, however, does point fingers at suspected conspirators, ranging from the CIA to the military, relying on a created character known as 'X' to reveal the plot to Garrison. In an interview in *Time*, Stone said he believes the film was not required to be historically factual. "Whenever you start to dictate to an artist his 'social responsibility' you get into an area of censorship. I think the artist has the right to interpret and reinterpret history and the events of his time. It's up to the artist himself to determine his own ethics by his own conscience" (Mckee, 2012).

Stone's film was sharply attacked before and after its release. Tom Wicker of the *New York Times*, who had covered the assassination for the paper, wrote in a December 15, 1991, column, "He uses the powerful instrument of a motion picture, and relies on stars of

the entertainment world, to propagate the one true faith—even though that faith, if wisely accepted, would be contemptuous of the very Constitutional government Mr. Stone's film purports to uphold." *Newsweek* called the film "heretical history" but praised Stone for his courage: "two cheers for Mr. Stone, a troublemaker for our times" (Mckee, 2012).

#### **Micro Issues:**

1. Should a filmmaker inform audiences that portions of a film are documentary and others are not?
2. How closely should a film that is based on a specific historical incident stick to the facts?
3. Should the filmmaker alert the viewer that certain characters within a historical film have been dramatized or that they are fictional composites?
4. Should a filmmaker deliberately seek to be persuasive or to advocate a political position in a history-based film?

#### **Middle-range Issues:**

1. What are an audience member's responsibilities? Are those responsibilities different when watching a film than when using news media?
2. Should filmmakers be allowed to alter historical fact for a higher purpose? What about writers and editors in other media?

#### **Macro Issues:**

1. Is film an appropriate forum for government criticism and debate? What standards should such filmmakers employ in terms of audience awareness and historical accuracy?
2. What standards of truth should entertainment meet? Are there different standards of truth for different media? Are there different types of truth?
3. Do artists have an obligation to arouse public criticism and debate? Should artists have a standard of social responsibility, and if so, what should that standard be?
4. Is mythmaking a legitimate purpose for a filmmaker?

#### **Case Study 3:**

##### **Terrorist Use of the News Media; News Media Use of Terrorists**

Americans die abroad every day; they die of illness, auto accidents, murder, drowning, and other reasons.



But when death occurs by an act of political violence, commonly called terrorism, news reporting intensifies and occasionally approaches saturation coverage. Terrorism existed long before the news media. And to this day, most terrorism-by states, groups, and individuals-receives no media attention. So what qualifies a very few terrorist incidents for saturation coverage? Journalists must consider not only how terrorists use the news media-but, conversely, how the news media use terrorists. Many journalists and media critics argue that the news media “legitimize” and thus encourage terrorists by giving them coverage. Some have called for voluntary or even mandatory guidelines for terrorism coverage. Yet others have argued that more coverage of terrorism is desirable, suggesting that the media can provide an important outlet for the expression of public concern and thus reduce political violence (Lule, 2006).

These issues were raised dramatically in one memorable case-the 1985 hijacking of TWA 847. On June 14, 1985, two members of the Shiite Moslem group the Islamic Holy War commandeered the jetliner with more than 150 people aboard. The gunmen forced the plane to make repeated flights between Athens, Beirut, and Algiers, settling finally in Beirut. Then, a passenger, US Navy diver Robert Dean Stethem, was severely beaten and killed, and shot in the head. His body was then pushed from the plane onto the runway. Holding American passengers as hostages, the hijackers demanded the release of seven hundred Shiite Moslems jailed or detained by Israel. Immediately, the incident commanded intense news coverage. The story dominated newspaper front pages and magazine covers. More than half of each evening newscast was devoted to the hijacking. Regular programming was repeatedly interrupted by special reports, a service the media were happy to provide since terrorism plays well in America (Lule, 2006).

From the beginning, reporters were forced to confront a number of ethical questions. For example, on the first day, as the plane sat in Algiers, networks and newspapers decided to report that an elite U.S. commando squad had been dispatched to the Mideast for a possible rescue mission. Within hours, the hijackers arranged for the jet to be flown back to the relatively more secure site of Beirut. There, hostages were taken off the plane and held

captive in the city, making a rescue mission much more difficult. By the second day, the original hijackers had been joined by members of the Shiite Amal movement. As negotiations stalled, reporters seemed to become arbiters between the Amal movement and U.S. officials. Nabih Berri, a leader of the Amal, especially was given much media time and space. Often, Berri was permitted to give live, unedited statements about the negotiations. Reporters also agreed to “interview” the hostages in custody of the Amal. Gathered around the jetliner, reporters questioned the jet pilot Captain John Testrake-who spoke with a gun at his head. Not surprisingly, the pilot echoed the hijackers’ statements and advised authorities not to attempt a rescue mission. Similarly, the next day, five of the hostages gave a “news conference” at the airport. Surrounded by Shiite gunmen, they talked with sympathy of the hijackers and their cause (Lule, 2006).

At home in the States, reporters were faced with a more common ethical decision-whether to interview the hostages’ families. Reporters for many news outlets contacted the families of hostages. Posing with photographs of a hostage, family members wept and prayed on camera that loved ones be returned. Extensive national coverage was given to the family of Robert Dean Stethem, the slain Navy diver. As the hijacking drew to a close, reporters in Beirut continued to interview hostages in custody. On June 28, the hostages were taken to a luxury hotel for what was seen as a farewell banquet before their eventual release. As at some Hollywood premiere, hostages were interviewed upon their arrival, and microphones were thrust in their faces as they were driven away. After seventeen days in captivity, the hostages were freed. They were flown from Lebanon and then to Syria, where they were convinced to give a press conference for the hordes of reporters. Some in the news media arranged to get more detailed accounts; NBC flew the families of four hostages overseas and paid hotel accommodations in exchange for exclusive interviews on its news shows. (Lule, 2006)

#### **Micro Issues:**

1. Did U.S. news media, especially network television, use proper news judgment in the extended, special coverage given to TWA 847? Were stories hyped by

such coverage? Did the media help create a crisis to attract an audience to the drama?

2. Should reporters have interviewed the terrorists and their hostages while the situation was still unfolding? What should have been the proper relationship between the networks and the terrorists?
3. Were stories about the hostage families exploitive? What was the news value of repeated stories on hostage families? Was it acceptable to pay the families?

#### **Middle-range Issues:**

1. What is the distinction, in terms of manipulation, between White House photo opportunities/press conferences and terrorist press conferences?
2. Do the news media legitimize and thus encourage terrorists by giving them international status, airing their demands and explaining their motives?
3. Should there be voluntary media guidelines? How would they read?
4. Should the media be prevented from making public certain information, such as military movements or policy options, that might be useful to terrorists?

#### **Macro Issues:**

1. Is the kidnapping or killing of an American on foreign soil worthy of national news coverage? What are the distinctions between the killing of an American during a robbery in Paris and the killing of an American by terrorists in Beirut?
2. What are the benefits for the U.S. news media of ongoing terrorist incidents? To what extent do those benefits influence news coverage?
3. Does the technology of instant picture transmission of terrorist events alter ethical decision making? Does compelling video dominate news coverage of the terrorist events over the issues that give rise to them?

#### **Case Study 4:**

##### **The Doctor Has AIDS**

A practicing pediatrician admits to having tested positive for the AIDS virus; court documents contain his admission and his name. Should these facts be turned into a front-page story or should they be forgotten? This was the decision that Dallas-area news media faced in the fall of 1987. Robert J. Huse, M.D., was one of only

six pediatricians in the politically conservative suburb of Mesquite, Texas. He was a twelve-year veteran and was extremely popular—topping more than five thousand office visits a year for the past three years. Parents described him as a caring doctor, one who would treat a child knowing that no money was available to pay his bill. Dr. Huse was also involved in a legal battle with his former roommate, Tyrone Sims. According to a request Dr. Huse filed for a temporary restraining order, Sims had told some of Huse's employees and patients that the doctor had AIDS. Furthermore, Sims was blackmailing Huse with threats of further disclosures, the court request revealed. (Elliott, 1990)

Soon after, reporters from local print and electronic media received telephone calls from an anonymous source who told them of Huse's request and alerted them to a September 11 hearing of the petition in open court. Dallas Morning News court reporter David Jackson said that he was so busy with criminal cases that he certainly would not have heard about this civil hearing if it hadn't been for the telephone call. Jackson retrieved court documents before the hearing and found that the temporary restraining order had been granted and was signed on September 1. The order forbade Sims from initiating communication with Huse's patients, associates, or employees or with "any other person regarding the plaintiff's (Dr. Huse's) physical or medical condition." The September 11 hearing had been scheduled to provide Sims an opportunity to argue against a continuance of the restraining order. Discussions then began in Dallas newsrooms about what, if anything, should be published. Three issues emerged as relevant prior to the hearing:

1. Civil cases are often settled or pushed back on the court calendar. The fact that the hearing was scheduled for September 11 carried no guarantee that it would be heard that day.
2. Dr. Huse was using the court system to seek privacy and protection.
3. People with AIDS are normally not identified without their consent. (Elliott, 1990)

Representatives from the electronic and print media attended the hearing Friday, September 11. Huse had, by then, extended his request for court protection to include sealing the records so that his name and the case

would no longer be public record. The court continued the restraining order against Sims but declined to seal the records or issue restraining orders against the news media. "The court proceeds from a strong commitment to First Amendment openness," said Judge John McClellan Marshall, who heard the case. "It's a bad policy for courts to seal things away." Author's note: A little more than two years after Dr. Huse saw his last patient, he was found dead in his bathroom, stabbed to death after what police described as a violent struggle with an unknown assailant. The Dallas Morning News quotes a friend as remembering him as "outspoken, kind-hearted and a stubborn human being. He never gave up. And I don't think that night he was killed that he ever gave up," the friend said. Dallas police have no suspects in the murder, but refused to rule out the possibility of a "vigilante" killing by relatives of a former patient. (Elliott, 1990)

#### Micro Issues:

1. What makes this story newsworthy?
2. Do the local news organizations have the responsibility to tell the community that a practicing pediatrician is HIV-positive?
3. Does the pediatrician have a right to keep this information private?
4. Should it make a difference (in the decision of whether to publish the story) if the anonymous caller was Sims?
5. Should news organizations refrain from publishing the story prior to the hearing? After the hearing?

#### Middle-range Issues:

1. Does the judge's refusal to seal the records add weight to the argument that the story should be published?
2. How should the presence of Dr. Huse's name in the court records be balanced against his request that he not be identified in the decision whether to identify him in the news story?
3. Would it be unfair to the other doctors if Dr. Huse was identified in the story as "a Mesquite pediatrician"?
4. Should the presence of other news-media representatives at the hearing affect a news organization's decision whether to go with the story or whether to identify the doctor?

#### Macro Issues:

1. Under what conditions should people with AIDS be identified in news stories?
2. Often a person who seeks court relief to guarantee privacy must do so through public court documents and hearings. Should news organizations shield the names of such people as they usually do with victims of rape or incest?

#### CONCLUSION A NEW CODE IS NOT ENOUGH

This is not only about rules; it is also about enforcement and institutions. 'Responsible journalism' is increasingly in direct competition with irresponsible, illegal journalism, online or offline. How to adapt soft regulation for this environment, and how to apply it to new media is a huge challenge. The PCC is open to expansion onto new media – but the blogs don't want the burden of new rules, and why should they if there is no threat of statutory regulation? And it goes without saying that 'responsible journalism' is in some countries a euphemism for self-censorship. Clearly no one solution will fit all. Fundamentally the case in the UK highlights the possibility that competition from outside the space of self regulation and responsible professional journalism may create pressures that could unravel structures and institutions supporting journalism ethics. If bloggers or whoever is hacking phones, they are going to get the story before one. How can one compete? Clearly the old and the new media need to open a dialogue to debate these regulatory and ethical questions. Above all the traditional media need to stop disparaging the new media, and begin to articulate a new ethics that applies to both old and new. The free press doctrine may be more difficult to propagate around the world in this century, and we need to think creatively about the relationship between media power and the state. Professional journalists, bloggers and producers are in this together now. (Barrett, 2011) The above mentioned questions in the four case studies exemplify the justification of ethics in all forms of journalism.

## Ethics in the New Media, Print Media and Visual Media Landscape

### REFERENCES

- Barrett James, 7 December (2011).** The black and white of media ethics, The Network GRC Blog., The Network.[http://www.tnwinc.com/index.php/blog/comments/media\\_ethics\\_reporting](http://www.tnwinc.com/index.php/blog/comments/media_ethics_reporting)
- Duhé Sonya Forte, : Nine days in union: the Susan Smith case, University of South Carolina. Case II-F. 1994. [http://resource.rockyview.ab.ca/t4t/forensicscience25/Module6/L4/4.1.4\\_case\\_studies.htm](http://resource.rockyview.ab.ca/t4t/forensicscience25/Module6/L4/4.1.4_case_studies.htm)
- Elliott Deni, (1990).** The doctor has AIDS, University of Montana. Case II-B. [higher.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/.../Doctor\\_has\\_AIDS.doc](http://higher.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/.../Doctor_has_AIDS.doc)
- Lule Jack, (2006).** Terrorist use of the news media: news media use of terrorists, Lehigh University. Case VI-F. [higher.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/.../Terrorists\\_and\\_media.doc](http://higher.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/.../Terrorists_and_media.doc)
- Mckee Kathy Brittain, (2012).** Filmmaking: looking through the lens for truth, Berry College, Mt. Berry, Georgia. Case X-C. [higher.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/.../Film\\_and\\_truth.doc](http://higher.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/.../Film_and_truth.doc)
- Media Ethics–Position paper, 09 July (1999).** [http://www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/position\\_papers/cfb\\_media\\_position\\_paper.pdf](http://www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/position_papers/cfb_media_position_paper.pdf)
- Tambini Damian, 14 September, (2010).** Media ethics in the new media landscape: new paper, Media and Communications Department, LSE. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/09/14/media-ethics-in-the-new-media-landscape-new-paper/>