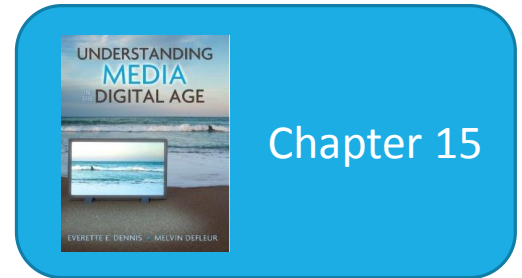




# Computers and Media: Ethics

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CSCI 1200  
JAREK SZLICHTA



# Media Ethics

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What is “ethics”?

# Ethics

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What is ethics:

- Set of principles or rights of moral conduct
- Standards of correct behaviour, the things you should or shouldn't do as an upstanding member of society

In some sense ethics are relative, they depend upon the standards of behaviour in a society, they can change over time

# Ethics

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Unethical behaviour may not be illegal, but in many cases can lead to legal problems

Unethical behaviour may lead to problems, they may not be legal

# Examples

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A newspaper reporter makes up a story, invents people for interviews, publishes several articles

- The reporter really hasn't broken any laws, but will likely be fired and never work as a reporter again.

A scientist falsifies information and publishes it as a result.

- Tarnishes reputation, could even hurt people (in the case of medical research).

# Ethics

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On the practical side, these are a set of rules that keep you out of trouble, based on many years of experience

If you do something unethical you might not be caught right away, but it could come back to get you in the future

Avoid unethical behaviour if you don't want problems in the future

# Media Ethics

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Most of media ethics deals with journalism or news, newspapers, radio and TV

This is the most obvious area, and many view it as the most serious

There are ethical issues in other media areas, we will start with journalism and then look at other areas



# Media Ethics

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Media problems in journalism occur in two areas:

- Errors of commission – do something that shouldn't be done
- Errors of omission - failing to do things that should be done

There are some ethical problems that could fall into either area, but this is a good place to start

# Case Study

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News of the World Phone Hacking Scandal



# Errors of Commission

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Most widely reported

This is when a reporter or editor has done something that they shouldn't do

The most obvious example of this is when a reporter makes up a story, particularly a sensational one

There have been numerous examples of this over the years, even with award winning reporters

# Plagiarism

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A less serious case is copying stories from other sources

A reporter copies a story from another newspaper and publishes it as his own work

This is hard to detect with foreign language sources, but sometimes reporters will copy stories from other parts of the country, hoping that no one reads these papers

With the Internet this is [easier to detect](#)

# Catching Plagiarism

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All stories could be registered at a central site, then easy to detect these problems

Why do reporters do this?

- In many cases it's much easier than doing an original story
- Someone else has already done the research and the interviews
- Even if you paraphrase the original article it is less work

# Moving at “Internet Speed”

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There is pressure on reporters to respond to events almost immediately, move at Internet speed

This conflicts with doing a good job of a story, so there is pressure to cheat

There are ways out of these problems

If you want to use the research from another story, [reference the previous story](#) and produce a story that is significantly different

# Anonymous Sources

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A major source of ethical issues is anonymous sources, reporter uses a source without identifying them, often without direct quotes

Ideally sources should always be identified, so we can evaluate the quality of the source, potential bias

A recent example: an economist employed by the Canadian Auto Workers comes out strongly in favour of subsidizing the auto industry, this is not an unbiased source of information

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# Why Hide Your Source?



# Why Hide Your Source?

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There are important reasons for not identifying the source

In the case of crimes may not want to identify the victim, but may still want to quote them

This is particularly important with sex crimes, but could also be the case where the victim could be victimized again, or where the victim could be an important witness in a court case

# Media Ethics

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If the source is identified, the information may dry up

This is often the case in political stories or whistle blowing

If the source is identified they could lose their job, or they could be denied access to information

# Problems with Anonymous Sources

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How do we know if the source really exists?

Do they want to be anonymous because their information is wrong or misleading?

Are they attempting to manipulate the truth or have another agenda?

# Checks and Balances

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The editor can check to see if the anonymous source is legitimate, just one more person who knows the source, not the same as publishing it

Try to verify the information through other sources, anonymous source should be able to suggest ways of verifying their stories

# Working on a Timeline

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Problem: this can all take time, if you have a hot story you want to rush it to press before any other paper finds out about it

Want to be the first with the story, but don't want to be embarrassed by a fake story

# The Damage is Already Done, or... You can't really take it back!

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On the Internet a fake story can live for a long time, during a political campaign a long lived fake story could do considerable damage

# Financial Ethics

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Other types of unethical behaviour are based on financial considerations

A reporter should not receive gifts or money from sources

Temptation to produce biased stories in favour of the sources

Similarly reporters shouldn't cover stories that they have a personal interest in, for example involving a political party they are involved with

# Financial Ethics

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Financial reporters should not cover companies that they have stock in

If they do, they should clearly state in the story that they are stock holders

Reporters should be careful about covering stories where they have a financial interest

Story could manipulate the market in favour of the reporter



# Moving Online

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Most of these ethical issues existed before digital media and the Internet

The Internet has increased the pace of news so there is not as much time to check sources and details

Thus, we have seen more cases of unethical behaviour

Digital media has introduced some new sources of ethical issues

# Digital Media Ethics

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With digital media it's easy to edit photos and videos to enhance the story

Can easily add or remove things from photos and videos

This could be relatively innocent like removing a commercial for a competitor from a video sequence and replacing it with your own

# Media Ethics

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This is a distortion of reality, will they do this for more serious things?

No real harm, but does impact the reputation of the TV network

More serious cases occur when an image is modified to enhance a story

Search: Photoshopped Journalism



<http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/10/in-an-iranian-image-a-missile-too-many/>



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# Media Ethics

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A related issue is capturing innocent bystanders in news photos and videos

Example: in a demonstration a photographer uses a wide field of view to capture people not involved in the demonstration, make it look larger

This is a misrepresentation, which is unethical, but it also implicates the innocent bystanders which aren't part of the demonstration

# Media Ethics

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If a crime occurred during the demonstration they might be charged even though they weren't involved

Might be spotted by their boss, who happens to be against the demonstration

They could even be targeted by criminal gangs, to get revenge or thinking that they were witnesses to a crime

# Media Ethics

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Basically associating people with an event they had nothing to do with

The last issue is accepting news coverage from individuals

Most local TV stations encourage their viewers to take pictures or videos of news stories and then send them to the TV station

This introduces several ethical issues



# Presentation

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Find an interesting example of photoshopped journalism

- Prepare a powerpoint presentation

# Actions

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Read Chapter 15 from course book.

# Summary

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Ethics are guidelines for behaviour

Journalism ethical errors are errors of omission and commission

In digital media, photo manipulation, anonymous sourcing, and citizen journalism are sources of ethical concern

With digital media, citizen journalism has raised new ethical issues

Violence in the media is an ongoing area of study