YENİ MEDYA ETİĞİNDE NEREDE DURULMALI

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Öz

Bu makale, yeni medya kullanıcılarına etik ile ilgili bir kapı açmayı amaçlar. Bunun için etik kavramının aslında tarihsel olarak ve doğasına uygun bir biçimde nasıl bir bütüncüllük sergilediğini ifade eder. Öncelikle sosyal bilimler alanında Kültürel Çalışmalar gibi bütüncül yaklaşımlar olduğuna değinir, ardından etik ve sosyal bilimlerin el ele yürüdüğünden bahseder. Sonrasında etiğin de aslında sosyal bilimlere benzer bir şekilde bütüncül görülmesi gerektiğini vurgular. Ardından günümüzde etik anlayışının yalnızca iş ahlakı gibi görülmeye başladığını ancak bunun etiğin aslından kopuk ve yine etiğin doğasına tamamen aykırı bir şekilde kısıtlanmış olduğuna değinir. Özellikle kanunen suç sayılmayan nahoş davranışların gelecekte yaşanmasını önlemek amacıyla herkesin anlayabileceği bir etik anlayış sunmanın gerekli olduğunu savunur. Sonrasında siyaset felsefesinde önemli bir isim olan Rawls'un adalet felsefesinde yer alan anahtar kavram olan cehalet örtüsünü bir metafor olarak etik içinde yeniden canlandırmanın mümkün ve en uygun yöntem olduğunu savunur. Bunun kullanıcılar açısından yeni medya etiği şeklinde örnek alınarak benimsenebileceğini ifade eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeni medya, etik, bütünsel yeni medya etiği, Rawls, cehalet örtüsü

WHERE TO STAND IN NEW MEDIA ETHICS

Abstract

This article aims to open the door to ethics for new media users. For this reason, it expresses how the concept of ethics actually exhibits a holism historically and in accordance with its nature. First, it mentions that there are holistic approaches, such as Cultural Studies in the field of social sciences, and then it mentions that ethics and social sciences go hand in hand. Afterwards, it emphasises that ethics should be seen holistically, similar to social sciences. Then, it mentions that today the understanding of ethics has started to be seen as only business ethics, but this is detached from the essence of ethics and is restricted in an entirely contrary to the nature of ethics. In particular, it argues that it is necessary to present an ethical understanding that everyone can understand to prevent unpleasant actions in the future – even though those are not lawfully classified as crimes. Afterwards, it argues that it is a possible and most appropriate way to revive the veil of ignorance, which is the critical concept in the philosophy of justice of Rawls, an actual name in political philosophy, as a metaphor in ethics. It states that this metaphor can be adopted by taking the example of new media ethics for users.

Keywords: New media, ethics, wholistic new media ethics, Rawls, the veil of ignorance

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Introduction

It is agreeable that social science is completely branched; as for fields, they have almost become niche. However, some social scientists agree that it does not give the full picture to not take the world as complete. Examining phenomena from one perspective does not entirely enlighten matters; it always leaves some parts in the dark. However, hardly anything is one-dimensional in the inhabited world, let alone scientific phenomena. Thus, it is crucial to take science as a whole, too. Cultural Studies can be carried as a sample.

It is not only classical Cultural Studies that is interdisciplinary. There are models like IEMP and NACEVP proving that it is possible by excelling in interdisciplinary as well (Heiskala, 2018). A phenomenon cannot be explained by only one parameter; the social realm is multidimensional and required to be treated as so. While emphasising one, ignoring the other would not be suitable or fair. It would not explain the case thoroughly, which also potentially misleads upcoming research. This understanding played a role in the emergence of the ecol mentioned above. Even though it was not always possible to conduct the research holistically, some researchers do not deny that any subject has more than one aspect to comprehend and point out.

Even though they are not similar, the presence of ethics in social science is undeniable. Whether the execution of the ethics in the fields or the ethics understandings in the subjects, ethics is observable. And for the social realm, ethics is highly debated, as it should be. Every discipline has its unique understanding of ethics. However intense the debates are, their reflection among people is not palpable. Similarly, the place of ethics in the new media is mainly overlooked by users. Several types of crimes have been reported, such as cyberbullying, harassing, stalking, and so on. Most of these are not lawfully controlled unless they bear extremely dire consequences, but the ecosystem still requires some some internal control. It is impossible to ask platforms to restrict some of these except for hate crime- which is still not accepted worldwide as a crime. Thus, ethics, more specifically, new media ethics, should be presented, and it should be done in a way that crowds can learn from. But before that, the qualifications of the new media ethics should be determined.

1. About ethics

While new media spreads, ethical debates are stranded within its almighty and rightfully renowned history. Even though its realm is historically and spatially vast, ethics is not essential in everyday life. It is rare for most people to stop before every single action and think about what they are about to do, their intentions and the possible outcomes of the action. It may seem harmless at first glance as long as the step is entirely personal and not directed at others. However, with the accessibility that the new media brings, online actions are no longer one-way; it is not even always possible for them to be on some platforms. Especially on the platforms open to communities ranging from distant to knit closely, it is more crucial than ever for individuals to act ethically more than ever. For individuals to act ethically, they need to know about ethics, but do they?

For it to be adopted, ethics should be learned hand in hand with daily life. However, ethics is constantly taught approximately always in the same way, starting way later in life to be absorbed, and, in the same order: starting with Ancient Greek, then mentioning European

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ethics a making superficial discussion on old models and ending it with microscopic examples that almost impossible to happen in the same order and in a highly monotonous way, and especially, doing it all with no context. Even when ethics education is perfectly structured, conveyed, and received, it turns out to be a slogan contest (Wyatt, 2008). It is generally about reducing the philosophers' perceptions into a few sentences. It is also reduced to abstract small examples like the trolley problem. Yet again, ethics is not something as abstract as it is considered; it is in our everyday life with every aspect of it: it is primarily palpable and feasible.

We usually never see any reality that reminds a cave at first sight, but we still talk about the cave allegory of Plato, which is entirely exquisite yet leads people to think ethics is something that stinks mouldy. Narrating but not promoting several thousand-year-old ethics or, in a better way, keeping it updated on our confusing modern lifestyle might help everyone understand and encourage people to live within its boundaries. Being perceived as abstract makes ethics considered unapproachable and outdated. Whether in our daily or work life or for media usage. Since there used to be no new media ethics and now media changes constantly, we may need to add or drop some parts from or to the traditional media ethics.

2. Evolving of the ethics

Even if its history seems ragged now, like any other discipline, ethics was built on a tradition and kept developing. Since ancient ethics is the root of contemporary ethics, it is quite precious and crucial. The understanding of ethics started with Socrates due to the shift of his philosophical focus from nature to the human experience. He made a ground for the Western sense of ethics (Kleinman, 2013). After Socrates, personal ethics did not improve during the Ancient Greek era apart from hedonist Epicurus; it continued on a more political level, mostly thinking on social ethics. Although scholastic ethics emerged and moral understanding started to be built on a religious basis, ethics could be found as a part of Divine Harmony, which means the sacred and natural organisation of the known and unknown to human beings (Hankins, 2007). Ethics kept evolving and changing further and further.

It would only be right to note that ethics evolved according to philosophers' sole mentality and focus. For instance, Plato's focus was on the republic, making his perception of ethics revolve around politics. It also reflects the mindset of the era it sprouted from. For instance, during the Middle Ages, scholastic thought was dominant, reflecting scholastic ethics and divine harmony or laying the groundwork for them. Just like how the rise of capitalism and puritanism kept up with each other, modern and postmodern times have brought an ethical perception that aligns with themselves.

Even though it is possible to find some parts related to modern times in previous forms of ethics, it is vital to point out that it is necessary to indicate the difference between ancient and contemporary ethics. It is evident that as modern people, we do not see ethics itself or its purpose like the ancients saw: as Rawls points out:

"The ancients asked about the most rational way to true happiness, or the highest good, and they inquired about how virtuous conduct and the virtues as aspects of character—the virtues of courage and temperance, wisdom and justice, which are themselves good—are related to that highest good, whether as means, or as constituents, or both. Whereas the moderns asked primarily, or at least in the first instance, about what they saw as authoritative prescriptions of

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right reason, and the rights, duties, and obligations to which these prescriptions of reason gave rise. Only afterward did their attention turn to the goods these prescriptions permitted us to pursue and to cherish. (Rawls & Herman, 2000)"

The people who lived thousands of years ago did not have the mentality we have now. As modern citizens of the world, our priority in everything, especially in ethics, is different. The distant thoughts in our mind when we read ancient ethics and the resemblances between Socrates and Plato prove this. That is one of the reasons why we, as modern people, need to theorise a new kind of ethics in any subject.

Another reason to need a new understanding of ethics is the distinctive nature of Greek society, for instance, its population: it was so low that you could point the deviants easily and the citizens were trying to be a reliable person by doing the good thing, and concludes: "Time does not permit a discussion of the philosophical moral views of the Greeks, except to note a few very general points." (Rawls & Herman, 2000).

Thirdly, the ancient understanding of democracy changed drastically, and while changing, people had to face many obstacles. People had to live through the dark ages, plague epidemic, feudality, myriad types of colonialism and several cultural and political revolutions to have democracy in a modern way. These extended processes had a dire effect on the whole world and, obviously, how ethics is perceived (Rawls & Herman, 2000).

With the massive difference between those circumstances, the expectation of the same ethics does not seem possible. It would be neither viable nor fair to try to apply old-fashioned ethics to a brand-new generation in a brand-new environment. New conditions must have a new, or better, updated understanding of ethics. We may agree on the nature of ethics with our forerunners, and we may concur that ethics is applied when we have a dilemma, but we do not have to apply old ethics to the current conditions that we live in.

Ethics should be considered differently now, but it does not change the fact that the media actually surround us. Especially with the availability of new media technologies, people are not only objects of the media, but they are also the producers of it, making the majority of the world population is users nowadays. It is clear that every single user must be liable to media ethics. However, ethics is not considered an everyday matter. This also proves that ethics is not an isolated way of thought. It is a part of a bigger whole, and while theorising ethics in an era-appropriate way, this should be key.

3. Media ethics

Media ethics has been all about intellectual freedom for a long time. Philosophers and different schools focused on why media should be free on their own and in a unique way, and they all agreed on intellectual freedom. The pioneer intellectual freedom advocates focused on the governments and media regulations. They mostly talked about newspapers and why they should be allowed to write whatever they believe to be true. Nowadays, media ethics are seen as if it is solely for journalists or media owners. Sometimes it is about widely expected objectivity and impartiality (Kieran 2002), some focus on censorship (Ellis, 2002), sometimes the issue is privacy (Cram, 2002), and sometimes it is violence (Graham, 2002). However, ethics is under the spotlight of scholars generally; it seems like it is overshadowed by profit

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(Rao & Wasserman, 2015); even the ones to work in media companies are not deeply concerned about doing the right thing or being ethical, studies show (Bucholtz, 2019).

Despite being such a fatal point, ethics is not considered crucial and one of the modern reasons ethics is not an everyday matter anymore is because it is taught in a limited way: it is not general ethics; it is mostly work ethics. Even in media education, a job in the broadest field is only concerned with work ethics; and it still does not work correctly (Bucholtz, 2019). Even though ethics lecture is an essential part of a core curriculum, it is still not seen together with media law, which is a considerable handicap to understanding the nature of ethics and law (Braun, 1999).

Being ignored or forgotten does not mean that media ethics are not needed. Especially globalisation makes it essential, if not crucial. While national and global news outlets seem the most effective, it does not render local news outlets -or social media users in their absence- less necessary or harmless to overlook. If the matter is mainly about the ones with the power to use mediums, media ethics must apply to new media users, too. The new media users are citizen journalists since they spread the news, message each other, manipulate other users, seem like regular users but actually work for some politicians, steal identities, bully other users and so on. It is a sphere that is convenient for any exploitation. Furthermore, since different forms of new media are global platforms, global media ethics must be applied to social media and its users.

4. What is global media ethics?

Global media ethics can be a matter while reporting global cases like climate change, environmental issues, and immigration (Dunwoody & Konieczna, 2013). However, keeping global and new media ethics is not possible or accurate. When globalisation through online media, especially social network sites (SNS), is beyond mainstream media companies, it lays a burden on every single platform user. Platforms are online sites where people can affect each other and be affected by other users easily and more often now. Even though the SNSes are not the direct cause, by being only a part of daily lives, they can contribute to self-esteem issues (Jiang & Ngien, 2020), can raise awareness of social, political, or environmental issues and allow people to sign petitions (Dünyanın, n.d.), or even channel voting behaviours towards a predetermined direction (Berghel, 2018). While the platforms are online sites that affect real life, personally and nationally, and cause so much, good and bad, why not be aware of the results of one's own actions?

According to Stephen Ward and Wassermann, the most distinctive side of global media ethics is its adaptability: to him, it is a constantly evolving field (2015). Since the new media evolves daily, linking them together is natural and necessary. His mention of "the increased interconnections among people globally" also suits quite well with the new media (Ward & Wasserman, 2015).

5. Radical media ethics and new media

What distinguishes Ward and Wassermann from other ethics is their persistence in being radical. In his book Radical Media Ethics: a Global Approach, he explains what should be understood from radical:

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"My radicalness seeks reform of fundamental ideas. Reform requires intellectual boldness and moral imagination: boldness to challenge outdated, yet cherished, ideas and imagination to invent new ideas. To be philosophically radical is to alter the structure of our thinking (Ward, 2015)."

As it is mentioned above, Ward and Wassermann also emphasise the unfashionablity of the old ethics narrative and suggest changing it from the roots by altering the whole way of thinking. While doing that, it must be kept in mind that ethics applies to everything about the ones alive or everything related to them.

For norms to be considered by the new media users, it is vital for them to agree on and understand the ethics actively. It does not only mean that the users understand the logic of ethics as a whole but also the reasoning behind the fundamental norms. Global media ethics might be contemplated, defined, and its norms can be decided upon, but if the ones to choose are not the ones to use media or there would be no one to follow its norms, then there is no use in working on ethics. So, according to Ward and Wassermann, "Global media ethics must be constructed by citizens and professionals in different media cultures." then add, "A listening approach seeks not only to include many different voices; it also wants those voices to be really heard" (2015).

For those voices to be heard, we most probably can not legislate a palpable list of certain norms but building some ethical codes might be suitable as a resolution. To keep ethics universal, everyone must be listened to; even if it is considered done, some of people may feel unsafe and refrain from expressing themselves. Since it is not doable, and "Journalism is a profession in search of norms." as a step to this resolution, we may apply the veil of ignorance metaphor from John Rawl's A Theory of Justice (Couldry et al., 2013).

In his book, A Theory of Justice, Rawls mentions the original position to keep the discussion of laws/norms just. In this position, people are behind a metaphoric veil of ignorance:

"No one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism. More than this, I assume that the parties do not know the particular circumstances of their own society. That is, they do not know its economic or political situation or the level of civilisation and culture it has been able to achieve. The persons in the original position have no information as to which generation they belong (Rawls, 1971)."

It would be expected from people to create a system that favours all parties equally and treats them with utmost equity since they are ignorant of themselves and have no clue about what norm will affect or limit their actions or instead themselves and probably will opt for the most libertarian law with an appropriate judiciary system (Rawls, 1971).

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Current article suggests that, just like Rawls, while building new normative ethics for media usage -especially new media usage-we can consider users as positioned behind a veil of ignorance. More than any other person, the users can recreate the idea of the Veil of Ignorance and build an inner set of rules for the new media usage. The users can decide what should and should not be done while/after using media tools and choose their actions accordingly. It may take a while and much self-awareness, but it is expected that they would probably decide not to be offensive, racist, or phobic, and they would probably ban any harassment or identity theft.

Apart from those wrongdoings, there are blurry lines based on the difference in cultures adopted by 'citizens'. While one culture embraces one action, the other one may find it completely unacceptable. However, the internet is a uniting environment for everyone from different cultures and backgrounds; it will definitely host a lot of shocking differences. It is crucial to remember that it would be only accurate to consider new media users as citizens of the internet environment, and it is evident that the new media users have different cultural backgrounds affecting how they use new media (Bucholtz, 2019). In their article, Ward and Wassermann suggest that respect and humanity can help us to disagree ethically (Ward & Wasserman, 2015). Accepting those two characteristics would come by default in the original position.

Nevertheless, it is important to remind readers that the idea of applying the veil of ignorance notion to the new media ethics can only be applicable to the personal use of online platforms. When the matter is companies, the veil of ignorance loses its nature since profit is the companies' first and foremost goal. A balance between the users can be seen when it comes to regular users. However, there is an uneven power dynamics between the users and the platform itself, or non-regular, stronger users like advertising companies or sponsored users. Whether the company is SNS or another that uses social media for market research or other purposes, there can be another way for new media ethics.

Conclusion

The article started with stating the antiquity and datedness of old ethics and suggesting that a new one is necessary; it is also demonstrated by a comparison between ancient times and nowadays. It also agreed that is why ethics is considered something special, not natural, just for work. It is also emphasised that media ethics is recognised just for the ones who work in the media professionally. Then, it is stated that we live with media so naturally that we do not even consider it something ethics worthy. We, as users, do not realise our actions on new media are in a context and in relationship with others, let alone considering its consequences in a global way. Then the connection between ethics and law with the tendency of journalism to be normative led us to raise the concept of the veil of ignorance from political philosophy to build a small list of norms. In that sense, a more honest and just new media environment can be established.

Sonuç

Bu makale, süregelmiş etik anlayışının eskiliğini ve demodeliğini belirterek, yeni bir etik anlayışının gerekli olduğunu öne sürerek başlamış; aynı zamanda antik çağlar ve günümüz

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arasında yapılan bir karşılaştırmayla da bunu kanıtlamıştır. Ayrıca, etiğin doğal değil, yalnızca iş hayatına özel bir kavram olarak görüldüğünü de ifade ederek medya etiğinin sadece profesyonel olarak medyada çalışanlar için geçerli görüldüğü de vurgulanmaktadır. Ardından medyayla o kadar doğal bir şekilde yaşadığımızı ve bunu etik bir şey olarak bile görmediğimizi ifade etmiştir. Kullanıcılar olarak, yeni medyadaki eylemlerimizin, sonuçlarını küresel bir şekilde düşünmek bir yana, bir bağlam içinde ve başkalarıyla ilişki içinde olduğunun farkında olmadığımız vurgulanmıştır. Sonrasında, gazeteciliğin normatif olma eğilimiyle etik ve hukuk arasındaki bağlantı, küçük bir normlar listesi oluşturmak için siyaset felsefesinden cehalet örtüsü kavramının yeni medya ile ilişkilendirilebileceği sonucuna ulaşılmış ve bu anlamda daha dürüst ve adil bir yeni medya ortamının bu şekilde oluşturulabilir olduğu vurgulanmıştır.

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