

Communication Ethics: From Theory to Practice

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INTRODUCTION

When we are talking about the ethics of communication, the audiences naturally think about the field of media and their minds are mainly concerned with moral crises and harms and they think about what should be done so that the media does not create or aggravate these harms and crises. In other words, the media are usually accused of creating social and moral harm. But it should be known that the concept of communication goes beyond the media and when we talk about the communication ethics, it refers to something beyond crises and harms. Therefore, the question is; Can communication help to reduce harm and crises?

According to today's expansion of social and virtual networks, the purpose of communication ethics is to find answers to the questions of communication activists, including journalists and mass media practitioners. In fact, communication actors are faced with choices moment by moment, and in the field of receiving and publishing news and reports, they must decide how they can be loyal to moral principles and values. On the other hand, communication is not limited to what is produced and sent in the media. In fact, the audience's value judgments about media content and performance are much more important; That is, what the audience considers moral or not.

Based on this introduction, two basic issues are raised: The first fundamental problem is the moral crisis. The question is; Is there a moral crisis? Has the increasing complexity and spread of media made today's world more moral or immoral? Does increasing access to information cause people to be more exposed to various crises? There is no single answer to these questions, because some people are optimistic about these events

and some people are pessimistic. So, the question is, are we in a moral crisis? And if we have a moral crisis or our society has a moral crisis, what is the cause? However, it can be said that society is not in a good place in terms of moral ranking. It said that moral crises are the result of political, economic and social crises. Furthermore, how can one say that there is a moral crisis? How can the severity and weakness of this crisis be measured? Especially, in a society where judgments are usually mundane and arbitrary. Also, one should ask which theories can explain the moral situation of the society. The second basic issue is about the communication crisis. In terms of the concept of communication crisis, several major questions are raised:

First, how communicative and conversational the society is and how much room there is for misunderstanding. Based on my experiences and research, I believe that Iranian society is a closed society; It means that it is not an open society. A communication society is a society in which everyone can talk to himself, his family, other people, social groups, and the government. But in Iran, the most important skill is to hide oneself from others. Therefore, the reality is that a communicative society - which is more open and moral - is very different from a closed or non-communicative society.

The second question is how much society acts based on media and which media is influenced by this society? For example, now it can be said that social and virtual networks have more control over the society and their coverage is much more than written media. Since years ago, the circulation of the press and books has decreased drastically, and on the other hand, the influence of virtual media has become much wider. Therefore, the

"mediaization" of society can be related to its "virtualization".

The third question is about the ability or inability of the media in the field of moral developments. We sometimes exaggerate or minimize to describe and explain the role of the media. But we must know that the media are neither absolutely capable nor absolutely incapable. In fact, sometimes in the absence of other agents and institutions, we deal more with the issue of media.

The fourth question is about communication propositions in Iran. In fact, Iranian society has moved from oral to virtual status by reducing the consumption of written media. Therefore, the variety of development propositions in Iran has increased.

The fifth question is, what is the amount of theorizing in the communication and media of the society? In Iran, theoretical aspects are less discussed and most of the judgments are based on scattered observations, not written research.

Now, when these two moral and communication crises - if they really exist - cross each other, they show the crises in a more intense way.

In the field of communication ethics, we must distinguish two types of ethics: individual ethics and collective and systematic ethics. Therefore, approaches or research can be applied when ethical principles are observed in both types of ethics. Therefore, it is necessary to move from focusing on individual communication actors to governmental, social, educational and professional institutions.

Questions related to the relationship between ethics and communication can be divided into several levels:

At the first level of the influence of ethics in communication, several questions should be answered in the field of sending messages in communication:

How ethical is the person who delivers the message?

How moral is the message he is communicating?

To whom does he communicate this message? (This means that the ethics of receiving the message should also be considered)

Why is he sending that message? Today it is said that the origin of the message must be justice - that has been discussed since Aristotle - or that compassion and empathy are also important in sending the message.

How does the media convey the message and is it important to be moral or not in the process of sending the message?

Through what channel is the message delivered and is this channel interactive or non-interactive?

At the second level, theoretical discussions about the effect of communication on ethics are discussed. As said,

the concept of communication is beyond media, but here we consider communication in the sense of media. The question raised in this context is what effect does the media have on the ethics of users. How effective is the use of different media in the following areas?

Individual (emotionally and emotionally)

Family (e.g., isolating people within the family)

Public morality

Education ethics

Cultural, artistic, scientific, technical, political, economic, legal, religious, and occupational ethics

These are the levels at which the impact of the media can be examined. For example, at the political level, it puts observation instead of activism, or from the legal point of view, it makes people rely on individual rights instead of collective rights, or from the religious point of view, it has an effect like "rituals" in virtual and real space as well as in professional ethics, and as a result we are facing a phenomenon called "citizen reporter".

At the third level, communication ethics or media ethics includes three categories:

How ethical are media goals and objectives?

How is ethical policymaking and planning possible? This discussion is especially raised about monopolistic media versus democratic media.

Practical and professional ethics. In my opinion, in this field, we are facing problems that are mainly in the form of paradoxes and dualities for which it is not easy to find a solution:

The first paradox involves four principles recognized in normative theories of communication: raising public awareness, freedom of communication, truth-telling, and respect for individual dignity and private life. Compliance with these principles is somewhat impossible in today's media world.

Second, new smartphones that are always connected to the Internet have created new ethical challenges. People like Wellman refer to the mobile revolution as the "third revolution of communication" - after the revolution of social networks and the revolution of the Internet.

Third, the expansion of the non-professional activity of today's citizen journalists has caused professional journalism to fade. In fact, today's communication actions in the virtual space are mainly based on non-professional journalism.

The fourth issue is the confusion of public space and privacy, and this issue has led to many ethical and legal issues.

The fifth is the growth of controversial and deceptive trends, which, for example, appear in the form of

encouraging users to click on content and advertisements, or "click traps".

The sixth is to use data mining and display targeted ads in social networks. One of the harms that the media may cause to morality is that any person can send messages to age, gender, racial, and religious groups, and some of these messages may exacerbate social gaps.

The seventh is the spread of fake news (fake news) or politically and economically oriented advertisements, which of course is not unique to Iran and can be seen everywhere. Fake news is a serious issue.

Eighth is the possibility of hiding the identity of people who publish fake news.

The ninth is the formation of bubbles of like-minded individuals, groups, and media that reinforce each other instead of establishing themselves in the dialogue space.

The tenth is the speed competition in the publication of content in social and virtual media, so that the emphasis on the "speed" of publishing news sometimes violates professional and ethical principles.

Finally, the eleventh is the following of mass media and professional journalists in selecting and highlighting social media. In fact, here, social media guides professional journalists, not the other way around.

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CONCLUSION

Our most important issue is the ambiguity and confusion in communication moral activism, so that it becomes very difficult to find an answer for it. But in my opinion, the most important strategy is to consider communication ethics as a new and interdisciplinary field and not a field that is only for communication. We must see the three categories of professional ethics, institutional ethics, and self-regulation ethics, especially in social networks, together and emphasize the openness of society and the strengthening of civil institutions as a prerequisite for the realization of an ethical society. In fact, a closed society and a society that does not have the power to choose is not a moral society. In this way, we can mention the fourth strategy: instead of emphasizing on restricting access to resources, we pay attention to educating the audience and increasing their communication ability and media literacy.

My last word is that in order to advance the ethics of communication, we should think about independent media and provide the possibility of economic independence of small and large media. We must make the media compete and ensure their sustainable life so that the media do not die young. We must provide legal support for the media. This is a way to solve moral crises and communication crises. [1-3].