Media Ethics and Dilemmas

Journalists, Citizens and Technology

By: Christopher G. Lewis

A 2013 Nicholas and Anna Ricco Ethics Award competition submission
Is a picture worth 1,000 words anymore? Can a photograph even be trusted?

This image taken by Getty’s photographer, Richard Lam, appears to show a couple kissing during the 2011 Vancouver Riots. In reality, she had fallen and he was attempting to help her up.
The impact of visual communications

Why are multimedia ethics so important?
The impact of visual communications

- Did you think of a word?
- Did you think of an image?

ALLIGATOR

http://www.marathonbooks.com/Alligator.html
What makes pictures memorable can now be reliable predicted.

- a) Most memorable images (86%)
- b) Typical images (74%)
- c) Least memorable images (34%)

The team planned to design a “memorable picture” iPhone app.
Memories are easily manipulated to create false impressions.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND LIES: USING FALSE PHOTOGRAPHS TO CREATE FALSE CHILDHOOD MEMORIES
BY: WADE, GARRY, READ, LINDSAY, 2002

- 50 percent of the test subjects created complete or partial false memories

MAKE-BELIEVE MEMORIES
BY: ELIZABETH LOFTUS, 2003

- About one third of the subjects remembered Bugs Bunny at Disneyland
The Bugs Bunny Effect
Technology-aided communications

How much information is out there?
Some Statistics: Twitter

http://mashable.com/2011/09/08/twitter-has-100-million-active-users/
Some Statistics: Facebook

Facebook 2012

Mobile Users
Active Users

0
200,000,000,000
400,000,000,000
600,000,000,000
800,000,000,000
1,000,000,000,000

http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts
Some Statistics: YouTube

Some Statistics: YouTube

Some Statistics: Instagram

https://instagram.com/press/
Codes of ethics

Do they still matter?
Public service and the *Fairness Doctrine*

- FCC introduces the *Fairness Doctrine* in 1949
- Intended to present issues to the public in a fair and balanced manner
- Eliminated by the FCC in 1987
- Language formally removed by the FCC in 2011

Codes of ethics

PREAMBLE
Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the foundation of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a full and comprehensive account of events and issues. Professional journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with dignity and honor. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and accept this code to describe the Society's principles and standards of practice.

SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT
Journalists should be honest, fair, and competent in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:
1. Seek the truth and report it fairly and accurately.
2. Rejects the practice of giving preferential treatment to any individual or group.
3. Avoid harm to others when doing so will not serve the public interest.
4. Provide a fair and accurate representation of events and issues.
5. Avoid misleading statements.
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MINIMIZE HARM

Journalists should:
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Ask These 10 Questions to Make Good Ethical Decisions

By: Dr. Bob Steele
The Poynter Institute

- What do I know? What do I need to know?
- What is my journalistic purpose?
- What are my ethical concerns?
- What organizational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?
- How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process?
- Who are the stakeholders — those affected by my decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate?
- What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel if I were in the shoes of one of the stakeholders?
- What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short term? Long term?
- What are my alternatives to maximize my truth-telling responsibility and minimize harm?
- Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?
Profit-Making Model
 Budgets shrink to maximize profit
 Advertising gains more control and corporate ownership shrinks

Pundits
 Masquerade as journalists
 Hard for the public to tell the difference

Codes of ethics
Losing credibility

Mistakes, spins and lies are nothing new
THE USS MAINE

- What caused the USS Maine to sink in 1898 remains unclear, but the sinking clearly started the Spanish-American War.


THE COTTINGLEY FAIRIES

- The fake photographs taken in 1917 were not revealed as a hoax until 1983.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cottingley_Fairies
In 2012, WGN in Chicago reports live about a plane crash without verifying.
Losing credibility

- Sometimes professionals accidentally make mistakes
In 2003, Walski composited a photo to, “improve its composition.”

During Romney’s 2012 campaign, a fake picture of children spelling out “money” on their shirts went viral.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/photo/essays/vanRiper/030409.htm

http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/socialpoliticalissues/ss/Romney-Money-Picture.htm
Losing credibility

In 2004, John Kerry was added to a photograph of Jane Fonda speaking at an Anti-Vietnam War protest.

Traditional journalists

Are we becoming relics?
Traditional journalists

- The choice is adaptation or extinction

"The Pentagon Papers"
- Published in 1971 by The New York Times, detailed the United State’s involvement during the Vietnam War

"WikiLeaks"
- Created by Julian Assange in 2006, released thousands of classified documents concerning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2010, and about the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center in 2011
The citizen journalist

Welcome additions or harbingers of doom?
The citizen journalist

ZAPRUDER FILM

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWHdEeHNbXY

RODNEY KING VIDEO

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SW1ZDIxiuS4
The citizen journalist

- Russian Meteor
- Katie Couric
Citizen journalists lack training and accountability.

http://mashable.com/2012/10/29/fake-hurricane-sandy-photos/
The social journalist

Is the answer collaboration?
The social journalist

- The Instagram option

The social journalist

- The New York Times option

http://projects.nytimes.com/watching-syrias-war
The social journalist

- The Storyful option

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNV4ylYXXX0
The solution

Is there one?
Combine all three, with a few addendums
Of course, we could always sit back and do nothing, but then...

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frKzYFXOCY