

Privacy and Ethics of Social Media Participation:

A Literature Review

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Abstract

Technological advancements continue to alter the way journalists perform the task of gathering and reporting the news. At the center of attention in this wave of technology gripping the industry is social media. Consumers are afforded unprecedented access to news and information thanks to the proliferation of mobile devices. According to Pew Research, 62 percent of United States adults get their news from social media, with 18 percent doing so often (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). These news consumers expect constant updates, so journalists must work to satisfy this hunger. This must be done carefully, though, as the online cycle of news doesn't allow for traditional gatekeeping methods. Furthermore, social media users expect a proper mix of personal and professional postings from journalists they follow in order to have trust built. These factors call for closer inspection of how journalists' use of social media aligns with ethical codes. This review of literature seeks to explore communication privacy management theory, reader response to journalists' use of social media, and ethical standards of social media use by journalists.

Keywords: ethics, journalists, news, privacy management theory, reporting, social media

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Freedom of information is a human right, and technology empowers consumers to receive information and react to it immediately, thus engaging in civically minded public discourse (Jallow, 2015; Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2016). When news breaks, people want to know what is going on. Maybe this means adjusting the radio dial or turning the television station to a preferred news station's coverage of the unfolding events. However, with the proliferation of technology pervading society, most news consumers use mobile devices to stay abreast of the world, primarily through the use of social media (Bowen, 2013; Franklin, 2014). Furthermore, social media sites see more traffic than news websites (Lim, 2016). According to Pew Research, 62 percent of United States adults get their news from social media, with 18 percent doing so often, and the majority of users are white females between the ages of 30 and 49 (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016).

Journalists are not excluded from lists of users on various social media platforms. The Poynter Institute suggests journalists primarily use social media for research by looking at blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, but journalists are also using such platforms to publish, promote, and distribute their own work (Grier, 2010). Social media is also used by journalists to keep up with what the competition is covering, speed up reporting, and interact with audience members (Peterson, 2014). Of all social media options available to journalists and consumers, Reddit, Facebook, and Twitter rank highest in percent of users who utilize the site for news, and with Facebook being the largest social networking site with 67 percent of adults as users and 66 percent of those users getting news from the site, Facebook accounts for 44 percent of the general population's consuming news; furthermore, with nearly 60 percent of Twitter users getting news from the site and 16 percent of the general population being users, social media

presents itself as a major avenue for news consumption (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Social media is a journalistic tool used on a daily basis as part of a journalist's workflow, just like a camera, a voice recorder, email, or the telephone (Cimarusti, 2015; Ritter, 2015). However, defining who is and isn't a journalist can be difficult because online tools allow anyone to create content and communicate with the world (Stevenson & Peck, 2011; Ward, 2014).

Despite so many individuals using social media for news consumption, there appears to be a lack of trust in the news disseminated via such platforms. Of 371 journalists surveyed, 91 percent of newspaper journalists and 85 percent of magazine journalists believed social media sites to be less reliable (Grier, 2010). Audience members appear to agree. Based upon a study where participants read details about how a journalist used various techniques to source a story, which included, among others, social media, websites, telephone calls, emails, press conferences, and interviews, the credibility of social media as a reporting tool ranked much lower than traditional reporting methods (Stroud, 2016). This can be attributed to the typical role of journalists being gatekeepers of news and information in which steps to verify information for truth and accuracy are taken, but with online forms of media, such a process fails to happen, at least in appearance, due to the fast-paced nature of the medium requiring quick and constant posting, which calls into question any information gleaned from such avenues (Borden & Tew, 2007). A journalist using social media to gather information must keep in mind social media allows for private-interest groups to exploit the nature of the platform by posting content deceptively (Bowen, 2013; Brandtzaeg, Lüders, Spangenberg, Rath-Wiggins, & Følstad, 2016).

This creates an interesting opportunity for news organizations. Technology allows for constant connectivity with society and the rapid dissemination of news (Franklin, 2014), but journalists must combat the negative perceptions of important tools such as social media. Journalism serves as a key component of democracy (Jallow, 2015). Outside of the First

Amendment, journalism stands on a foundation of ethics, which create trust with the public (Brislin & Williams, 1996). A public distrust of journalists' use of social media to report news suggests a lack of clear ethical boundaries being adhered to in order to maintain trust in such times of technological disruption to the media industry. Therefore, how ethics impact journalism must be reconsidered (Lehman, DuFrene, & Lehman, 2010). By considering topics of social media use by journalists and citizens, this review of literature seeks to explore communication privacy management theory, reader response to journalists' use of social media, and ethical standards of social media use by journalists.

Privacy Management in Social Media

Communication privacy management theory considers relational issues by considering three key components, which include privacy control, privacy ownership, and privacy turbulence (Petronio, 2013). It chiefly concerns interpersonal communication and the willingness of individuals to share thoughts and beliefs (Vik & Bates, 2015). Research suggests this willingness stems from the perceived risk associated with sharing any personal thoughts or information based upon how it is most likely to be received by others (Kennedy-Lightsey, Martin, Thompson, Himes, & Clingerman, 2012). Social media services act as platforms for such communication as they represent online communities where individuals can come together to share micro and macro aspects of their lives, depending upon their willingness to be open and contribute to the larger conversation concerning life (Yang, Pulido, & Yowei, 2016). A key part of such participation concerns communicating with strangers and acquaintances alike because social media is available to individuals within and without ones social sphere (Vik & Bates, 2015). Any given social media platform can be viewed as a place in which individuals can find their identities and happiness by becoming part of a collective group (Arnett, 2008). In such a situation, the individual controls how much private information he or she shares, which leads to

deciding to opt in or not to social media privacy controls and how to react should intended private data be exposed publicly without knowledge or consent of the user (Petronio, 2013). The ability to make such determinations concerning individualized privacy boundaries serves as an important process for effective participation in communication, specifically when it comes to social media use (Yang, Pulido, & Yowei, 2016). It should be noted, though, that these boundaries change depending upon the situation and information being shared, so a singular privacy management stance does not exist for an individual because it is fluid (Kennedy-Lightsey, Martin, Thompson, Himes, & Clingerman, 2012). Furthermore, the type of social network dictates the amount of private information a person is willing to share because some social media sites allow the user to determine the privacy settings, but an understanding of these settings must be had by the user to know what the default settings are in order to adequately protect his or her privacy based upon his or her preferences (Choi & Bazarova, 2015).

With privacy comes the desire to be able to be open and honest without fear of retribution, so some social media users may participate anonymously or with an assumed anonymity, as they believe their posting may not be seen by the masses due to selective privacy controls implemented (Vik & Bates, 2015). The use of such controls stems from fears of unsanctioned use of information, collection of information, and misrepresentation of information (Osatuyi, 2014). Hess (2014) shares examples of such concerns by describing instances when seemingly innocuous tweets gain traction and go viral with the support of mainstream media outlets, despite the fact the person sending the tweet did not intend for the message to be seen by the larger public, such as when a woman called for rape survivors to share what they were wearing at the time of their assaults and the subsequent tweets got carried by BuzzFeed and other news outlets. This assumption of control over privacy leads to more social media use and participation in conversations, especially with the ease of use from any location or situation via

mobile devices (Yang, Pulido, & Yowei, 2016). However, as Hess (2014) points out, individuals must understand that news outlets are not required to get permission to share a tweet in the course of reporting, unless doing so would violate specific norms such as not identifying rape victims without permission. Petronio (2013) suggests control over privacy can break down and actions on social media can become atypical in times of extreme emotional reaction. In short, external factors impact an individual's willingness to share information while participating on social media platforms (Yang, Pulido, & Yowei, 2016). The individual, therefore, must decide if social media is being used as a purely social venture or a brand-building opportunity (Hess, 2014). Based upon this, it becomes clear image on social media platforms is important as it relates to interaction between participants through perceived levels of knowledge and trust (Vik & Bates, 2015).

Reader Response to Social Media Use

The technology allows for news to be reported from anywhere by anyone, meaning media outlets no longer control the flow of information (Lim, 2016). News stories evolve over time, and research suggests social media users understand and accept this as part of the process of reporting in the digital age (Fisher, 2014). For a journalist to be viewed more favorably by other users, he or she must partake in the norms of social media calling for disclosure in the way of revealing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and interactivity in the way of taking part in discussions and providing feedback as part of exchanging messages in two-way, reciprocal communication (Lee, 2015). This takes into account expectations of the users, which means if a user expects a journalist on social media to be reliable, then that journalist will be viewed with trust (Lim, 2016). However, being open and available to users creates conflict within journalists using social media for professional goals because it goes against the idea journalists should be impartial and without allegiance to any one particular group (Lee, 2015). Research indicates,

though, heavy social media users seem to be more willing to accept journalists who are not adhering to traditional ideals of neutrality and detachment because the use of social media by those users influences their news media consumption habits (Lim, 2016). Lee (2015) suggests this can be attributed to social media users looking for social connections, such as social interaction and self-expression, rather than to meet their informational needs, so a journalist is expected to be a part of his or her coverage of a news event via social media by way of sharing personal observations and feelings, which means users will believe reports from a journalist if the journalist has forged relationships and built a reputation for being his or her own self online. Objectivity appears to no longer be of chief concern for consumers because if a journalist is being honest online, he or she recognizes the fact he or she is a human with personal opinions that need to be shared instead of blindly conveying the message of sources without any analysis (Borden & Tew, 2007). This presents itself as particularly true with younger news consumers who seem to give more credence to journalists who are active on social media; however, it must be noted that on the professional level, journalists can lose credibility by participating in exchanges with users that do not concern news events (Lee, 2015). Journalist build and destroy public trust by either feeding into the attitudes of users who believe news should serve the citizens and be representative of them as individuals with certain needs or ignoring the audience's wants and desires entirely (Lim, 2016). Furthermore, journalists must remember their actions on social media, of building trust and protecting privacy ethically seeking permission to use information learned from followers, dictate how other users view the news organizations they work for because the journalists are the public faces of the outlet (Lee, 2015).

Trust and privacy relates to the perceived social responsibility of media outlets, which includes providing news and information services to society (Middleton, 2011). In online and social media arenas, however, this trust breaks often as verification is pushed to the back-burner

in favor of speed and being first with the story (Fisher, 2014). This speaks to a lack of accountability due to the nature of the media organizations constantly chasing consumers across various social media platforms that act as arbiters deciding what content users are presented with by employing algorithms that try to guess what a user wants to see (Borden & Tew, 2007). Algorithms driving what social media users see within their feeds combined with selection biases derived from the intentionality of connecting with people who agree with preconceived beliefs leads to misinformation being spread as fact without any oversight or consideration of where the message originated (Bode & Vraga, 2015). Undoubtedly the willingness to believe what peers within the network share stems from a desire to gain intimacy with others online (Miguel, 2016). This concept must be understood because journalists are competing with the noise of such algorithms and biases, and to be successful they must learn how to counteract the negative attributes of social media's dissemination of information, perhaps by learning search engine optimization techniques that would allow their true accounts of news events to turn up higher in Internet searches, which could lead to more fact-based stories being spread via social media (Dunten, 2016).

Ethical Standards in Social Media

Ethics serves as the basis for trust in journalism because they allow consumers of media to understand the goals and objectives of a media organization (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011). Ethics is a system of principles and norms used to direct the behavior or actions of a given group of people, such as journalists (Ward & Wasserman, 2010; Plaisance, 2016). They exist as a set of rules of what journalists should and should not do in order to uphold the ideals of the profession and the organization for which they work as this relates to the role in society (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011). Ethical communication requires journalists to give a voice to all diverse opinions by providing information necessary to making informed decisions in a manner transparent and

without outside influence (Ceron, 2015; Lyon & Mirivel, 2011). Some studies suggest, however, codes of ethics exist for perception's sake only as they fail to represent how media organizations truly operate and lack how infractions to the codes will be penalized (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011).

Social media exists as a public forum, so it makes sense to adopt an understanding that everything published online is fair game for use by journalists and non-journalists alike; however, social media also exists as personal communities, which means unique cultures and etiquettes must be considered (Hess, 2014). This personal aspect of social media elicits the idea traditional journalism's ideal of objectivity is being downplayed in favor of transparency and a style of reporting putting emphasis on interpretation (Ward, 2011). The primary goal, however, remains as spreading news in a manner to create an informed public (Lyon & Mirivel, 2011). Media companies urge journalists to take part in social media because then those journalists can connect with readers and/or viewers along side breaking news, which builds a brand of trust and leads to profits for the organizations by consumers following links provided via social media to the website or other product of the news organization (Holton & Lewis, 2011).

Ward (2011) suggests the ambiguity surrounding social media's role in the journalism landscape should be combated by creating ethical guidelines for social media use altering traditional ethic stances that account for how different platforms operate and redefining objectivity to alter the notion reporting only facts is being objective and instead account for the reality that reporting is analytical. This breaks away from the traditional view of journalism's role in society, which suggested unbiased reporting was objective and preferred while opinionated reporting was advocacy and less desirable (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011). Objectivity proves to remain important in the sense it builds trust, but there exists the need for the use of the platforms to also contain a human element by the user being real and present without necessarily

being biased in sharing personal accounts of news as it transpires (Cimarusti, 2015). Social media creates an atmosphere of openness where anyone can participate and is not the sole arena of professional journalist (Carpenter & Lertpratchya, 2016; Segard, 2015; Plaisance, 2016). Therefore, Ward & Wasserman (2010) suggest a wider ethical standard for social media use should be adopted, one that includes professionals journalists and would-be citizen journalists, because changes in the media landscape call for more participation by various individuals. The print media has long been considered the Fourth Estate after the three branches of government, so new forms of media, such as social media, is considered the Fifth Estate (Hidri, 2012). In essence, social media allows for participation beyond the controlled communication traditionally found in print media, of which journalists serve as the gatekeeper to the information, and makes it harder to distinguish between producers and consumers of news (Ward & Wasserman, 2010).

Some researchers subscribe to the notion of American philosopher John Rawls's veil of ignorance, which aims at attaining impartiality by all participants in communication within a public sphere; however, other researchers push back against this suggesting, especially with social media, there are multiple spheres to consider making Rawls's stance false (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). Such philosophical considerations must be taken into account because diversity — including race, creed, gender, and voice — is part of ethics (Brislin & Williams, 1996). Social media involves unique communities around which individuals congregate, so ethics must be adapted to meet the needs of those cultures, such as considering if consent can be given to, for example, copying a tweet or Facebook post for use outside of the community in which it originated (D'Arcy & Young, 2012). Hess (2014) argues it is fair game once it is published online regardless of any assumed privacy. Without the adoption of a more universal code of ethics focusing on accuracy and objectivity, user-created content can be misappropriated, leading to copyright, libel, and other legal issues (Eid & Ward, 2009).

Ward & Wasserman (2010) suggest self-regulation may work if it is based upon “the idea of meaningful participation as hospitable, sincere and truth-seeking; global, and accessible across material, social and national borders; and tolerant, respectful and self-reflective” (p. 290). Perhaps everyone must accept responsibility for how communication exists online (Plaisance, 2016; Ward, 2014). However, for ethics across any platform to be effective, it seems clear there is a need for consistent understanding and application of codes (Brislin & Williams, 1996; Himelboim & Limor, 2011). Short of this ideal being reached, ethical issues in journalism must be considered on a case-by-case basis as the need arises, as long as it fits within the ideals of trust, truth, and accuracy (Cimarusti, 2015; Lăzăroiu, 2011; Roberts, 2012). Ward (2014) suggests future ethics will outline what journalists should say in their use of social media, how and when organizations should use social media postings from citizens, describe how journalists can provide commentary, differentiate between being an activist and pursuing a just cause, and provide methods for dealing with new media options, among other things.

Research concerning social media indicates millennials and others born after 1982 use social media the most, and these millennials place high value on transparency and clear expectations (Langett, 2013). Based upon this, users, whether professional journalists or not, all contribute equally as peers without any sort managerial hierarchy as would be found within a legacy media organization (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). Cimarusti (2015) says, “The media has entered an experimental age. The means by which we gather information, filter our thoughts, write our stories or produce our videos, all of it has changed” (p. 37). Sylvester (2011) says the key to navigating such new technologies is to remember context is key, and if something wouldn’t be published in a news article without context, it should be posted to social media with context. Clayfield (2012) suggests posting incremental updates to a story is akin to radio reports in they provide more constant exchanges with the audience. The difference between a radio

report and a tweet, for example, is the social media posting might contain details that wouldn't normally be included in a news report in order to help the audience members feel as if they were there alongside the reporter, such as when a juror forgets to turn off his cellphone and a classic rock song plays as his ringtone (Sylvester, 2011). Ward (2014) makes the point that this type of color commentary and other uses of social media are where updated models of ethics need to come into play to account for the new tools available to journalists.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

Privacy seems to be a chief concern of social media users, even though the essence of social media is an open and public dialogue with one's personal life and views (D'Arcy & Young, 2012; Hess, 2014). There appears to exist a disconnect with this desire for privacy when it comes to how journalists interact with communities of citizens via social media in that non-journalist users want media representatives to be open and human by displaying transparency and sharing personal insights and aspects of their lives without going to extremes of discussing mundane issues with fellow users (Lee, 2015; Lee, 2016). Compounding this disconnect is a lack of clear standards for how journalists should conduct themselves on social media. There is no universally accepted set of ethical guidelines for social media use (Cimarusti, 2015; Lăzăroiu, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Ward, 2011; Ward, 2014; Ward & Wasserman, 2010).

Moving forward, research should focus on how ethics for social media use continue to evolve with the changes in technology, such as the increasing use of live-streaming services including Snapchat and Facebook Live. This could include how ethics are being taught in journalism education programs. Delving into how organizations dictate use of social media by employees would provide valuable insight into aspects of privacy and participation. Use of information put forth on social media should also be considered in the context of crisis management to help develop ideas of how information, or misinformation, spreads and is

interpreted. Research also could look into how social media can bolster small-town, community journalism. These considerations would help guide the study of social media's impact on society and journalism by describing specific uses. From this hypotheses could be developed and tested using both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

Continued study of social media is necessary as technology continues to evolve. Technological advancements have undeniable impacts upon the journalism industry. They cause traditional ideals to be questioned and new methods of operation to be adopted. As social media is adopted by ever-increasing numbers of individuals and organizations within society, journalism must keep up with these trends to be able to perform its societal role effectively. If it doesn't keep up with the times, journalism runs the risk of becoming obsolete, which creates dire questions about the continued operation of the democracy.

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