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Using Classic Social Media Cases to Distill Ethical Guidelines for Digital Engagement

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Through systematic case analyses of much-discussed social media cases, both negative aspects and best practices of social media use are revealed. Ethical theory is applied to these cases as a means of analysis to reveal the moral principles associated with each case. Four cases are analyzed, ranging from bad to arguably innovative. Based upon comparing the moral principles upheld or violated, descriptive ethics are used to infer normative ethical guidelines to govern the use of social media. Fifteen ethical guidelines derived from the cases and normative moral theory are offered as a way to begin a discussion that leads to a deeper understanding of ethics in the burgeoning realm of digital engagement.

PURPOSE

Public relations as an industry and as an academic pursuit has been heavily involved in pioneering the digital engagement of publics via social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook or Twitter or social media sites such as Blogger. The public relations industry sees digital engagement as a new tool of public relations with more access to directly influence the attitudes and ultimately behaviors of publics than the more traditional media with its gatekeepers guarding access to publics. Digital engagement can be defined as an organization creating active and interested relationships with publics using Internet channels, such as product endorsements by prominent bloggers.

To conceptualize the construct of digital engagement, one can synthesize the work of the numerous scholars, building on J. E. Grunig's (1992) excellence theory and also on mass communication theories; specifically, agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), framing (Entman, 1993), and uses and gratifications (Katz, 1959) theory. The use of social media in the public relations industry is primarily as a tool to build an active relationship between an organization

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and a small, specifically segmented public. Publics should reciprocate with increased trust and loyalty toward the organization resulting in an engaged and lasting relationship.

Ethics in social media is a difficult topic. Social media has little in the form of standardized ethical norms and also has a relatively short history. However, the classic cases that are generally considered infamous or exemplar can provide a means for retrospective or historical analysis and recommendations for future standards.

HOW PUBLIC RELATIONS USES SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has transformed the way in which reporters gather and report information, the way public relations practitioners provide news, the way audiences collect information, and the nature of the interaction between publics and interact with organizations. Using social media as a part of a public relations campaign is commonplace, and digital specialty firms, such as Edelman Digital, provide social media expertise to the industry. Social media sites such as blogs, microblogs, video sharing sites, electronic forums, and other forms of interactive websites are used to maintain relationships with publics. Digital media provide rapidly breaking information, and digital forums are commonly used for product placement, advertising and promotion, celebrity endorsements, and news updates.

The interdependent fields of public relations and journalism have both had to adapt (Wright & Hinson, 2012) to these new or evolved forms of communication. In a longitudinal analysis from 2006 to 2012, Wight and Hinson (2012) found that "communication or public relations continues to be the most likely organizational function to be responsible for monitoring and managing an organization's blog and social media communication. Marketing was a distant second" (p. 2). Although the legal ramifications have been explored (Terilli, Driscoll, & Stacks, 2009) there are few ethical guidelines to govern the arena of social media. General ethical principles of public relations still apply, but social media combines many fast moving, irretractable, and often unfamiliar forms of communication, thereby requiring more specific guidance.

The contested terrain between public relations, advertising, marketing, and, to some extent journalism, have also been blurred in the digital realm. Richard Edelman, CEO of Edelman Digital Public Relations, wrote in a blog post:

> I have been one of the hard-liners opposing any blurring of the lines between advertising and PR. I am now prepared to change my position. I still believe that we have a primary task of proposing stories to journalists and bloggers. But there is a vital emerging business to be done in content creation for brands. In the past six months, the previously sharp distinction between paid and earned media has become blurred. Sponsored content, native advertising and long-term aggregation deals are all being discussed. (http://www.edelman.com/p/6-a-m/paid-media-a-change-of-heart/, n.p.)

In urging the public relations industry to consider digital media as "an unmatched opportunity" to create engagement, Edelman, widely considered an industry leader in digital engagement, recognizes how convergence has changed the industry (Edelman, 2013, n.p.). What is not so clear is how to ethically manage campaigns in the social media, digital engagement arena. Classic cases are widely discussed among convergence scholars but guidelines are being distilled in an ad hoc, catch as catch can basis rather than systematically. This article takes a few of those classic cases and examines them systematically, through the lens of moral philosophy, to help distill the rights and wrongs of using connected digital channels to create engagement among publics. However, not only the communication channels have blurred—audiences have changed as well.

ACTIVE AUDIENCES AND CHANGING FACE OF MEDIA USE

Media fragmentation it has progressed rapidly since the early 1990s. Both information production and consumption have been transformed. That dramatic change brings a need for ethical examination and standards tailored to the medium because the internet has fundamentally changed the way in which people interact with others, with organizations, with governments, and with business itself.

Harold Lasswell's (1948) legendary aphorism *who says what, to whom, through what channel*, and *with what effect* now must be changed to reflect both the fragmentation and speed of new communication, to read, *who says what, to which audiences and publics, through which channels*, and *with what multiple effects?* One could initially argue that those changes are relatively minor, but the characteristics of the Internet and its audiences multiply the role for ethics and ethical analyses. Further, the role of the audience has gone from a more passive information recipient to a more active information processor, and in many cases and active information seeker. The more active audience can be explained by theories ranging from uses and gratifications to the situational theory of publics, and has been solidly conceptualized by other scholars (Kim, 2011).

Multiple and fragmented media channels means multiple effects. By consequentialist moral philosophy, having a greater multiplier of effects created by social media also means having a greater weight of ethical responsibility. Consequentialist paradigms require the user to predict, with relative accuracy, the future ramifications of decisions.

A complex media environment also requires careful judgment about the communication sophistication of others, known as media literacy. Now information consumers must be literate about social media, meaning that they are aware of the pitfalls and dangers of unverified communications as well as the public nature of their posts. The consequences of communication in such an environment surpass the capabilities of all but the most sophisticated type of utilitarian calculus.

Immediacy, fragmentation, and permanency all contribute to the consequences of communicating in the digital realm. Erroneous communication is a likely result. No longer can an organization call an editor to request that a correction be run in one media outlet the next day; a story, even if erroneous, can make it around the globe through countless social media networks, microblogs, and secondary media outlets in only a matter of minutes. Wright and Hinson (2010) explained the reliance on new media: "In so many other news situations over the past few years, audiences learned the news from micro-blogs or social media first and well before television and other traditional news providers reported what was happening." The problems arising from that change are following technological innovation and pose numerous challenges, particularly when unverified information can become a form of news. Both the speed of the communication and the fragmentation of multiple receivers who may then re-communicate the message pose problems for media ethicists. Utilitarian ethics suggests practitioners should reason in a more complex fashion to determine the potential consequences, accounting for the greater good for the greatest number of people. The utilitarian paradigm would entail a thoughtfully weighed approach to efforts to create digitally engaged publics. Therefore, Twitter and micro-blogs pose an exceptionally complex moral dilemma that defies a consequentialist paradigm and is, perhaps, better suited to a deontological (principle-based) approach.

SHARED INTEREST IN ACCURACY

This speed and fragmentation raise concerns not only for public relations professionals but also for journalists. Not only do journalists find their watchdog role usurped, but they also note the potential dangers of having no gatekeepers, editors, or fact checkers to verify information. The days of journalists using multiple sources to verify facts are dwindling. Journalists today often have the role of correcting the errors of other communicators. On the other side of the news media, public relations professionals fear being panned, ignored, or misquoted and then seeing their organization as a "trending topic" on Google, Yahoo, or Twitter. Both professions have an interest in maintaining the ethical standards.

When the responsibility for clear and accurate information is high, the demand for ethical engagement with the message is also high. Means of clear ethical analysis for using social media to collect or disseminate information have not been widely adopted by the involved industries, with the exception of the Radio Television Digital News Association, which has adopted social media guidelines (Woefel, 2010). Moreover, it does not appear that consumers believe that traditional media outlets are ethical or want to rely upon them for information. The 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer study found the most trusted information source is "someone just like me" (Stacks & Michaelson, 2010). Social media has trumped traditional media, but as the cases analyzed in this study show, it is a terrain with few ethical constraints and, it seems, few ethical deliberations.

The use of social network sites by journalists and public relations professionals is not the only new communication channel bringing with it a myriad of ethical choices. There are paid Bloggers, YouTube™ campaigns, Astroturf sites, spammers, and serial e-mailers using fake identities on behalf of causes. Of the more than 70 million blogs being tracked by Technorati (Holter, 2010), most are without even a hint of objectivity. Anyone can have a blog and call himself or herself a "journalist" without credentials. Such would-be-journalists may have a large readership but have, in many cases, never studied journalistic ethics or codes of ethics and no experience with journalistic standards. Many blogs have an enormous readership, but their credibility is variable. Some "A list" blogs (of large readership and influence) do have a (limited) ethics statement, but these statements often then place the ethical responsibility on a media literate public. Courts have not upheld for bloggers the same First Amendment protections awarded to journalists. The reason normally cited is that bloggers lack the responsibility to editors that a traditional journalist holds (Hudson, 2010).

From a public relations perspective, the view is also not encouraging. McCorkindale (2009) found that of the 2010 Fortune 50 companies, 69% of those organizations were using social media sites. Bowen (2010), studying the Fortune 500, found that corporations do not use their own websites to engage publics but instead rely on other channels, including social media and blogs, to create digital engagement. Those forms of media are often not under the direct control of the public relations practitioner, and messages can become mutated, inaccurate, or worse.

Consumers of social media expect accurate information. In fact, Wright and Hinson (2010) found an increasing rate of respondents in their annual study who say that they expect blogs and social media "to be honest, tell the truth and advocate a transparent and ethical culture" with 50% answering affirmatively in 2010, up from 41% in 2009. Scholars do not know exactly how often that trust is misplaced, but the following cases indicate that serious ethical violations seem to occur with an astonishing regularity.

Not much about the ethical implications of communicating in social media space is new, other than its often-misleading veil of privacy in which users mistake public for private communication or organizations sell user data to marketers. As shown in the Ketchum case, reviewed below, the privacy that is assumed is often anything but, and readers have difficulty distinguishing if a person speaks as a representative of an organization or in the realm of personal opinion. Donath (2007) found that users often think of social network sites as private and safely-walled-off worlds in which they can share provocative content "or recount illegal activities such as drug use or underage drinking" (n.p.) without regard for negative consequences. It is likely that employers or potential employers will find the information, either purposefully or by becoming a friend of the person, creating a confused relational context. Light, McGrath, and Griffiths (2008) expounded that social network users "may find that their profile constructs a particular view of them that they may not want publicizing in a work context" (p. 8). The lines among personal, professional, and public have become blurred. For these reasons, ethical analyses by social mediated communicators are necessary to clear some of the ambiguity and prevent further missteps.

To further complicate matters, blogs themselves blur categories between personal and professional speech. Some organizations such as McDonald's manage employee bloggers (whose jobs include blogging about McDonald's) closely and monitor them. This is clearly a restriction of the blogger's First Amendment rights. However, if the blogger could be construed as a representative of the organization, or speaks on behalf of the organization, then the rules for commercial speech apply. The responsibility is on the blogger to identify clearly whether he/she is speaking as a private individual or as a representative of that organization. The opinions on General Motors "Fast Lane" blog clearly represent General Motors (for more on the legality, see Terilli et al., 2009). However, if GM's CEO decided to write a personal blog about his own opinions and topics, hosted on WordPress, for example, he should clearly state that his blog does not represent General Motors. With the changing terrain of media and social network communication, in both public relations and journalism, the rules of engagement also change and ethical norms are still in formation. The task of inspiring ethical communication across social media platforms is a difficult one, but one that ethicists absolutely must undertake.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

When faced with the task of creating ethical guidelines an analytical framework is essential. Based on the foregoing, utilitarian approaches are not as helpful as scholars and practitioners would wish due to the fragmented and multiple consequences of digital communication.

Deontology provides a more solid basis to guide should guide social media and the cases that were analyzed below. For that purpose, the analytical framework of Kantian deontology is reviewed briefly here so that its tenets can be discussed in light of the cases.

Deontology, or ethics based on duty, applies the order of rules, maxims, and principles. The deontological approach to ethics has been a “particularly popular” form of ethics applied in business and in computer science (Light et al., 2008, p. 2). The deontological perspective, because it is rules based and not focused on specific consequences, dovetails perfectly with the attempt to create ethical guidelines for use in social media to use across cultures, platforms, and situational specifics.

Deontology originated with the writings of Immanuel Kant (1704–1824) who refined ancient Greek philosophy to reflect laws beyond time, place, or cultural norms, or what philosophers call universal moral norms. Universal norms transcend situational specifics to distill the basic moral principle involved (e.g., truth, respect, honor, value of life). To make his ethical framework defy the situational ethics prevalent in his day (situational being those decisions made purely by their unique consequences), Kant (1783/1977) arrived at a three-pronged test: the categorical imperative. The deontological categorical imperative obligates all rational beings to be moral as their first order of duty by the virtue of their ability to engage in independent rational analyses. The three categorical imperative tests are as follows, with a brief description of the moral principle involved after each:

> CI 1: *“Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”* (Kant, 1785/1964, p. 88)

This test is an attempt to eliminate both cultural bias and preferencing of the self over others, known as prudential self-interest or selfishness. In this test, Kant obligates the decision maker to consider whether any other rational person would make the same decision. The test not only requires reversibility (more commonly known as the Golden rule of do unto others as you would have done unto you) but also universality, meaning that the decision would hold under rational analysis from all perspectives. Deontology requires the communicator to view the issue from a multiplicity of perspectives. Kant compared this approach of moral analysis to mathematics, writing: “It is absurd to have an opinion in pure mathematics.... In judging from pure reason, to have an opinion is not allowed at all” (Kant, 1997, p. 686). More thorough and better decisions should result from the lack of bias produced by this universal test. The universal nature of this test often makes it the hardest form of the categorical imperative to meet, and the case analysis below this moral principle is referred to as *duty* or *universality*.

> CI 2: *“Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.”* (Kant, 1785/1964, p. 96)

Form 2 of the categorical imperative is also called the law of dignity and respect. Kant held that all rational beings are equal regardless of birthright, financial considerations, appearance, and so on. The virtue that engenders equality is the ability to engage in an independent or autonomous rational analysis. Most of Kant’s philosophy studied and created rigorous means for rational analytics based solely upon reason and he held that all beings are equal because they can independently engage in such analyses, and are obligated to do so. Therefore, any action that abrogates the dignity or respect for another person is unethical. Form 2 of the categorical imperative seems particularly germane in the areas of media communicating with audience and public relations communicating with publics. It will be referred to in the case analysis below as *dignity* and *respect.*

> CI 3: *"If our conduct as free agents is to have moral goodness, it must proceed solely from a good will."* (Kant, 1963/1930, p. 18)

A good will, or pure moral intention, is the only incorruptible motivation in Kantian philosophy. Kant argued that other, even virtuous motivations could become self-serving or corrupted if taken to extremes. He also argued that the only morally worthy action is that which is undertaken because it is the right thing to do. Actions with a good intent, therefore, are the only actions that qualify as ethical. Many public relations activities fail to meet this third test of the categorical imperative because they work in a mode of advocacy or self-interest, rather than serving truth. In order to meet this standard, a rational analysis must reveal that good intention or a pure moral will is the basis of the communication. In the case analysis, this test will be referred to as *intention* or *good will*.

In summarizing, Kant's philosophy is based on a rational duty to uphold universal moral principles and the dignity and respect of those involved by communicating with good intention. In contrast to consequentialist theories, Kant did not allow the decision maker to take actions based on potential consequences. In fact, he wrote, "It is most reprehensible to derive the laws concerning what I **ought to do** from what **is done**, or to want to limit it to that" (Kant, 1997, p. 398) (bold emphasis in original).

Therefore, this essay attempts to build ethical guidelines by applying deontology to prominent cases in social media and digital engagement.

Examining some of the best and worst case examples can provide "best practices" and "worst practices" to begin building ethical guidelines for use in social media. Studying exemplars, either positive or negative, is a common way that scholars arrive at best practices for a field (Peters & Waterman, 1982). This study uses a case analytic approach to closely examine a few indicative cases and to draw conclusions from them for developing a set of ethical guidelines. The cases selected were chosen after conducting fact-finding research on 16 case ideas. Yin (1994) argued that "case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). This case analysis is meant to explore the ethical issues encountered in social media campaigns rather than to create a generalizable measure of those problems. Qualitative research excels at assessing meaning, process, and context (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Whitehead, 1985). Universal moral standards lacking in or exemplified in the cases, distilled through deontological analyses, were pattern matched (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and compiled to form Table 1. Similar concepts were collapsed into one guideline when possible, as long as the meaning was consistent. The result was 15 guidelines for social media that were then pretested by two professors who study social media for meaning and clarity, and edited along the lines of their written and verbal suggestions.

TABLE 1
Ethical Guidelines for Using Social Media

#	*Guideline*	*Rationale/Implementation**
1	Be fair and prudent	Consider fairness, justice, access. Consider right to know.
2	Avoid deception	If it is deceptive, even arguably, simply do not do it.
3	Maintain dignity and respect	Ensure that the communication maintains the dignity and respect of the involved publics.
4	Eschew secrecy	Barring trade/competition secrets, if an initiative warrants secrecy, something needs ethical examination.
5	Is it reversible?	How would you feel on the receiving end of the message? Is it still ethical then?
6	Be transparent	Paid speech should be transparently identified as such by "(Endorsement)" "(PaidMsg)" or similar phrasing.
7	Clearly identify	Personal speech and opinion versus speech as a representative of the organization should be identified.
8	Rational analysis	Examine messages from all sides; how would it look to other publics; how could it potentially be misconstrued?
9	Emphasize clarity	Even if the source or sponsorship is clear . . . make it clearer.
10	Disclose	Transparency in message creation and facts/data needed for an informed decision.
11	Verify sources and data	Be consistently credible; do not use rumor or speculation.
12	Establish responsibility	Does the message maintain your responsibility to do what is right?
13	Examine intention	Is your decision made with good will alone?
14	Encourage the good	Does your message help to build connectedness, engagement, and community?
15	Consistency builds trust	Consistency allows publics to know and understand you, and you can meet their expectations.

**Note*. The level of analysis can be changed by using the words "campaign" or "initiative" instead of "message," which is used here for simplicity.

THE CASES

The cases below are real-world incidents taken from a range of social media cases. Information below was compiled from numerous sources and fact checked before inclusion.

The "Wal-Marting Across America" Flog

Flog, meaning fake blog, is a term that did not exist until Edelman Public Relations created a front group to run a fake blog for Wal-Mart, in this landmark case. On October 9, 2006, *Business Week* ran a "top news" story questioning Wal-Mart's "relentlessly upbeat" blog run by "Laura and Jim," supposedly an average, everyday mom-and-pop traveling in an RV across the United States. The pair stopped for the night in Wal-Mart parking lots and wrote blogs and posted photos each day about their interactions with happy Wal-Mart employees. No sponsorship or backing was disclosed on the "Wal-Marting Across America" blog, so one would assume it was their personal blog. The ethical problems began to surface with the *Business Week* story and follow-up stories by bloggers and media alike. Deception became apparent and the story gained momentum: the two travelers were not who they claimed to be; they were not, in fact, related, and were actually a freelance writer (Laura) and a photojournalist from the *Washington Post* (Jim). The photojournalist was later sanctioned over this incident for working in violation of the *Post's* freelancing policy against being paid by interest groups.

As part of a concerted strategy to fight Wal-Mart's reputation for exploiting employees, Edelman spearheaded this initiative to highlight happy employees and average-person supporters. Edelman created an Astroturf group (e.g., front group) called "Working Families for Wal-Mart" (WFWM) that also funded the flog. The RV, the blog, expenses, and fees for Laura and Jim were paid by Wal-Mart and funneled through the front group. When the scheme came to public attention, the blogosphere and industry critics were infuriated. A week later, a second Edelman flog called "Paid Critics" came to light, also fronted by WFWM.

This case is rife with deception. Astroturfing by the creation of a front group and concealing the sponsor of the blog indicate a purposefully deceptive campaign. Edelman should have known better, as deceiving the public is something students learn not to do in their first public relations class. Edelman, to his credit, faced the PR media and admitted the error, noting that there would be mistakes made as social media were introduced into the public relations toolkit of tactics.

The Wal-Mart flog fails the first formulation of the categorical imperative because deception cannot be universalized. Edelman's action also fails the second test of the categorical imperative because concealing the real source of the website does not respect the dignity of the public, nor does it respect their intellectual need for open and honest information to form independent judgments. Concealing the source of the blog/flog not only fails to meet the second form of the categorical imperative, but actively disrespects the dignity of publics by intentionally deceiving them. The Wal-Mart case also fails the third form of the categorical imperative because it was not undertaken with the pure moral intention to tell the truth and to honestly represent Wal-Mart's employees. The actions fall into the ends justifies the means type of decision making. Even using less rigorous forms of ethical decision making than Kant's categorical imperative, the case represents a dramatic failure of ethics, both in the journalistic sense and in the public relations sense. Deliberately concealing sponsorship, astroturfing, and flogging are practices that violate the moral duty communicators have to society to be universally honest, to communicate with dignity and respect, and to act with good will. From applying deontology to an analysis of this case, the following ethical guidelines can be posed:

> Be fair; treat publics with the respect that they deserve by providing the full information necessary for a thoroughly considered decision. Do not engage in deception. Avoid secrecy because it is an indication that deception is at play or used to conceal unfair practices. Disclose all needed information.

Micro-Blog Fiascos: Ketchum Public Relations' FedEx Tweet; Carl's Jr. Endorsements

The micro-blog Twitter, with its 140-character status updates, has created much consternation in the digital arena. In arguably the most infamous case, an offensive Tweet was sent by "@keyinfluencer"—a Ketchum public relations executive, arriving in Memphis to present at a large client, FedEx. His tweet said: "True confession but I'm in one of those towns where I scratch my head and say 'I would die if I had to live here.' " Of course, FedEx intercepted the Tweet, was offended, and publicly decried the agency, the account executive, and the incident. FedEx, in the form of an open letter, questioned if Ketchum was worth its fee if the tweet exemplified expert public relations.

Though Twitter began as a simple "what are you doing?" status update, it is innocuous. Courts have ruled that libel can take place via publication on Twitter. Now that the Library of Congress is archiving all Twitter transmissions, there is little doubt that tweets are indelible, published public speech. Other cases of deception involving Twitter include celebrity and product endorsements that do not disclose paid endorsements. For example, Kim Kardashian's $10,000-per-tweet endorsement of Carl's Jr.® fast food leaves the uninitiated believing that the thin celebrity is constantly eating bacon cheeseburgers and fries. It was only recently disclosed that Kardashian tweets for cash. To avoid deception, product placement or celebrity endorsement should be disclosed. Paid Tweeters should indicate that they are paid to endorse products, avoiding confusion among their less media-literate followers. Disclosure could enhance the effectiveness of genuine endorsements and would make celebrities potentially more cautious about the organization with whom they agree to be a paid endorser. Both outcomes are more ethically responsible than concealing the relationship. Few consumers are likely to make purchasing decisions on a personal endorsement via social media alone, and they are less likely to view the organization as credible or trustworthy when such a deceptive practice inevitably comes to light.

There are now many scandals and impending legal cases based on ill-conceived Twitter posts. Many organizations, including Kitchen Aid and the Red Cross, have also had errant posts from employees using Twitter. The NCAA is investigating numerous collegiate sports figures based upon their Twitter posts regarding illegal benefits from sports agents. Hotel heiress Paris Hilton will potentially face criminal drug charges in which evidence involves ill-conceived Twitter posts. Obviously these actions cannot be universalized because they do not respect the self or others, have no grounding in rational thought, and only hold the intention of self-satisfaction.

In the cases of Ketchum/FedEx and Carl's Jr., the public relations industry is again at fault. It is apparent in the case of the Ketchum Tweet the dignity and respect of publics was not maintained. In the case of Carl's Jr., the dignity and respect consumers was also abridged by concealing the fact that the celebrity was paid each time she Tweeted about the product. Concealment should raise a red flag anytime it is employed because it generally means that the dignity and respect of publics is not being maintained. The Ketchum case is unsalvageable in terms of ethics, failing all three forms of the categorical imperative, but the Carl's Jr. case could have been ethical by employing honesty and transparency. However, the case again represents a dramatic failure of the public relations industry to base decisions on deception rather than transparency.

Fact checking is also relevant. If @keyinfluencer checked his followers on Twitter, he might have realized that FedEx would intercept his Tweet and refrained. Further, both Ketchum and Carl's Jr. should have had social media policies that require transparency and a clear view that the person speaks on behalf of the organization (or not) or is offering paid endorsements (or not). Using Kant's formula of dignity and respect to analyze the cases involving Twitter also leads to a concern that the publics have access to information from all sides of an issue so that decisions can be made rationally. Those concerns yield these guidelines:

> Be transparent; paid speech should be identified as such. Identify communication as personal, individual speech and opinion versus speech as a representative of the organization, so that publics have the information to evaluate it appropriately. Check relevant facts. A rational analysis should examine messages from all sides and viewpoints.

Customer Loyalty Programs on SNS; Taco Bell

There are numerous examples of outstanding fan pages and customer loyalty programs using Facebook and Twitter. Ethically, the majority of these programs disclose that they are run by the organization sponsoring the product or service by designating themselves as the "official" page. These official pages normally provide promotion codes or discount codes to followers or are used to announce and promote new products or initiatives to further engagement.

Taco Bell runs one such SNS "fan club" that is successful because it neither overcommunicates nor underutilizes the list of its followers. New taco creations and promotions are announced, special discounts offered, but the messages are clearly labeled as officially generated by Taco Bell. The messages differ from advertising because they are connecting to "fan" publics who have opted to join the Taco Bell list, and these messages are based on an ongoing relationship with the current customer. The page can be used by the organization to conduct environmental scanning in its issues management program. Fans of Taco Bell post compliments and complaints that can then be tracked to identify emerging issues or followed up on by management. Posts include product commentary, often discussing favorite menu items, or sometimes providing input for correction in product offerings, such as the fan post: "I miss the Chicken Enchilada Grilled Burrito—I think it is time for it to reappear." Such messages provide valuable feedback to corporate in both a product development sense, for marketing purposes, for the test kitchen, and, perhaps most importantly, for relationship management.

These types of relationships are termed *exchange relationships* because they involve the exchange of information or ideas for some form of promotion support, usually product discounts. Exchange relationships are ethical as long as there is no exploitation or deception involved. An ethical analysis of the Taco Bell Facebook page reveals no deception, so there is no violation of ethical principles in an honest and transparent exchange relationship such as those in this category. The deontological universal duty of honesty is maintained.

The third form of the categorical imperative, good intention, is present in what appears to be good will to provide information on available services or products. Further, these types of social media campaigns reward followers, members, or fans for their loyalty with financial incentives such as special discounts or promotions, serving to help maintain a long-term relationship with interested publics. Social media programs such as Taco Bell's maintain the dignity and respect of publics by valuing a relationship with them, thereby upholding the second form of the categorical imperative.

Exploitation is not likely in this type of social media campaign because individuals voluntarily opt in as "friends," "followers," or "fans," and they are also free to opt out at any time. As long as no exploitation (such as spam email) is involved, this use of social media is an ethical public relations practice because the organization has a duty and responsibility to treat its publics fairly, provide accurate information, and to maintain reversibility (that is, to treat publics how you would wish to be treated) and universality (any organization could do the same). The intention behind such social media programs is more ambiguous, and is no doubt at least partially self-serving. But in the case of Taco Bell's Facebook page, the site appears to be maintained with the interests of publics in mind.

Taco Bell provides a positive example of conducting a social media campaign with publics. Although there is some emphasis on exchange relationships (sales) it is not deceptive or exploitative; the followers of Taco Bell also get to give input and seek information. In meeting the three tests of the categorical imperative, a rational observer can say that the campaign is ethical. Through its universal nature, dignity and respect for publics, and apparent goodwill the Taco Bell social media campaign provides numerous normative guidelines for other campaigns to follow:

> Emphasize clarity in your communication. Maintain responsibility through SNS channels. And, examine intention–the communication must be undertaken with good will alone.

Starbucks's "my Starbucks idea" Website

Starbucks® provides a classic case in the development of social media and the active engagement of publics. Starbucks was among the first large organizations to take social media to an innovative level by using it to actively conduct research and generate public feedback. The idea page promotes engagement of the public with the organization, and offers a space in which publics can share ideas as well as discuss topics with each other. The page invites participation with the opening:

> You know better than anyone else what you want from Starbucks. So tell us. What's your Starbucks Idea? Revolutionary or simple—we want to hear it. Share your ideas, tell us what you think of other people's ideas and join the discussion. We're here, and we're ready to make ideas happen. Let's get started (http://mystarbucksidea.force.com/).

By actively inviting participation, the organization is not only promoting engaged relationships but is also able to use the site as a cost-effective source of research data. The site provides a valuable information, opinion, and attitudinal data freely offered by Starbucks customers. Numerous ideas that originated with Starbucks customers on the website have been launched, from recycled Starbucks cards to eco-friendly cup sleeves. In addition to the cost savings, publics to engage with Starbucks on the website will, in most cases, have increased knowledge about Starbucks and relationship satisfaction with the organization resulting in increased brand loyalty. In public relations terms, the "my Starbucks idea" campaign creates a win-win scenario.

Starbucks maintains the deontological duty of dignity and respect for its publics by allowing them to have a voice in the operations, management, and policies of the organization. Therefore, the initiative appears to be ethically sound because it gives a forum for discussion, debates, complaints, or new ideas which are open for anyone to join. The intention behind such a fan page must be genuine; in other words, someone in the organization must really be listening, monitoring the feedback, and considering the ideas of publics as worthy of respect (rather than exploitation or similar). A good moral will is required: such a page cannot be "just for show" and still be ethical. The deontological standard of a good intention or morally good will requires that the organization use the page to consider ideas that are meritorious and being open to changes within the organization, rather than simply trying to foster management's ideas among publics. Starbucks seems to use the campaign to generate dialogue with publics in an ethical manner because it seems to genuinely feel a duty to listen to publics and be open to change. Encouraging a sense of connectedness and community among Starbucks fans adds social value to the campaign.

In establishing the campaign to encourage dialogue and both positive and negative feedback, it appears that Starbucks values its publics, maintains their dignity and respect, and uses the space with good intent. The deontological tests of the categorical imperative are met in this campaign. These actions help to build trust, find truth, and build long-term relationships. Long term, trusting relationships must be built on authenticity, credibility, and consistently ethical behavior. The "my Starbucks idea" vase is an excellent example of how employing ethical principles in management decision making can result in increased organizational effectiveness, better relationships with engaged publics, and enhanced trust built on consistently ethical actions. Thus, the Starbucks case provides illustration of these ethical guidelines:

> Encourage the good, helping to build connectedness, engagement, and community. Consistency builds trust; consistency allows publics to know and understand you, and you can meet their expectations.

CONCLUSIONS AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES

A crucial aspect of social media use is considering the ethical implications of not only the message but the medium. The rapidly changing communication environment and the speed with which messages move and fragment only heighten the ethical imperative for accuracy, honesty, and full disclosure. Those pressures are felt by journalists, social media experts, and public relations professionals. Grunig (2009) explained, "if the social media are used to their full potential, I believe they will inexorably make public relations practiced more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible" (p. 1). Neill and Drumright (2012) found that public relations professionals are increasingly being called upon to act as ethics counsels in their organizations, coinciding with Wright and Hinson's (2012) finding that public relations managers normally direct an organization's social media strategies.

The social media space should not change journalists' watchdog responsibilities but rather should enhance them by the increased democratization of both information access via the Internet and information output by publics. Neither journalists nor public relations professionals have control of messages. Publics have become an inextricable part of the communication process by using social media.

Finally, we must consider the sociological concept of *anomie* when communicating in the technological world. Durkheim (1951) coined the term and he described anomie as a state of disconnectedness, social isolation, or the lack of a social ethic. By the very paradox of its nature, social media can both connect a person to distant contacts and make him or her feel isolated from those nearby. Durkheim connected the idea to ethics by considering the extent to which moral norms are socially constructed. To maintain our best, most ethical selves, social media should be used to encourage the good, to laud the praiseworthy, and to encourage that which we most value about ourselves and in our organizations. Using social media to increase connectedness and community can help fight the isolated state of anomie that Durkheim described as a danger to society itself and to the individual.

Scholars can learn much from both these exemplary cases. With the analyses of the above case examples in mind, Table 1 presents the 15 ethical guidelines derived from the cases. They are offered as a way to frame the short history of classic social media cases, to learn from both the good and the bad examples, and to begin an exploration of ethics in a fragmented media environment. Adhering to ethical principles is the responsibility of each individual communicator, public relations professional, journalist, blogger, and content creator. Although the digital realm is ever-changing, the ethical guidelines offered here represent a good start for future analysis based on past practices.

Although these ethical guidelines do not claim to be exhaustive, and many new cases will no doubt emerge highlighting new principles for consideration, they are a good start. Communication professionals who implement social media initiatives would be well advised to consider the harm to their reputations that can be caused by ignoring ethics in the technological space. It is hoped that these ethical guidelines will not only foster more ethical use of social media by communication professionals, but that ethicists will take up the mantle to conduct studies examining the application of ethical principles in the rapidly changing and fragmented media environment that constitutes social media and creates digitally engaged publics.

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