

## The Role of Ethics in Political Communication

Liaqat Ali

Department of Management Science, Indus University.

### Abstract

Argument first makes a simple summing up of what is going to be discussed and why this is a timely discussion in the US. With the increasing power and influence of the media in American culture, there has been a surge of political programs both on TV and on the radio commenting on the news. The US has always been known for its individualism and this has become an ideal for citizens to meet. However, if this is the case, then politics becomes dangerous because it forces citizens to conform to more collectively accepted ideologies. Many citizens see the mass media as doing little more than maintaining the status quo. Not only are media professionals forced to look out for their own interests, many are also forced to compromise for the good of the public. This is what gives media its credibility'their objectivism. The big question that is asked is how media professionals will be able to balance their own desires and interests with those of the public. It is eventually revealed that there are no social obligations that force media professionals to think about anything other than their own best interests and that they should not have to justify breaking these ethical standards. Even so, after examining a study in relation to his own, it is contested that Americans have been shown to not allow their politics to be affected by media. This hypothesis is then backed up with a few examples concerning the Democratic primaries and the congressional elections. The media serves two purposes: to inform and to persuade. However, the American media today increasingly focuses on persuasion. Last, the relation between the media and democracy is discussed. There have consistent fears of the transformation the US from a print culture to a television culture. Finally, the consequences of the media's ability to shape political reality are discussed. The media can end up eroding the credibility and viability of the democratic process and can also literally eradicate public policy discussion on key issues. It would thus appear that it is in the best interest of the

American public sphere to begin considering the establishment of ethical guidelines to govern the media industries.

Keywords ethics, political communication, media influence, objectivity, credibility, public interest, democracy, ethical guidelines.

## 2. Introduction

The reflection addresses the ethical dimension of political communication. What is the role of political communication in democracy? To what extent is political communication ethical or non-ethical, and what are their consequences on the governed? To tackle these questions, it reflects on Matteoli's theory, taking some cues from Voltaire. In a representative democracy the relationship between governors and the governed is essentially unbalanced: a few governors control the lives of many governed. As a logical consequence, the relationship between the governors and the governed must necessarily be asymmetric. The governed are at the mercy of decisions taken by the governors, even in cases where these decisions are arbitrary, or non-motivated. Given this imbalance, the ruled can and should do everything possible to be correctly informed by the rulers. Political communication either sets a basis for a well-informed electorate or hides reality. The first case is compatible with democracy, the latter is not. But hiding reality can be obtained, if a lie is maintained time after time, until it is received as a truth. This strategy requires that lies are broadcasted long enough, and this necessity creates a problem of ethical dimension in communication (Pomilio, 2012). Hence, the problem can be summarized in two different yet strictly correlated questions: 1. How are political scandals managed by politicians and journalists in order to protect the source, even if the piece of information that was agreed upon to be kept confidential, would potentially benefit the democratic process? 2. How do journalists (de)construct the image of semi-private meetings with politicians and business exponents to protect the source, whose behaviour, under doubt, appears as detrimental for democracy? The nature of both issues is composite, hence it would be more appropriate to address them by splitting them into different sub-questions. The context of the questions is editorial boardroom meetings between a politician and

newspaper/daily bulletin editors over 3 years. The unit of analysis is a scandal, the “Soros case”. A by-product of the reflection is a structural relationship between democracy, the source protection system and a specific use of semi-private meetings as a strategy to manage the media in order to avoid negative electoral outcomes. This scheme is represented in the conceptual model proposed. The results show the potential of some ethical conduct of political communication to play a key role in a democracy, acting as a communication channel to reveal a lie, so that transparency returns in the relationship between governors and the governed (Bergman, 2019).

### **3. Ethical Frameworks in Political Communication**

Political communication informs and engages the processes by which different individuals and collectives debate, make collective decisions, and act subsequently about shared issues, concerns and risks. In the emerging societal context, political communication analyses ethical practices and thoughts in the open and transparent interactions with reference to non-state sectors, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, lobbyists, public relations, or the media, as well as a growing number of governance networks, public-private partnerships, or private regulation and standard-setting bodies. A surge in normative debates around cross-border and global governance and whether new forms of democracy can manage globalization has been noticeable in the field. Recently, ethical issues have become an increasingly prominent concern in many areas of behavior, knowledge and industry, none less so than in political communication. Ethics play a crucial role due to the power, prestige and influence that mass media communication enjoyment encompassed in the broader perspective of initiating and reflecting political processes in contemporary societies. This development has generated in an increased pressure also for research in the field to reflect upon the role and evaluation of ethical considerations in setting as well as investigating the political, economic and communicative platforms and environments of media content. Such pressure can easily be confirmed by browsing through the special issues and conference calls of many journals and conferences dealing with mass communication or political science that have been issued in recent

years. The focus of this contribution is to exemplify different theoretical perspectives, operationalizable approaches, and findings of current research in order to evaluate their potential to advance the reflective evaluation of media content or audience behavior. On the one hand, such a focus may enable media practitioners, decision-makers or social scientists in a broader sense to 'take stock' with respect to the current state-of-the-art literature more easily (Grill & Dawson, 2015). On the other hand, the compilation of applications of ethical considerations in political communication endeavors to act as a referral source when selecting the most appropriate sets of ethical guidelines or highlighting the most significant findings according to the research questions of ongoing research. Thus, the purpose is to approach a research area with a broad interest by integrating different exemplary methods and results in a structured fashion.

#### **4. Case Studies and Analysis**

In exploring the mainstream and cosmopolitan frameworks in the context of cases, given of each framework will apply, and given of each framework will be violated. After the presentation of the case studies, this analysis will conclude with a focus on how the argument of the implications across different mainstream and cosmopolitan stakeholders for understanding ethical and unethical communication in the political sphere. Ethical communication and the dissemination of disinformation are perennial issues in politics. Knowledge of these issues continues to be important for political actors, educators, and voters, who rely on information given in the public sphere for a range of political decisions. Yet, as the deconstruction of the mainstream and cosmopolitan ethical and unethical political communication case studies shows, knowledge about them can also be reasonably complex, reflecting the complex political, socio-cultural and economic influences which converge in its reproduction (Austin & Jin, 2015). These complex influences in the case studies considered here operate distally through the political-economic structures and through the crumbling trust that underpins those structures, but also more proximally through the political actions (and inactions) of politicians and governments and the frames and agendas set by journalists.

Of course, these forces are not immutable, and there are suggestions for strategies or actions by stakeholders across both mainstream and cosmopolitan frameworks which may at least begin to erode the causes of unethical communication and in turn diminish its effect.

### **5. Impact of Unethical Practices**

Unethical practices in political communication affect the democratic order through a variety of means, putting individuals and groups at a disadvantage. A growing body of research has identified a plethora of such practices that have only been made worse by the rise of social media (Toledano & Fay Wolland, 2011). The implications of social media extend beyond the individual, as unethical communication can serve to spread misinformation, manipulation or petition (hate speech etc.) to a wide audience in rapid time. This not only corrupts the democratic process and undermines public trust in political institutions, but also is a threat to the social order. This paper reflects on the wider societal implications from the point of view of two important political theorists, aiming to issue a stark warning about the careless use of communication by politicians and other stakeholders with the promise of addressing the need for greater regulation in the domain of political communication in the aftermath of these thoughts. A crucial feature of a democratic society is the idea of open deliberation concerning issues of common concern. However, the rise of social media also means people can be trapped in filter bubbles or echo chambers with similar-minded others. These two factors (targeted misinformation and the closure of social networks) not only makes it more difficult to argue against one's opponents, but can also increase the degree of polarization if individuals of opposing views fall into suspicion or hatred of the other camp. With discussion stalling, little progress can be made in forming political opinions and taking part in the democratic process. Apart from harming political discourse and making it harder for people to form opinions, unethical practices in political communication also lower the rate of voting and signing petitions. In particular, voters on the fence are more likely to abstain as they are more likely to question their own opinions. Yet, there is more to the quest for democratic accountability. (Wijaya, 2022)

## 6. Regulatory Measures and Enforcement

Political communication is a key of democratic process and as a field of study is interdisciplinary. Contemporary political messages are shared in a wide range of media, from traditional ones, like newspapers, radio, television, to new and social media, internet based. In Albania, the political communication, the discourse analyses, or researchers in the fields of media and journalism. Neglecting the very important issue of the ethics in political communication.

A central concern is ethics in political communication: how is conceptualized, which are most violating standard ethical principles, in which way can be improved. It is explored regulatory and enforcement measures, including policies, laws and guidelines, it is addressed at the role of regulatory bodies and the effectiveness of such bodies in enforcing existing standards, in place and thoughts about other standards needed, it is addressed at challenges for ethics in political communication associated with new technologies, and it is reflected on how these challenges can best be met. It is recognized that a culture of ethics should be promoted in political communication. This can't only be achieved through regulation and enforcement, but also through education, training, and personal commitment. Finally, it is compiled views on ethics in political communication expressed in the International Conference. (Castro Seixas, 2021)

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