

Education for Justice (E4J)  
University Module Series: Integrity & Ethics

# Module 10

## Media Integrity and Ethics<sup>\*</sup>

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## Introduction

This Module discusses the relationship between the concepts of ethics and media. It aims to facilitate introspective reflection on the ways in which all of us, as individuals, play a part in the creation and dissemination of media. The Module explores the critical importance of ethics to both traditional forms of media, such as journalism, as well as modern forms of social media. The advent of social media technologies and digital news has increased the ethical responsibility of individuals in this field, especially given the global reach and powerful impact of these new media forms. These changes, together with fake news and increasing media restraints worldwide,

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\* Developed under UNODC's Education for Justice (E4J) initiative, a component of the Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration, this Module forms part of the E4J University Module Series on Integrity and Ethics and is accompanied by a Teaching Guide. The full range of E4J materials includes university modules on Anti-Corruption, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Cybercrime, Firearms, Organized Crime, Trafficking in Persons/Smuggling of Migrants, Counter-Terrorism, as well as Integrity and Ethics. All E4J university modules provide suggestions for in-class exercises, student assessments, slides, and other teaching tools that lecturers can adapt to their contexts, and integrate into existing university courses and programmes. All E4J university modules engage with existing academic research and debates, and may contain information, opinions and statements from a variety of sources, including press reports and independent experts. All E4J university modules, and the terms and conditions of their use, can be found on the [E4J website](https://www.unodc.org/e4j/).

render this Module important and relevant to students from all disciplines.

In recognition of this changing landscape, the Module extends the discussion of ethical responsibilities beyond professional journalists to news consumers, social media users, and the so-called “citizen journalists”. It is designed to help lecturers enhance their students’ understanding of who exactly a media provider or consumer is, and what type of ethical considerations need to be considered by those who are in these roles. The Module also seeks to provide students with an understanding of the detrimental effect that a lack of integrity and ethics in media provision and consumption can have.

The Module is a resource for lecturers. It provides an outline for a three-hour class but can be used for shorter or longer sessions, or extended into a full-fledged course (see: Guidelines to develop a stand-alone course).

## Learning outcomes

- Appreciate the responsibilities of media and the ethical dimensions of media creation, provision and consumption
- Understand the ethical obligations that media providers have towards society
- Make ethical decisions regarding media, whether as providers or consumers professionals or non-professionals, or as mere users of social media
- Analyse media ethics cases and issues using the Potter Box decision-making model

## Key issues

Journalism has long been considered a pillar of democracy, given its function of communicating vital information to the public regarding institutions and individuals in positions of power. An informed citizenry is critical for good governance and essential for exposing and preventing corruption. This assumes that the information is accurate, truthful and non-biased. Indeed, these are some of the ethical responsibilities of media professionals that the Module explores. The discussions are relevant to all students who are media consumers and wish to understand what ethical obligations they can expect media professionals to uphold. In addition to consuming media, many students play an active role in the production of media, especially social media. Therefore, after discussing the ethical obligations of media professionals, the Module proceeds to address the responsibility of all individuals to practice ethical behaviour in the creation and dissemination of social media. The Module first examines key terms and concepts.

## Terms and concepts

Two key concepts used in this Module are “media” and “ethics.” The word ethics comes from the Greek *ethos*, which means character, or what a good person is or does to have good character. The concept of ethics is explored in detail in Integrity and Ethics [Module 1](#) (Introduction and Conceptual Framework), which introduces

students to Richard Norman's definition of ethics: "the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the nature of human values, of how we ought to live, and of what constitutes right conduct" (Norman, 1988, p. 1). Media is defined by the [Merriam-Webster's Dictionary](#) as "the system and organizations of communication through which information is spread to a large number of people". A more current and relatable definition for students is provided by [Dictionary.com](#), which defines media as "the means of communication, [such] as radio and television, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet, that reach or influence people widely".

The concept of "media ethics" refers broadly to the proper standards of conduct that media providers and disseminators should attempt to follow. With modern technology and increased globalization in today's world, there are many more branches of media than there were in earlier times in history. These new media forms trigger new ethical issues. For example, today many ethical issues arise in relation to the Internet, which did not exist just 40 years ago. As a result of the wide range of media platforms and vast accessibility, different issues may surface depending upon the branch of media in question.

Technology has also led to the emergence of so-called "citizen journalists" as people are recording, photographing and videotaping newsworthy events as they unfold (Bulkley, 2012). Citizen journalists further compound media ethics issues and will be discussed in one of the exercises. An underlying theme in the subject of media ethics across many different branches of media is the potential conflict between the standards for ethical behaviour and companies' desire for profit. This and similar issues are discussed in [Module 11](#) (Business Integrity and Ethics), which delves deeper into ethical issues confronting private sector actors, and [Module 14](#) (Professional Ethics), which discusses the issues of professional codes of ethics and role morality.

It is important for students to grasp that conflicts of interest exist across many domains within the media and assess what ethical standards are required for journalists, consumers, and companies or individuals who play a role in the provision and dissemination of information to the public. As all parties involved must adhere to ethical standards, this Module considers the ethical principles for both media professionals and non-professionals who engage in creation and dissemination of media. It then allows students to holistically engage in the material through exercises.

### Ethical principles for journalists and other media providers

While the Module considers ethical obligations of both media professionals and non-professionals, it should be noted that media professionals are held to higher ethical standards compared to non-professionals. They have duties to provide society with accurate, truthful and non-biased information. Media professionals have ethical obligations towards society simply by virtue of their activities as journalists, reporters, anchors, or owners of media corporations. The role of the media in contemporary times is affected by the commercialization and diversity of media actors, which

include grass roots and independent media, corporate media, advocacy groups, consolidated media companies, state-owned and privatized media. Media ethical obligations apply to all of these.

Many media houses, online platforms, professional associations and other organizations have developed ethical codes for journalists. Over 400 ethical codes for journalists have been adopted worldwide, many of which can be accessed at the [database](#) of the Accountable Journalism Site. The Code of Principles adopted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in 1954 has been regarded as a universal statement about ethics in journalism. According to the [IFJ Code](#), the core values of journalism are truth, independence and the need to minimise harm. Another influential ethics code for journalists is the one adopted in 2014 by the U.S.-based Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). The [SPJ Code of Ethics](#) is available in numerous languages including Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Its Preamble states that “an ethical journalist acts with integrity” and the code has four foundational principles that call on journalists to: (1) seek truth and report it, (2) minimize harm, (3) act independently, and (4) be accountable and transparent. Under each principle, the SPJ Code of Ethics contains further guidance and calls on journalists to approach their work with the highest standard of ethics in mind. These principles, which are discussed in further detail below, apply to traditional journalism as well as modern forms of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. While some of the examples below are from the SPJ Code, they apply universally since similar principles and values are embraced by journalism codes around the world.

#### (1) “Seek truth and report it”

With regard to the first principle (seek truth and report it), the SPJ Code calls on journalists to take responsibility for the accuracy of their work, confirm information before releasing it, and rely on original sources whenever possible. The Code promotes and encourages journalists to use their work to facilitate greater transparency of those in power. For example, the Code requires that journalists be persistent and brave in their constant effort to hold those in power accountable. Journalists, according to the SPJ Code, must provide a platform for those in society who may not have a voice. It also states that journalists should be supportive of open and civil dialogue in which different points of view are exchanged, even if the journalists themselves find those views objectionable. Journalists have a special responsibility to be watchdogs over the government and public affairs. Furthermore, journalists should endeavour to ensure the transparency of public records and public business. In this sense, the SPJ Code appears to promote the idea that journalists owe a duty to the public to provide accurate information, to facilitate open access and transparency of the government and other individuals in authoritative positions, and to provide those without a voice in society the opportunity to speak and share their beliefs, perspectives, and experiences.

Experts on media ethics echo the value and importance of truth-seeking by journalists. Journalists and news organizations should be truthful and their reporting should accurately represent the issues or stories being reported. However, with this

in mind, it is also critically important that journalists maintain respect for individual privacy while seeking the truth. At times, the individual's right to privacy may clash with the public's need to know information. There are ethical obligations on both sides of every decision and therefore journalists face difficult choices.

## (2) "Minimize harm"

The drafters of the SPJ Code emphasize under the second principle that journalists must also minimize harm that could be caused by their reporting and that ethical journalism demands that sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public are treated as human beings deserving of respect. As such, journalists should consider individual privacy rights as well as the impact their reporting may have on individuals in general. The Code states that journalists must show compassion for individuals who may be affected by news coverage, which may include juveniles or victims of crimes. Journalists should also be mindful of cultural differences when reflecting on the ways in which news or information may be received. The Code advises journalists to show "heightened sensitivity" in these circumstances (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014).

The tension between the competing goals of publishing information for the greater good of the public and refraining from sharing such information in order to protect individual privacy rights raises ethical questions and requires journalists to consider and weigh various factors in these strategic decisions. Harm to the individual may take the form of invasion of privacy or the dissemination of information that offends or damages him or her in some way.

In these decisions, journalists may consider various schools of thought, including virtue ethics, utilitarianism and deontology (Ess, 2013, p. 262), which are discussed in Integrity and Ethics [Module 1](#). The basic premise of utilitarianism is that the morality of an action depends on whether it maximizes overall social 'utility' (or happiness). More specifically, utilitarianism is the idea that the goal of an action should be the largest possible balance of pleasure over pain or the greatest happiness for the largest number of people (see Module 1 for further explanation and sources).

Utilitarianism can either justify the release of information to the public despite a slight violation of privacy rights, or it can justify the withholding of information in order to protect privacy rights in certain circumstances. Utilitarianism can justify individual privacy, and correlatively, property rights, insofar as these things lead to the greatest happiness for the largest number of people, as opposed to just that individual. Utilitarianism can be used to justify sacrificing the privacy of a few individuals if it would facilitate greater access to information for the general public.

Deontologists, on the other hand, present a competing perspective. They provide a more straightforward defence of individual privacy rights, because these rights are arguably necessary to our basic existence and practices as autonomous moral agents. Thus, deontologists would favor the protection of individual privacy over the release of information that would serve the greater good to the detriment of the

individual. Deontology is also defined in Module 1. Its basic premise, according to that Module, is that morality depends on conformity to certain principles or duties irrespective of the consequences. Therefore, the deontologists' response to this question in media ethics would be that we should not violate individual privacy rights of others, as we would not want our own privacy rights violated.

These competing perspectives inform approaches to questions in media ethics and are particularly relevant when addressing questions of protecting individual privacy and minimizing harm to the individual, on the one hand, and serving the greater public good on the other.

### (3) "Act independently"

Journalists are also called on to act independently, which is the third principle outlined in the SPJ Code. Under this principle, the drafters of the Code emphasize that the primary responsibility of ethical journalism is to serve the public (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014, footnote 6). As such, journalists must put the public first and reject any special treatment to advertisers, donors, or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage. This requires journalists to refuse gifts and to avoid any conflicts of interest.

An example of conduct that falls short of the principle to act independently occurred in Canada in 2015. Leslie Roberts, a news anchor for Global Toronto, a news agency in Canada, resigned from his position at the network due to serious allegations of conflict of interest (Global News, 2015). Roberts publicly admitted that he was secretly a part owner of a public relations firm whose clients appeared on Global News programmes. Mr. Roberts never informed Global News management of his connection to the public relations firm. Such a conflict of interest raises serious ethical concerns, as the media has a duty to provide unbiased and independent information. If an anchor and news agency are presenting information to the public that is skewed by preference in guests on the show who are perhaps incentivized to send a certain message to the public, the duty of presenting the truth has been violated. This conduct flies in the face of the principle of acting independently laid out in the Code.

Another example of conduct that falls short of the principle that journalists should act independently is the handing out of "brown envelopes" containing large amounts of cash to journalists at press briefings, in exchange for publishing their stories. This trend of "brown envelope" journalism is fundamentally opposed to the principle of independence in journalism and allows the media to present skewed, or biased, information to the public (Nwaubani, 2015).

### (4) "Be accountable and transparent"

The SPJ Code advises journalists that they must be accountable and transparent, which is the fourth principle. Journalists should explain ethical choices and processes to audiences and should recognize and publicly acknowledge any mistakes. They should also correct these mistakes promptly and prominently. In the example referred to above, Leslie Roberts came to recognize that journalists have a

duty to expose unethical conduct in journalism to the public, including any behaviour within their own organizations, as the Code also states that ethical journalism means “taking responsibility for one’s work and explaining one’s decision to the public.” Global News recognized the unethical conduct of Mr. Roberts and made the following statement after Mr. Roberts resigned: “Global News remains committed to balanced and ethical journalism produced in the public’s interest.” Global News also made public Mr. Roberts’ letter of resignation, in which he acknowledged that his own unethical conduct was the cause of his resignation from the network and apologized by stating: “I regret the circumstances, specifically a failure to disclose information, which led to this outcome” (Global News, 2015). The morally upstanding way in which Global News handled this conflict of interest is one that preserves the principles laid out in the Code and upholds the high standards of behaviour for journalists that are a fundamental part of any discussion on media ethics.

In summary, journalists have a duty to (1) seek the truth and report it, (2) disseminate information in a way that minimizes harm to the public, (3) act independently in providing such information, and (4) be accountable and transparent in the process. These ethical duties of journalists are fundamental concepts in media ethics.

#### (5) Objectivity

A fifth ethical duty or principle that can be discussed in class is the concept of objectivity. Long considered a norm in journalism, objectivity is currently the subject of significant debate. That debate tends to recognize transparency to be a preferable principle. While human beings may never be truly objective, we can at least disclose our frames of reference. In her article [Objectivity and Journalism: Should We Be Skeptical?](#), Alexandra Kitty elaborates further on this idea (2017).

### Ethical principles for citizen journalists and media consumers

While the most widely known ethical obligations in the world of media are those owed by journalists to the public, individuals who are not media professionals still have a responsibility to act with integrity in their use and consumption of media.

To illustrate this obligation, this Module will first look at the case of people who are often referred to as “citizen journalists.” These people are not media professionals. Often, they are simply bystanders with a smart phone. However, these people sometimes have access to unfolding events that traditional journalists do not always have. Because of the global nature of social media, they are able to share their recordings and photos with a nearly limitless number of people. Examples of this phenomenon were seen when thousands of people on the ground were posting their experiences online during Hurricane Sandy of 2012, the Fukushima earthquake of 2011, the Boston Marathon bombing of 2013, the Paris terror attacks of 2015, and various global conflicts. While this was helpful in many ways, it also led to the spread of dangerous rumours and untrue statements.

Ordinary citizens should never be discouraged from sharing what they see. However, the increased power of their position due to social media platforms creates an ethical duty to act with care. Citizen journalists should strive to possess the same integrity that is expected from the professional news media. This means asking questions such as the following before sharing material online:

- Is what I am posting accurate?
- Have my sources of information been verified?
- Will anyone be harmed by sharing this information?

After all, the goal of citizen journalists should be to contribute to a better societal understanding of whatever they are reporting. This standard does not only apply to people who are posting online about ongoing events, but also to those who are blogging or creating content in any way.

The ethical obligations of users of social media also deserve attention. While social media users may not always be creating new content, they still often make decisions about which content to share with others. Unlike in the print media of the past, much of the media now published online is no longer clearly demarcated as news or opinion. Ads often resemble statements of fact and articles frequently do not list a writer or source. This confusion can be seen in the discussions globally regarding the issue of “fake news.”

In the United States, a poll published by the Pew Research Center on 16 December 16 2016, shortly after the U.S. elections, showed that 23 percent of respondents had shared a made-up news story on social media, either knowingly or not. According to the same poll, 64 percent of respondents said that the phenomenon of fake news had caused significant confusion regarding current events.

Sharing and promoting these stories on social media may not only cause confusion, but may also be harmful. Rumours and mistruths can damage reputations and even put others in danger. While one person sharing a false story may go unnoticed, there is often a collective impact.

The ethical course of action for social media users is to refrain from contributing to the spread of misinformation. In order to avoid this, social media users must critically evaluate content before sharing.

To assess the credibility of an article or story, social media users should ask themselves questions similar to the following:

- Who is the source? The author?
- Is the writer asserting fact or opinion?
- Does the piece contain sources or quotes that can be verified?
- Does the piece use language intended to provoke emotional reactions?



Studies show that members of the public have significant difficulty in assessing the credibility of content on social media. Knowing this, it is even more important to think about the ethical implications of what we share online.

To conclude, this Module illustrates that media ethics applies to all of us, whether or not we intend to become media professionals. With this in mind, the following section suggests class activities through which students can engage with the issues discussed above.

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## Exercises

This section contains suggestions for in-class and pre-class educational exercises, while a post-class assignment for assessing student understanding of the Module is suggested in a separate section.

The exercises in this section are most appropriate for classes of up to 50 students, where students can be easily organized into small groups in which they discuss cases or conduct activities before group representatives provide feedback to the entire class. Although it is possible to have the same small group structure in large classes comprising a few hundred students, it is more challenging and the lecturer

might wish to adapt facilitation techniques to ensure sufficient time for group discussions as well as providing feedback to the entire class. The easiest way to deal with the requirement for small group discussion in a large class is to ask students to discuss the issues with the four or five students sitting close to them. Given time limitations, not all groups will be able to provide feedback in each exercise. It is recommended that the lecturer makes random selections and tries to ensure that all groups get the opportunity to provide feedback at least once during the session. If time permits, the lecturer could facilitate a discussion in plenary after each group has provided feedback.

All exercises in this section are appropriate for both graduate and undergraduate students. However, as students' prior knowledge and exposure to these issues vary widely, decisions about appropriateness of exercises should be based on their educational and social context. The lecturer is encouraged to relate and connect each exercise to the key issues of the Module.

Some of the exercises include a recommended TED Talk which the lecturer can show in class to inspire discussion. TED Talks are open sourced on the Internet. They are informative and delivered by a person with direct knowledge of the subject. Lecturers may use alternative TED Talks that he or she deems more appropriate for the students, or conduct the exercises without a TED Talk.

### Pre-class exercise: What do we know about media ethics?

Ask the students to prepare at home, before the class takes place, a one-page report assessing their use and view of media and social media. Ask them to answer questions such as: What is the role of news media and social media? What is their first priority: entertainment, news, profit, truth, public service, or a combination of these elements? Students should describe why they chose one of the above and what they see as their own role in today's media and social media environment. The assignment is due at the start of class.

#### ➤ Lecturer guidelines

This pre-class exercise could be useful for expanding students' thinking about the Module topics. Lecturers should provide students with ample notice and time to complete this assignment before class.

### Exercise 1: How to choose your news

Ask the students to write down their current sources of news stories, both traditional media or trending social media.

Call on students to disclose their choices and ask them the following questions:

- Why did they choose that source(s)?
- Why did they think it is reliable?
- Could they identify the author of the story?

- What further investigation did they do to verify a story?
- How many times have they shared, re-tweeted or posted a story without any investigation of its authenticity or reliability?
- Did they ever learn at a later stage that the story they shared was not true? If so, what did they do?

Wrap up the discussion by asking the students the following question: What is our ethical responsibility as citizens, students and social media participants to think independently and safeguard the truth of what we read and report?

The lecturer could end or start this exercise by screening the TED Talk: [How to Choose Your News](#). This is a short, concise TED Talk on modern media. The talk addresses issues of media control, how to identify media bias by considering timing and word choices, how to cross check or challenge a media or social media story for truth or depth and how to be a smart consumer of media.

#### ➤ Lecturer guidelines

Guiding students to think about these questions may be informed by your own experiences with traditional media and social media. The point of this exercise is to make the students realize that these issues have a personal impact on them, and are not only someone else's responsibility or problem to solve. The lecturer can use this exercise to make students aware that in today's world everyone participates in the gathering and dissemination of news and stories. This requires all of us to take some measure of responsibility for the truth of what we produce, distribute, redistribute or read.

It may also be helpful to reference the article "Visiting the House of Rumor" (see Core readings) to provide a historical perspective and to highlight that the concerns about fake news are not new or just a social media problem.

### Exercise 2: The rise of fake news

Have the students watch [this](#) documentary that shows fake news 'factories' in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. After a short discussion of the documentary, ask each student to create a fake news story and show it to the class together with another story that is true. Ask a few of the students to present their stories and ask their fellow students to distinguish the true from the fake news and facilitate a discussion around that.

After the students complete the activity, screen the TED Talk: [Think like a Journalist](#). This TED Talk has a funny personal beginning that relates well to the main theme of ethical, trustworthy journalism and argues that re-sending social media news content makes all of us instant reporters. This is an excellent transition from the big picture of media ethics to the media ethics of the individual. As a news reporter for the *Plano Star Journal* newspaper, Ms. Samuels delivers a talk on fake news, disinformation, dangers of silo social media and the role of the media as well as the role of the consumer of media in our Internet age. She uses her personal experiences from high

school, as a university student, and later as a young journalist, which will help the issues seem relevant to the students.

➤ Lecturer guidelines

This exercise will help students understand the complexities involved in the rise of fake news, a pervasive issue that transcends politics and borders.

### Exercise 3: Role play: does the media have a "duty of care"?

The lecturer divides the class into four groups representing different parties: media consumer, journalist, media producer (owner), and government regulator. The lecturer asks the students to role-play or debate the following themes: Does the media have a duty of care to be accurate? To whom does it owe this duty?

Other questions to explore might be:

- What is the media's duty of care to consumers?
- Can a media duty of care be governed, regulated or guided by legal decisions on duty of care in other circumstances?
- Does a duty of care apply differently to tabloid vs. traditional vs. openly biased vs. bought media outlets vs. any individualized social media outlet?
- Is the media's role to inflame, inform or sell media by any means chosen and how does this affect the duty of care?

Students should emphasize the primary ethical focus or expectations of their assigned group.

The lecturer can start or conclude the exercise by screening the TED Talk: [\*Does the media have a "duty of care"?\*](#) This talk addresses the obligations of media to be correct and truthful, and the media's duty of care to consumers.

➤ Lecturer guidelines

The lecturer opens the discussion with the above questions and then gently guides the groups to keep them focused. It is especially important that they maintain the focus of their assigned group and not let a different personal belief distract them. It is the learning from the exercise that is important, not that the student has to believe the position they are assigned.

This teaches the importance of peer disagreement as a fact-finding methodology for the truth or best decision on the truth and as a critical practice to arrive at ethical decision-making. A colleague who can effectively play a devil's advocate is a journalist or social blogger's best friend.

## Exercise 4: The Potter Box and media ethics case studies

The purpose of this exercise is to introduce students to the ethical decision-making model known as the “Potter Box” (named after its creator, Harvard professor Ralph Potter), and explore its application to media ethics case studies. The Potter Box method requires us (1) to precisely define the situation or dilemma, and then to think about (2) the underlying values of each case, (3) the principles which are most important to apply, and (4) the conflicting loyalties that one might hold to the various stakeholders in the case. This four-step approach is designed to open one’s thinking and promote discussions about a systematic process for making ethical decisions.

The lecturer introduces the Potter Box method, and demonstrates each of the method’s four steps through a discussion with the students.

The lecturer asks the students to apply the Potter Box method to selected case studies found on the website of the *Society of Professional Journalists* here <https://www.spj.org/ethicscasestudies.asp>. The case studies available on the SPJ website address a range of issues, as reflected by their titles:

- Using the ‘Holocaust’ Metaphor
- Aaargh! Pirates! (and the Press)
- Reigning on the Parade
- Controversy over a Concert
- Deep Throat, and His Motive
- When Sources Won’t Talk
- A Suspect “Confession”
- Who’s the “Predator”?
- The Media’s Foul Ball
- Publishing Drunk Drivers’ Photos
- Naming Victims of Sex Crimes
- A Self-Serving Leak
- The Times and Jayson Blair
- Cooperating with the Government
- Offensive Images
- The Sting
- A Media-Savvy Killer
- A Congressman’s Past
- Crafting a Policy

After selecting the case study, the lecturer asks the students to create their Potter Box, working individually and writing down their thoughts. The lecturer then asks the students to share their analysis with the class and reflect on the following questions:

- Which values, principles, and loyalties are in direct opposition? Use a “vs.” indicator in between these such as “truth vs. innocence” or “safety vs. accountability”.

- Can you use the Potter Box to push yourself to new thinking beyond the obvious answers? After you first listed “oppositions”, can you next list more such conflicting values, principles, and loyalties which will help you better understand and solve the case?
- What are the likely limitations to the Potter Box? What possible flaws in logic or problem solving could arise when depending only upon this Box?
- Do you think your use of the Box is producing a better answer than your own intuitive thinking? What is the net value of the Box and of your current solution to the problem?

➤ Lecturer guidelines

The importance of introducing students to an actual systematic tool for moral decision-making cannot be over-emphasized. The Potter Box, although open to criticism like any other such tool, has been employed for decades in many types of ethics work and instruction. The Potter Box is designed to open one’s thinking and promote discussions about a systematic process for making ethical decisions. It can serve as a microscope that helps us see what is underneath the ethical issue, rather than a calculator that gives precise answers.

The Potter Box method is well introduced, illustrated, and explained in the opening chapter of the book *Media Ethics: Cases in Moral Reasoning* cited in the Advanced reading section below. If you do not have access to the book, you can learn about the Potter Box method by watching [this](#) video as well as reading [this](#) article and [this](#) blog post. If you are unfamiliar with the Potter Box it would be helpful for you not only to read about it, but also to take one or two case studies of your choosing and apply the Potter Box reasoning yourself. Relevant case studies can be found in a textbook or on the website of the Society of Professional Journalists <https://www.spj.org/ethicscasestudies.asp>

Students in a classroom setting do not have time to fully develop the thinking behind each block of the Potter Box. Nonetheless, the exercise will train student to ask important questions such as: Who else would be impacted? What precedent might I set? What personal, employment and social interest will my decision impact? How much will I hurt and assist innocent third parties? Overall, the student must learn to ask key questions and use systematic analysis, not just make snap judgments without a moral rationale.

### Exercise 5: Astroturf and manipulation of media messages

The lecturer starts the exercise by screening the TED Talk [Astroturf and manipulation of media messages](#). This TED Talk is an excellent follow on to the Potter Box as it demonstrates the need for ethical investigation of news and the harm from not doing such ethical investigations to the consumer, as well as to the reporter and to the news organization’s credibility. This talk sheds light on the growing phenomenon of political, corporate or other interest groups disguising themselves as grassroots groups, research foundations or well-researched personal

testimonials. The talk discusses the motivations behind this, such as controlling the social media discourse surrounding a particular issue or product and overwhelming independent investigations or contrary information with a flood of confusing data, information and alleged expert opinion. Corporate or political resources marshal their wealth and power to create a cohesive but fake story for their gain in all forms of media. The discussion of Wikipedia will be startling to the students. The TED Talk concludes with helpful hints for recognizing if “astroturfing” is behind the story.

The TED Talk exposes that much of modern media is so driven by ratings and advertising that it often ignores its ethical duty to investigate stories for the truth before distributing them as news. Helpful strategies for recognizing “astroturfing” in order to apply the ethical duty to the truth in media and social media reporting are discussed and can lead to important class discussions.

Following the TED Talk and a brief discussion, assign for small group preparation and class discussion stories from the Fake News site for considering whether “astroturfing” was behind the fake news. See: iMediaEthics, <https://www.imediaethics.org/topics/fabrication>. This site posts a running list of current news stories published without fact checking or investigation of truth or authenticity. Most have follow up retractions but the site provides contemporary stories to create interesting class discussions on how those stories were published if they were fake. Through negligence? Deliberate deception? Astroturfing?

#### ➤ Lecturer guidelines

The TED Talk is very engaging and interesting but it is really a brief overview of a very complex issue. Students will need to understand the difficulty of detecting “astroturfing” and even more so, uncovering the facts of “astroturfing.” It will be important to acknowledge this complexity while encouraging students to make the effort to understand the issues. This is best achieved by visiting each group during the exercise and encouraging the investigation and preparation for class discussion.

### Exercise 6: Citizen journalism

The lecturer starts the exercise by screening the TED Talk *Citizen Journalism*. This TED Talk introduces the idea of “new journalism”: i.e., citizen or collaborative journalism. What are the possibilities and dangers associated with modern citizen journalism? Using two true examples with widely different media reporting news stories that are far from the truth, the talk explains how an interested group manipulates each story. Both stories are later rebutted by, or with the help of, citizen journalism exposing the facts as they really happened. This TED Talk powerfully demonstrates the importance of citizen journalism.

The TED Talk provides an excellent point of departure to introduce the Code of Ethics for Journalists from the Society of Professional Journalists: <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>. The stories allow for an engaged and inspiring final class discussion with the caution that errors, manipulation or fake news are always likely, mandating the principles found in the code of ethics. The class should

end as it began with an open and student-centered class discussion.

### ➤ Lecturer guidelines

One goal of Exercise 5 is to leave students on a positive note, and give them the self-motivation to research and read more on the topic. As this Module represents a tight time schedule, the lecturer may wish to eliminate the TED Talk or the discussion of the Code of Ethics. The TED Talk can be proposed to students as a follow on self-study or for students who have a particular interest in the subject. If the Code of Ethics is skipped, it can be copied and handed out to students at the end of class for their future reference.

## Possible class structure

This section contains recommendations for a teaching sequence and timing intended to achieve learning outcomes through a three-hour class. The lecturer may wish to disregard or shorten some of the segments below in order to give more time to other elements, including introduction, icebreakers, conclusion, or short breaks. The structure could also be adapted for shorter or longer classes, given that class durations vary across countries.

### Introduction (10 mins)

- It is recommended to start the class with questions, as a way to engage students and encourage them to think critically about the role of ethics in both media provision and consumption. The lecturer can open the class with these questions: Who controls the narrative of the media in important issues? If media providers do not ethically investigate their sources and report with honesty, who will know if a media report is true and how can we test its truth?
- Following a short discussion, the lecturer introduces the Module and emphasizes the importance of media ethics.
- The lecturer may note that media ethics covers a wider range of media/journalism issues than those covered by this short Module, including free press, freedom and access of information, sources, confidentiality, accountability, conflict of interest, deception, hacking, sensationalism and misrepresentation. The lecturer will not have time to describe fully all of these issues but may give quick explanations with current examples as time permits.

### How to choose your news - Exercise 1 (20 mins)

- Screen *How to choose your news* TED Talk (5 mins)
- Conduct Exercise 1 – ask students to write out current news choices (5 mins)
- Guide a discussion in which students explain their choices (10 mins)

### The rise of fake news - Exercise 2 (30 mins)

- Screen the short documentary on fake news (3 mins)



- Conduct Exercise 2 - ask students to create a fake news story (15 mins)
- Discuss the rise of fake news and the ethical issues involved (12 mins)

Does the media have a "duty of care"? - Exercise 3 (30 mins)

- Screen *Does the media have a "duty of care"?* TED Talk (11 mins)
- Conduct Exercise 3 – divide students into consumer, journalist, media producer (owner) and government regulator (4 mins)
- Students perform role-play/debate, emphasizing the primary ethical focus or expectations of each group (15 mins)

The Potter Box method - Exercise 4 (30 mins)

- Explain the Potter Box, demonstrating each quadrant with Q&A (15 mins)
- Conduct Exercise 4 – Students apply Potter Box to a case study and discuss the case and their own “boxes” (15 mins)

Astroturf and manipulation of media messages - Exercise 5 (30 mins)

- Screen *Astroturf and manipulation of media messages* TED Talk (15 mins) or alternatively screen the TED Talk *Think Like A Journalist* (15 mins)
- Conduct Exercise 5 - lead class discussion on “astroturfing” stories of fake news from the iMediaEthics website (15 mins)

Citizen Journalism and Conclusion - Exercise 6 (30 mins)

- Screen *Citizen Journalism* TED Talk (20 mins)
- Conduct Exercise 6 using Code of Ethics for Journalist and citizen journalism (cited in core readings) (10 mins)

## Core reading

This section provides a list of (mostly) open access materials that the lecturer could ask the students to read before taking a class based on this Module.

Hargraves, Ian (2014). *Journalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See Chapter 7, Murder is my meat: the ethics of journalism (pp. 109-125). \* These assigned pages cover the ethics of journalists and the moral conflicts that can arise even if ethically correct. Oftentimes gruesome photos are not printed but facts that are deeply personal (and can lead to harm or suicide) are printed under a right to know. Freedom of the press requires a self-regulatory approach to what is the right thing to do when the decision is not clearly a right vs. wrong decision. Introduces the students to situational ethics and moral relativism in journalistic decisions.

Harwood, Kenneth (2017). Visiting the house of rumor. *Media Ethics*, vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring). \*Provides a historical perspective and highlights that the concerns for fake news and rumour are not new or just a social media problem. Can generate a dynamic class discussion on how to address a modern problem with ancient roots. Available from [http://www.mediaethicsmagazine.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3999146:visiting-the-house-](http://www.mediaethicsmagazine.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3999146:visiting-the-house-)

[of-rumor&catid=205&Itemid=486.](#)

Russell, Frank (2016). Beyond rock bottom: will the news media learn any lessons from coverage of the 2016 election? *Media Ethics*, vol 28, No.1 (Fall). \*Discusses the conflict between media as a neutral reporting system, a truth fact checker to ethically report, or just a big business. Students may focus on this quote in the article: “Among the quotes that will not soon be forgotten from this election cycle [2016 US Presidential Election] will be one from CBS Chairman Leslie Moonves. ‘It may not be good for America,’ he said of the campaign, ‘but its damn good for CBS.’” Available from [http://www.mediaethicsmagazine.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3999128:beyond-rock-bottom-will-the-news-media-learn-any-lessons-from-coverage-of-the-2016-election&catid=204&Itemid=486](http://www.mediaethicsmagazine.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3999128:beyond-rock-bottom-will-the-news-media-learn-any-lessons-from-coverage-of-the-2016-election&catid=204&Itemid=486).

The lecturer can use these two recommended articles from *Media Ethics* or can choose alternative articles based on regional emphasis and student age/level. Articles in *Media Ethics* magazine are often short and of an op-ed or commentary style such that the student may wish to support or debate the author’s position.

Society of Professional Journalists website (2018). \*While this site focuses on journalism, its ethics code, articles and blog are applicable across the spectrum of media and social media. It is also a useful site for interested students to be familiar with and explore in their own time. The following two sections of the site will prove especially useful for this Module:

Code of Ethics (2014). \*Ethical rules for journalists with broad application to all media and social media. Available at the site above in PDF versions in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Available from <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>.

Ethics Case Studies (2018). \*Provides ethical case studies for further class discussions. Available from <https://www.spj.org/ethicscasestudies.asp>.

Swain, Kristen Alley (1994). Beyond the Potter Box: a decision model based on moral development theory. \*This essay proposes a detailed justification model that includes decision criteria beyond those of the widely used Potter Box. The model’s steps, which correspond to Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, encourage journalists to examine the relative morality of their decisions on multiple levels. Available from [https://www.academia.edu/2766204/Beyond the Potter Box A Decision Model Based on Moral Development Theory](https://www.academia.edu/2766204/Beyond_the_Potter_Box_A_Decision_Model_Based_on_Moral_Development_Theory).

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013). *Reporting on Corruption: A Resource Tool for Governments and Journalists*. New York, See Chapter V, Integrity and Accountability (pp. 73-83). \*Chapter V discusses the role media plays in exposing public corruption and informing society, and raises the

questions of what measures the media should take to address transparency, integrity, and accountability in its own dealings, including the ownership and operations of private sector media outlets. Available from <https://www.unodc.org/lpo-brazil/en/frontpage/2013/12/06-reporting-on-corruption-a-resource-tool-for-governments-and-journalists.html>.

Veeneman, Alex (2018). The power of words. \*This blog discusses the debate over repeating in news reports the use of vulgar or inflammatory words that are part of a news event. When (if ever) is the use of vulgar, inflammatory, demeaning or discriminatory words a necessary element to understanding the story? What is the journalist and media ethical responsibility for accuracy versus deleting words or facts that are part of the story but are not necessary to tell the story? Available from <https://blogs.spjnetwork.org/ethics/2018/01/>.

## Advanced reading

The following readings are recommended for students interested in exploring the topics of this Module in more detail, and for lecturers teaching the Module:

Allan, Stuart and Einar Thorsen, eds. (2009). *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Attkisson, Sharyl (2017). *The Smear: How Shady Political Operatives and Fake News Control What You See, What You Think, and How You Vote*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Bresnan, Patrick S. (2018). *Awakening. An Introduction to Eastern Thought*. 2018. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Taylor and Francis.

Christians, Clifford G. (2016) Ethics of Human Dignity In The World Of New Media. Available from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kXSZ\\_ziZrY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kXSZ_ziZrY).

Christians, Clifford and others (2017). *Media Ethics: Cases in Moral Reasoning*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Routledge.

Cooper, Thomas (2011), *Fast Media / Media Fast*. Boulder, CO: Gaeta Press.

Dreher, Tanja (2009). Listening across difference: media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice. *Continuum* vol. 23, No. 4, pp.445-458.

Ethical Journalism Network (n.d.) The 5 principles of ethical journalism. Available from <https://www.ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/who-we-are/5-principles-of-journalism>

Hargraves, Ian (2014). *Journalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press.

- Hyde-Clarke, Nathalie (2011). *Communication and Media Ethics in South Africa*, Juta.
- International Federation of Journalists (1986). Declaration of principles on the conduct of journalists. Brussels, Belgium. Available from <http://www.ifj.org/en/about-ifj/ifj-code-of-principles/>.
- Kayode, Olujimi and Adeyemi Ridwan (n.d.). Ethical challenges of tabloidization and trivialization in the Nigerian media space. Available from [https://www.academia.edu/4629275/ethical\\_challenges\\_of\\_tabloidization\\_and\\_trivialization\\_in\\_the\\_nigerian\\_media\\_space](https://www.academia.edu/4629275/ethical_challenges_of_tabloidization_and_trivialization_in_the_nigerian_media_space).
- Keeble, Richard, ed. (2000-present). *Ethical Space: International Journal of Media Ethics*. London: Taylor and Francis. Available from <http://www.communicationethics.net/espace/>.
- Kittross, J. Michael, ed. (1987-present). *Media Ethics Magazine*. \*Start with most current 2016-8 issues. Available from <http://www.mediaethicsmagazine.com>.
- Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel (2010). *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel (2014). *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Luther, Catherine A., Caroline Ringer Lepre, and Naeemah Clark (2018). *Diversity in US Mass Media*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Norderstreng, Kaarle (2000). The Structural context of media ethics: how media are regulated in democratic society. In *Media Ethics: Opening Social Dialogue*, B. Pattyn, ed. pp. 69-86 Peeters Press.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013). *Reporting on Corruption: A Resource Tool for Governments and Journalists*. New York. Available from <https://www.unodc.org/lpo-brazil/en/frontpage/2013/12/06-reporting-on-corruption-a-resource-tool-for-governments-and-journalists.html>
- Ward, Stephen J.A. (2013). *Global Media Ethics, Problems and Perspectives*. Chicester, West Susses, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ward, Stephen J.A. (2016) *Digital Media Ethics*. School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin – Madison. Available from <https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/resources/digital-media-ethics/>
- Ward, Stephen J.A. & Wasserman, Herman, eds. (2008). *Media Ethics Beyond Borders: A Global Perspective*. London: Routledge.

Wasserman, Herman (2013). Journalism in a new democracy: the ethics of listening. Available from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11984982.pdf>

Wasserman, H. 2010. *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa: True Story!* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Weisenhaus, Doreen and Simon N.M. Young, eds. (2017). *Media Law and Policy in the Internet Age*. Oxford: Bloomsbury.

## Student assessment

This section provides a suggestion for a post-class assignment for the purpose of assessing student understanding of the Module. Suggestions for pre-class or in-class assignments are provided in the Exercises section.

To assess the students' understanding of the Module, the following post-class assignment is proposed:

What do you think of your own media habits before the class in light of what you learned in the class? What impact do you think you will have upon others and upon the environment applying what you have learned? If you intend to become a media professional, where will you draw the line regarding what practices you will not undertake no matter how much money you might be paid? Where will you draw the line regarding what is acceptable professional behaviour in borderline ethical situations? If you intend to be a consumer of media, how will you make your assessments of media accuracy? Support these decisions with reasoned arguments, with the use of a Potter Box analysis and the Society of Professional Journalists: Code of Ethics.

## Additional teaching tools

This section includes links to relevant teaching aides, such as PowerPoint slides and video material, that could help the lecturer teach the issues covered by the Module in an interactive and engaging manner. Lecturers can adapt the slides and other resources to their needs.

### PowerPoint presentation

- [Module 10 Presentation on Media Ethics](#)

### Video material

- [How to choose your news](#), Damon Brown, 6/3/2014 TED-Ed (4:48)
- [Does the media have a "duty of care"?](#) David Puttnam, 2/10/2014 (10:37)
- [Think Like A Journalist](#), Kelsey Samuels, TEDxPlano4/25/2017 TEDx Talks

(13:05)

- [Astroturf and manipulation of media messages](#), Sharyl Attkisson, TEDxUniversityofNevada 2/6/2015 TEDx Talks (10:36)
- [Citizen journalism](#) Paul Lewis | TEDxThessaloniki (16:55)
- [The Potter Box method in a media ethics context](#), Charles Cameron, YouTube (10:47)

## Blogs

- [The Potter Box](#), in Media Ethics in the Morning (succinctly describing the Potter Box method and including a helpful graphic of the “Box” flowchart).

## Guidelines to develop a stand-alone course

This Module provides an outline for a three-hour class, but there is potential to develop its topics further into a stand-alone course. The scope and structure of such a course will be determined by the specific needs of each context, but a possible structure is presented here as a suggestion. Ample materials for a full course are available in the Core and Advanced reading listed in this Module. The TED Talks referenced in the Module can be used in relevant classes for promoting discussion and debate

Session	Topic	Brief description
1	Role of journalism in society	Should cover the history of journalism and journalism stories relevant to the culture of the location and universally understood journalistic events. Use open class discussions and debates of journalism and the state as well as what journalism is today; private, public, entertainment, social/srowd/citizen-controlled (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, etc.), to engage students in the meaning of journalism and their role with media and in this class. Suggested review for teaching ideas and material: <i>Journalism: A Very Short Introduction</i> .
2	Introduction and understanding ethics	This introductory class should focus on basic understandings of ethics and brief historical overviews of the major ethical theories (e.g. utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics) and philosophers (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Mill, Hegel, Kant, Marx, Rawls, Rorty, etc.) This class and the next overlap in many ways and set the intellectual/cognitive expectations for the remaining classes on media ethics issues. Suggested Sources:

Session	Topic	Brief description
		Integrity and Ethics <a href="#">Module 1</a> and <i>Media Ethics: Cases in Moral Reasoning</i>
3	The Potter Box and how to use it	Introduction to the Potter Box as an ethical consideration tool. Using case studies, this class is used for student exercises and class reports on using the Potter Box. Its goal is to engage the students in ethical thinking and set the stage for reflection as media ethics issues are discussed in later classes. The goal will be to use the Potter Box at various times in later classes and then again at the end of the course for a reflection exercise and report. Suggested Sources: <i>Media Ethics: Cases in Moral Reasoning;</i> <i>Ethics Dilemma: Use Potter Box;</i> <i>Beyond the Potter Box: A Decision Model Based on Moral Development Theory</i>
4	Code of ethics and ethical case studies	Class reads and discusses the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. Lecturer uses material and case studies to explore the practical meaning of a code of ethics, who and how it applies and helps in circumstances such as sharing information, anonymous or unnamed sources, citizen reports and using online sources without access to actual sources. Suggested Source: <a href="https://www.spj.org/ethics.asp">https://www.spj.org/ethics.asp</a>
5	What news is trustworthy and how to choose?	Class discussion and debate on what news to trust and what is a trustworthy source. Suggested Sources: Use TED-Talk on <i>How to choose your news</i> as a light opener. Teacher selects pages from <i>Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload</i> .
6	Does the media have a duty of care to avoid harm and to whom?	Class discussion and debate on what is a duty of care and does it apply to media. Explore this issue at the level of original reporting source, re-publication and re-transmission by media or citizens. Analogous examples may be drawn from re-publication of state secrets or pornography both of which carry a liability for subsequent publications. Suggested Sources: Use TED-Talk on <i>Does the media have a "duty of care"?</i> And selected reading from <i>Media Law and Policy in the Internet Age</i>
7	You are the media	Class discussion on how a journalist should

Session	Topic	Brief description
	publisher, journalist or re-sender. How do you act on what you think you know?	think and dissect all facts and possible story from those facts before deciding on what the facts are and what should be published or republished. Allows students to role-play a journalist, editor, owners or consumers of media. Suggested Sources: Use TED-Talk on <i>Think Like A Journalist</i> and selected readings from <i>The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect</i> .
8	Who controls the media discourse and to what extent is it manipulated by interested parties or groups?	Class discussion, research and role-playing using materials and contemporary media stories for class exploration of bias, gain and special interest. The TED Talk challenges and exposes the fallacy of commonly held beliefs in media today. Suggested Sources: Use TED-Talk on <i>Astroturf and manipulation of media messages</i> and Introduction and Chapter 1 from <i>The Smear: How Shady Political Operatives and Fake News Control What You See, What You Think, and How You Vote</i> .
9	What is “new journalism”? Citizen, consumer or collaborative journalism and its role	Start with the TED Talk <i>Citizen Journalism</i> as it sets out two very powerful true stories to raise the issues and accompanying complications to spark class discussions and debate. Suggested reading also introduces the students to photojournalism as a powerful citizen tool with examples from many parts of the world. This material can be expanded by student examples and Internet searching to create local content. Suggested Sources: Use TED-Talk on <i>Citizen Journalism</i> , and selected readings from <i>Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, Volume 1</i> .
10	Media and social issue: a study on one issue and how to address it	Using <i>Reporting on Corruption</i> , class will cover the topics in the report and ask students to apply what they have learned about media and ethics to the specifics of reporting on corruption. Each chapter presents case examples to choose from and to engage students on their role in addressing corruption as journalists, media participants or media consumers. UNODC, <i>Reporting on Corruption: A Resource</i>





<b>Session</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
		<i>Tool for Governments and Journalists.</i>