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Media Ethics in the 21st Century

**Media ethics** is the subdivision of [applied ethics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Applied_ethics) dealing with the specific ethical principles and standards of [media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media), including [broadcast media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broadcast_media), [film](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film), [theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre), the [arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arts), [print media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Print_media) and the internet. The field covers many varied and highly controversial topics, ranging from [war journalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_correspondent) to [Benetton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benetton_Group) advertising.

News manipulation. News can manipulate and be manipulated. Governments and corporations may attempt to manipulate news media; governments, for example, by [censorship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship), and corporations by share ownership. The methods of manipulation are subtle and many. Manipulation may be voluntary or involuntary. Those being manipulated may not be aware of this.

Ethics of journalism:

[Truth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth). Truth may conflict with many other values.

Public interest. Revelation of military secrets and other sensitive government information may be contrary to the[public interest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_interest), even if it is true. The definition of [public interest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_interest)is hard.

Privacy. Salacious details of the lives of public figures are a central content element in many media. Publication is not necessarily justified simply because the information is true. [Privacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privacy) is also a [right](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right),and one which conflicts with [free speech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_speech).

Fantasy. Fantasy is an element of entertainment, which is a legitimate goal of media content. Journalism may mix fantasy and truth, with resulting ethical dilemmas. Taste. Photo journalists who cover war and disasters confront situations which may shock the sensitivities of their audiences. For example, human remains are rarely screened. The ethical issue is how far one risk shocking an audience’s sensitivities in order to correctly should and fully reports the truth. Conflict with the law. Journalistic ethics may conflict with the law over issues such as the protection of confidential [news sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_source). There is also the question of the extent to which it is ethically acceptable to break the law in order to obtain news. For example, undercover reporters may be engaging in [deception](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deception), [trespass](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trespass) and similar [torts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torts) and crimes. Ethics in journalism is a utopia, can never be applied in practice.

 Ethics of Entertainment Media:

The depiction of violence and sex, and the presence of [strong language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strong_language). Ethical guidelines and legislation in this area are common and many media (e.g. film, computer games) are subject to ratings systems and supervision by agencies. An extensive guide to international systems of enforcement can be found under [motion picture rating system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motion_picture_rating_system).

[Product placement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Product_placement). An increasingly common [marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marketing) tactic is the placement of products in entertainment media. The producers of such media may be paid high sums to display branded products. The practice is controversial and largely unregulated. Detailed article: [product placement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Product_placement)[Stereotypes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypes). Both advertising and entertainment media make heavy use of [stereotypes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypes). Stereotypes may negatively affect people's perceptions of themselves or promote socially undesirable behavior. The stereotypical portrayals of [men](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men), [affluence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affluence) and [ethnic groups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups) are examples of major areas of debate. Taste and [taboos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taboos). Entertainment media often questions of our [values](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Values) for artistic and entertainment purposes. [Normative ethics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normative_ethics) is often about moral values, and what kinds should be enforced and protected. In media ethics, these two sides come into conflict. In the name of art, media may deliberately attempt to break with existing norms and shock the audience. That poses ethical problems when the norms abandoned are closely associated with certain relevant moral values or obligations. The extent to which this is acceptable is always a hotbed of ethical controversy.

Media and democracy:

In democratic countries, a special relationship exists between media and government. Although the freedom of the media may be [constitutionally](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution) enshrined and have precise legal definition and enforcement, the exercise of that freedom by individual journalists is a matter of personal choice and ethics. Modern democratic government subsists in [representation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representation_%28politics%29) of millions by hundreds. For the representatives to be [accountable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accountability), and for the process of government to be [transparent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transparency_%28humanities%29), effective communication paths must exist to their [constituents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_district). Today these paths consist primarily of the mass media, to the extent that if [press freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_freedom) disappeared, so would most political [accountability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accountability). In this area, media ethics merges with issues of [civil rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_rights) and [politics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics). Issues include: