

SOCIAL MEDIA ETHICAL PREDICAMENT

MUDASIR SULTAN*

ABSTRACT

In the first decade of the 21st century, new media technologies for social networking such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube began to transform the social, political and informational practices of individuals and institutions across the globe, inviting a philosophical response from the community of applied ethicists and philosophers of technology this millennium generation technology, machinery is evolving at daily basis there are a lot of things being effected with this evolution. One of which is our practices of social networking which is largely shifting to the internet causing a lot of ethical issues which were not faced before these online social networking practices. Most people live by their own morals and ethics and we all have our own beliefs as to what is right and wrong in life. However, it seems that when it comes to social media and having an online presence, some individuals or companies believe that ethical behavior is moot. The dynamics of personal relationships and interactions have changed and some may feel that because they are hiding behind a computer screen and typing the words instead of speaking them, it really doesn't count as unethical behavior. On the same back ground this paper is aimed to study Ethical dilemmas in online social networking which are being faced these days. There will be a section covering the issues related to the impact of unethical usage of online social networks in business industry.

INTRODUCTION

Online social networking is the use of dedicated websites or application in order to interact with other people who also those social networking sites having same interests or knowing you from other circles, groups or communities. Social networking is the basis of a society and it was always possible in person but in this era of high speed data transmission social networking has evolved through internet and has added different colors and flavors according to the needs of time. There are plenty of features being offered by social networking sites (SNS) which include making your profile, finding

people with mutual interests, sharing with your circles or groups, interacting with people in your groups and getting the information. As **social media** usage continues to rise, it's only natural that statistic correlations will be made about the individuals who use the medium. This isn't a bad thing; it's common to deep-dive into demographic information and behavioral data. While there will always be exceptions to the "correlations" that emerge from such data, universal truths about **social networking** usage and user behavior can be valuable.

*Research Scholar, Himalayan University (A.P). *Correspondence E-mail Id:* editor@eurekajournals.com

THE ETHICS RESOURCE CENTER

ERC is the oldest **non-profit organization** in the U.S. dedicated to independent research and advancement of high ethical standards and practices in both public and private institutions. Since 1994, the ERC has produced the National Business Ethics Survey (NBES), **available for free**

to the public, to gather information about employees' perspectives of ethics in the workplace. Dr. Patricia J. Harned, president of the ERC, says the NBES is the only longitudinal study that represents the views of the U.S. workforce in business.

The ERC's latest report is one of the first to explore the possible connection between **ethics and social media**. "Social networking has become very important in our culture, and we wondered if the technology is influencing employees' views about ethics at work," Harned explains. "Additionally, over the past few years, we have seen companies establish policies concerning social networking in the workplace, so this year it seemed fitting to add questions on the topic."

NATIONAL BUSINESS ETHICS SURVEY RESULTS

One of the most fascinating conclusions in the report is that "active social networkers show a higher tolerance for activities that could be considered unethical." But Harned says the findings are not an indictment about the character of social networkers: "It appears that they are more willing to consider things that are 'gray areas'-issues that are not always clear in company policies as wrong; and that's an area for further study."

The report also points out that active social networkers are at higher risk for observing misconduct. Harned stresses that it's *observing*

wrongdoing, not necessarily *participating* in it. "You could also look at another set of our responses-particularly the high number of active social networkers who reported misconduct-and say that social networkers behaved appropriately," she explains.

ETHICAL PREDICAMENT

With the rise of Online Social Networking, the ethical dilemmas are growing in number including violation of privacy, misrepresentation, bullying and creepiness. When the consumers are getting the facility of relatively unrestricted social communications they are becoming more vulnerable to deception and scams too at the same time which has become the reason of attention for Social Networking Ethics. Few ethical dilemmas faced when different people use social networks are given below:

INVASION OF PRIVACY

If the actions that break the law or terms of privacy of any user of social network harm that individuals personal or professional credibility should be considered unethical. The invasion of privacy would include any non-permissive approach taken to get any kind of personal or any other kind of information about an individual which can harm him or affect him in any sense.

While discussing social media ethics, behavioral targeting is a questionable area to consider. The advertisers tracking our shopping behaviors and click through patterns to use that data in retargeting campaigns. The positive point is that the viewers may appreciate the relevance of the material being advertised to them but this is a kind of invasion of privacy.

A very similar situation occurs when marketers give their email lists to Facebook to use custom audience feature. They match those lists to the

emails which are registered with them fortargeting.

SPAMMING

Over-publicizing unasked promotional messages is also considered as an unethical act based on how this is being done. In spamming users are usually bombarded with some kind of information which does not interest them or even if it does, it is too extensive to be swallowed.

In this situation, the user's relative information which he may be needing gets under the pile and may get ignored because of that useless pile of spamming which is obviously unethical from user's perspective.

PUBLIC BASHING

While using social networks people think that they are private and they can express anything they want to but they are not as private as they think. Disparaging your competitors in

SNS (social networking sites) is considered unethical because of its broad range of negative impacts. Once you have posted something, it is not yours anymore and it can go viral as fast as

a fire in the forest without asking for your permission which then can't only affect your reputation but also the person or company you were disparaging about, so much. This kind of cases can also raise a risk for legal lawsuits.

DISHONESTY AND DISTORTION

There is no fair enough method to validate the honesty and authenticity of social networking activities of users. The intensions of social media usage include transparency of communications and other activities posts through SNS. It is unethical to be dishonest about anything even on social networks. So, if you will make dishonest claims about yourself

or anything else or go on commenting offensive material, it is going to affect yourself or your company at the end. By doing such activities you are jeopardizing your personal reputation and your company's name. So, we should all keep ethics in front of use even while using social media.

IMPROPER ANONYMITY AND DISTORTED ENDORSEMENTS

If one represent himself with wrong affiliations, credentials or expertise, it is unethical to become anonymous but showing yourself to be someone different than you are. There are people who provide companies with their anonymous feedbacks which are not true and it has caused a lot of damage to companies by the stories of consumers of their products by fake stories.

Hiring people to comment your favorable or fabricated stories about your company or your products are also considered unethical. Some employees are also found guilty of exaggerating competitive deficiencies.

MISUSE OF FREE EXPERTISE AND CONTESTS

With the increasing extensive use of Facebook contests and other crowd sourcing for soliciting design ideas, the participants have the risk of making their secrets open with no reward. Most of the times, design ideas are rewarded to the most profitable partners of the social network sponsor leaving many with unrewarded work. This abuse is especially unethical if the sponsor knowingly gathers superior design ideas from contestants they have no intention of compensating

HOW TO BE ETHICAL IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Most people live by their own morals and ethics and we all have our own beliefs as to what is

right and wrong in life. However, it seems that when it comes to social media and having an online presence, some individuals or companies believe that ethical behaviour is moot. The dynamics of personal relationships and interactions have changed and some may feel that because they are hiding behind a computer screen and typing the words instead of speaking them, it really doesn't count as unethical behaviour. However, social media is now becoming more and more legitimate in business as well as in personal life. The way that a business or individual should professionally act in real life is being transferred into the online world. But where do these ethical boundaries lie? We are taught as we grow up through face to face interactions, experiences and lessons what we should and should not do. It's important to transfer our values and ethics into social media. Transparency As a business, an expert or professional in any field it is vital to stay transparent. Transparency is something that is sought after in the professional world so why can't it be sought after in the digital world? Social media is all about creating relationships with your target audience, forming bonds, communities and creating a better understanding of each key target. If you don't stay transparent you risk losing all you have built and your reputation could even be irreparably damaged. There can be no harm done in being honest with your followers-in more cases than not they will appreciate and like you even more for being so. Anonymity everybody has a right to privacy, however in some cases the internet can take privacy a little too far. Anonymity and allowing people to comment anonymously on your website or blog is not consistent with your goal of transparency. Social media is, in its own way, anonymous enough already. Giving individuals the right to log on as anonymous can pose many problems for your business as well as for your audience. People seem to feel as though

they can say anything they want once they have that anonymity power and although everybody has a right to privacy, allowing people to choose a user name rather than use their real name is private enough for a public website. Treat others as you would like to be treated It is known as the 'Golden Rule' and is probably one of the most important ethical tips to stand by when it comes to social media. Think of all the things that people do on social media that you personally dislike-whether it be tweet your work without crediting you, selling your personal details to telemarketers or sending you promotional emails once you have accepted them as a friend. Chances are if it annoys you then it will annoy your audience, so why do it? If social media is all about relationship building then why would it seem ethical to treat your audience in a way that would make them feel used or annoyed? Social media is becoming more and more legitimate in both the professional and personal world. Being ethical and having a code of ethics for your social media campaign or even for your own personal social media channels is vital to stay successful to stay

CONCLUSION

While scholarship in the social and natural sciences has tended to focus on the impact of SNS on psychosocial markers of happiness/well-being, psychosocial adjustment, social capital, or feelings of life satisfaction, philosophical concerns about social networking and ethics have generally centered on topics less amenable to empirical measurement (e.g., privacy, identity, friendship, the good life and democratic freedom). More so than 'social capital' or feelings of 'life satisfaction,' these topics are closely tied to traditional concerns of ethical theory (e.g., virtues, rights, duties, motivations and consequences). These topics are also tightly linked to the novel features and distinctive functionalities of SNS, more so than

some other issues of interest in computer and information ethics that relate to more general Internet functionalities (for example, issues of copyright and intellectual property).

This discussion concludes that where there are numerous benefits of social networking sites there is an increasing challenge of ethical issues which are being faced on social networks.

There are some issues which can be considered under legal lawsuits, while others are issues of pure ethics. These ethics should be properly defined and spread over to all the users of social networks. There should be some struggle to spread the awareness of these ethics.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Stone, Brad. "Facebook." *The New York Times* 7 December 2007. 11 November 2008.
- [2]. https://www.lagrange.edu/resources/pdf/citations/2009/10Cornerstone_Williams.pdf.
- [3]. Survey of 7 companies with 2,000 employees or more, IBE, 2011.
- [4]. Nestlé, Code of Business Conduct, 2007. Available at: <http://www.nestle.com/Investors/CorporateGovernance/CodeOfBusinessConduct/Pages/CodeOfBusinessConductHome.aspx>.
- [5]. New Tools Cast a Wider Social Network for Recruiters, by Rita Pyrellis, *Workforce Management Online*, August 2011.
- [6]. Social media monitoring raises disturbing questions: An Ethikos interview with Kansas State's Diane Swanson, *Ethikos*, September/October 2011, pp.7-9.
- [7]. See: ACAS Research Paper (2009), *Workplaces and Social Networking: The implications for employment relations*, pp.28, by Andrea Broughton, Tom Higgins, Ben Hicks and Annette Cox, The Institute for Employment Studies.
- [8]. DLA Piper, Op cit.
- [9]. Ibid, pp.7.
- [10]. www.ibe.org.u.