

The Ethical Values of Interactive Media Communities in the Age of New Media. A Critical Approach

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Abstract:

In the age of new media, interactive media communities have emerged as central spaces for dialogue, participation, and knowledge exchange. These communities are not only technological constructs but also social environments governed by implicit and explicit ethical values. This study critically examines the ethical foundations that shape user behavior and collective interaction within digital platforms. It highlights key values such as transparency, responsibility, respect for diversity, and the safeguarding of privacy, while also addressing the ethical challenges related to misinformation, hate speech, and digital polarization. By adopting a critical approach, the paper emphasizes the necessity of fostering media ethics that balance freedom of expression with social responsibility. Ultimately, the study argues that the sustainability and credibility of interactive media communities in the digital era depend on the reinforcement of shared ethical principles that protect both individual rights and the integrity of the collective public sphere.

key words: values, ethics, media community, interactive, new media

Introduction

The contemporary era is widely recognized as the age of technology, information, and social communication. Modern societies are increasingly characterized as information societies, where the generation, management, and dissemination of information form the cornerstone of progress and development. In this context, information is not merely a resource but a strategic asset that provides power and control to those who possess accurate data at the right time. The concept of the Information Explosion illustrates the exponential growth in knowledge production, along with the diversity of its sources and formats. This includes journals, books, research studies, datasets, conferences, academic theses, patents, and technical standards, all of which are vital components of today's information environment. Consequently, the challenge lies not only in producing vast amounts of information but also in organizing, accessing, and effectively utilizing it to foster innovation, decision-making, and sustainable development within the information society. Experts and specialists agree that we are currently living in the age of technology, information, and social communication. We are indeed experiencing an *information society* that relies on the utilization of modern technologies to produce abundant information and employ it in delivering services efficiently and effectively. Information constitutes the foundation of enlightenment and development, and those who possess accurate information at the right time hold the elements of power and control in a changing world that depends on science in every aspect, far from randomness and improvisation.

The term Information Explosion refers to the expansion of the scope in which information operates, encompassing all areas of human activity. This has led to a tremendous growth in intellectual production, its dispersion, and the diversification of information sources and formats such as journals, books, research papers, data, seminars, conferences, academic theses, patents, and standard specifications all of which are essential for the Information Society.¹

1. A General Introduction to Ethics and Values

. Definition of Ethics

Linguistically: In the Arabic language, the term (ethics) is defined as disposition, character, or habit. Some Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Miskawayh (421 AH), view ethics as a form of the soul from which good and virtuous actions emanate naturally, without affectation or difficulty.²

And it is necessary to discipline the self so that virtuous actions become a deeply rooted disposition grounded in ethical values. Some scholars argue that ethics refers to an individual's behavior that aligns with the customs of their society, as emphasized by

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positivist sociologists. At times, a person of good character is also described as a “good citizen.” Moreover, Arabic lexicons indicate that (ethics) is a firmly established state of the soul (a disposition) from which actions emanate without the need for deliberation or reflection, as noted in *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ*, published by the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo in 1960.³.

- **Terminologically:**

Salim al-Jabi defined ethics as being rooted in the very essence of matter rather than merely a philosophical subject, as many thinkers describe it. He argued that ethics are tied to the natural qualities with which humans are endowed, qualities that extend to the origins and properties of matter itself, and are related to the inner forces of the human being. These natural traits constitute the foundation for activity, work, and development. The concepts of good and evil, therefore, depend on how these traits are used: proper use leads to good, while misuse leads to evil. Just as the forces of matter are the basis of the world’s progress and development, the utilization of natural qualities linked to human inner forces forms the basis of ethics.

Ethics as a discipline is defined as “the study of principles, their organization, derivation, and significance for moral life, along with the identification of the duties binding upon human beings.” Anthropological studies indicate that the history of human civilization is replete with similar moral codes, which suggests that the moral foundation of humanity is innate. This is consistent with al-Jabi’s analysis of the roots of ethics.⁴

Scholars and social scientists, however, have often depicted ethics in different ways: sometimes as a normative science concerned with what ought to be, attempting to establish moral principles and ideals; at other times as a science concerned with human customs, requiring the study of moral laws and traditions, or even as a positivist science subject to empirical observation.

The Sophists believed that ethics are grounded in the individual as the measure of good and evil. Socrates opposed this view, arguing that the foundation of knowledge including moral knowledge—lies in reason, which leads to objective truths and universal values. Sociologists, on the other hand, have regarded ethics as “the science that determines the behavioral rules accepted by a community in a specific historical period,” which implies that moral rules are not necessarily fixed.⁵

In conclusion, defining ethics in a universally accepted way remains difficult. In philosophy, ethics primarily concern the concepts of good and evil, right and wrong. In the context of public service, however, ethics refer to the behavioral standards expected of civil servants, particularly the duties they must perform, reflecting the values of society. Public officials often face ethical dilemmas in defining their responsibilities, balancing their obligations against financial temptations, avoiding criticism of their superiors while

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protecting them. This issue becomes particularly evident when political considerations are prioritized, as the public servant is required to maintain political neutrality while upholding societal values, adhering to principles of integrity, and safeguarding public funds.

• The Concept of Values

Linguistically, the Arabic word *qīmah* (value), plural *qiyam*, derives from the root *qāma* (to rise, to stand), which carries multiple meanings:⁶

1. **Continuity and permanence:** The root suggests stability, as in the expression *mā lahu qīmah* (“it has no value”), meaning it lacks substance or permanence. The Qur’anic expression (*fī maqāmin amīn*) denotes a state of enduring presence.
2. **Governance and care:** The Arabs used the term to describe leadership and responsibility; a *qayyim* is the one who oversees and manages affairs, such as a man caring for his household.
3. **Righteousness and uprightness:** Something of *qīmah* is considered valuable by virtue of its soundness and integrity. The Qur’an uses the expression (*dīnan qiyaman*) to denote a religion that is upright and firmly established. Similarly, *khuluq qīym* refers to good character, while *kitāb qīym* denotes a book that clearly distinguishes truth from falsehood.

These three linguistic dimensions converge in the general meaning of “value,” encompassing stability, responsibility, righteousness, and uprightness. Conceptually, however, values are more complex. The notion of “value” has long been debated by philosophers and scholars, dating back more than 1,500 years, making it one of the central issues of human thought. Regardless of differing schools of philosophy, values remain at the core of human existence, shaping reflection, judgment, and interaction. Human life without values is essentially devoid of meaning, for values constitute the framework through which individuals engage with ideas, experiences, and objects.

Given their importance, values have been analyzed by philosophers, educators, sociologists, and political scientists, producing a wide array of perspectives. Some have reduced values to mere interests or preferences without binding authority, while others have expanded them to function as cultural standards that sustain human existence.

Accordingly, values can be defined through the following characteristics:⁷

1. A standard by which judgments are made regarding what is desirable or preferable in situations involving multiple alternatives.
2. A determinant of specific goals or ends, as well as the means to achieve them.
3. A basis for evaluating experiences positively or negatively.
4. A framework for expressing choices among alternatives, highlighting the selective nature of values.

5. An element of obligation, often expressed in prescriptive terms such as “ought” or “should.”
6. A weight that varies from individual to individual, depending on the extent to which they adhere to a given value.
7. A hierarchical system where more important values hold greater relative weight than those deemed less significant.

2. Interactive Communication and Interactive Media: Overlaps and Distinctions

**** What is Interaction?***

In Arabic linguistic usage, (interaction) derives from the root (to do, to act). It means to fabricate or produce, while *infa'ala* refers to being influenced or affected, whether positively or negatively. it denotes reciprocal influence between two entities. In chemistry, *tafā'ul* describes a process in which one substance reacts with another, altering its composition.

Researchers in communication studies define interaction as a dynamic exchange between sender and receiver, with responsiveness as a key characteristic. Unlike traditional human communication, interactive communication extends to engagement not only among participants but also with the medium itself.

The term interactive communication is often used interchangeably with computer-mediated communication (CMC), emphasizing the role of digital platforms. Its key features include:⁸

- The exchange of communicative roles between participants.
- Equality among participants in communicative power, fostering collective agreement through free and open dialogue.
- Democratic participation, exemplified in online discussion forums, live chat rooms, and email exchange platforms.

Thus, interactive communication represents a form of egalitarian engagement in which participants collaboratively construct meaning, free from external dominance or manipulation.⁹

**** Interactive Media***

**** Types of Interactive Media***

To understand interactive media, it is necessary to briefly revisit the stages through which mass communication has addressed audiences. These stages, outlined by Dr. Sami Al-Sharif during the Fourth Scientific Conference of the Media Sciences Division at the

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International Academy of Engineering and Media Sciences, can be summarized as follows:¹⁰

a. The Elite Stage

At this stage, the audience was relatively small, composed mainly of the wealthier and more educated sectors of society. Media content was tailored to the tastes of the elite.

b. The Specialized Stage

This stage saw the emergence of fragmented groups with specific and defined interests.

c. The Interactivity Stage

Here, audiences gained a degree of transitional control over the type of information they consumed. In other words, individuals could act as editors-in-chief of the media they selected. Interactivity, however, requires the interplay of four essential elements: higher education, abundance and affluence, leisure time, and population size.

Within these stages, the satellite revolution marked a turning point in communication technologies, introducing specialized channels and enhancing audience interactivity through three major developments:¹¹

1. Cable Television

Cable TV services emerged in the United States in the late 1940s to improve television quality, beginning in 1946. While it spread across developed countries, its application in developing nations was hindered by costs, leading many to rely on more affordable and high-quality aerial cable systems.¹²

2. Direct Broadcasting Satellite (DBS)

DBS technology revolutionized the transfer of data and information across borders with minimal interference, covering vast distances. Satellite communication developed in two phases:¹³

- **Distribution Satellites (1970s):** These relied on ground stations acting as gatekeepers and served various purposes, such as:
 - Exchange of TV programs among broadcasters.
 - Satellite news gathering.
 - Delivering signals to cable companies.
 - Broadcasting to transmission stations.
 - Providing multi-channel television services in hotels and residential complexes via internal distribution systems.

- **Direct Broadcasting Satellites (1980s):** These enabled the direct transmission of TV programs from satellites to home receivers, bypassing ground stations and cable systems. Signals were transmitted from ground stations to satellites, amplified, and rebroadcast to households. Today, global television satellite communications are dominated by five major organizations:¹⁴
 1. **Intelsat**, launched its first satellite in 1965.
 2. **Inmarsat**, launched in 1976.
 3. **Intersputnik**, launched in 1962 by the Eastern Bloc.
 4. **Eutelsat**, launched in 1971.
 5. **Arabsat**, launched in 1985. Additional satellites have since been launched by Israel, Iran, and India.

3. Digital Television

Digital TV represented a revolution in broadcasting, allowing up to eight channels within the frequency band of a single analog channel. It provided high-definition images, clearer sound, and lower costs. First adopted in 1993, it paved the way for specialized thematic channels targeting niche audiences.¹⁵

Following these advancements came the information explosion via the Internet, virtual reality technologies powered by artificial intelligence, decision-support systems, and digital information platforms. These developments became strategic tools within organizations worldwide, requiring strict regulation and cooperation.

By the 1980s, Videotex systems emerged, followed by the growth of the Internet and the development of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s. These innovations expanded interactivity, eliminated temporal and spatial limitations, reduced costs, and engaged human senses, particularly hearing and sight.¹⁶

The Internet shifted from being a domain for scientists and experts to a platform accessible to individuals anywhere and anytime, provided they had a computer. Email introduced additional services, including electronic money transfers through credit cards and other financial tools. New platforms such as bulletin boards, online seminars, chat lines, electronic newspapers, health bulletins, and national research networks proliferated.

3. The Ethical and Value Dimensions of the Interactive Media Society and the Duality of Stability/Change

*** The Ethical Dimension of the Interactive Society**

As Gilles Lipovetsky notes: “In post-democratic societies, ethics do not re-emerge as an unconditional ideal, but rather as liberal societies’ response to concerns arising from new forms of power technological and media-related alike.” Consequently, maintaining democratic principles requires the establishment of counter-balances, managed either through laws and regulations or through professional ethics governing the media field in its various dimensions.

Thus, media practices must be situated at the intersection of four key domains, with each country determining the weight of each according to its context:¹⁷

1. **Law:** Written legislative texts and regulations that are explicit and enforceable, often with punitive measures.
2. **Morality:** Shared values, norms, and customs embedded in a society’s cultural and symbolic fabric, often unwritten but vital for communal living.
3. **Ethics:** Principles derived from both law and morality but not formally codified, serving as guiding standards for conduct.
4. **Professional Ethics:** Norms developed within media communities themselves, often codified in codes of conduct or charters of honor, combining elements of law, morality, and ethics.

These domains overlap but do not cover the same scope. While morality provides general principles, law codifies binding rules (with room for judicial interpretation), and media practices often establish professional standards agreed upon by practitioners themselves.

* *Value Stabilization in Interactive Societies*

a. Supporting Values

- According to Maurice Hanou-Mietz, new media serve as a means of transmitting cultural heritage from one generation to another, monitoring societal environments, and linking dominant values with individuals in times of rapid change.
- New media reinforce values by providing individuals with daily information and knowledge, thereby aligning personal beliefs with societal norms and enhancing social integration.
- They also unify personal values and socially accepted behaviors, enabling individuals to interpret their world by comparing their experiences with mediated representations.¹⁸

b. Changing Values

- New media have the capacity to reshape value systems by introducing dynamic and shifting content into people’s lives. This generates conflict between inherited values

(which some seek to preserve) and newly constructed media values (which others accept as givens). This dynamic highlights the urgency of rational media use, especially in the Arab world, where values are deeply intertwined with Islamic traditions.

- Media can expose corrupt values within society, creating pressure for reform, while silence or censorship fosters tolerance of such corruption.
- Their persuasive power lies in their ability to captivate audiences, particularly through television, leading individuals to imitate admired figures and internalize media-promoted values.
- Media redefine values in line with new contexts e.g., women's education, once considered a negative value, has been reframed positively through persistent media advocacy.
- In this way, media act as engines of social change by reshaping opinions, attitudes, and behaviors, influencing broader societal structures.¹⁹

c. Creating New Values

- New media are decisive in shaping the values of interactive audiences, influencing social development through new forms of socialization.
- They spread emerging values, integrate them into societal systems, and foster new patterns of thought, virtual relationships, and social structures.
- They stimulate imagination, regulate behavior, and construct social norms, embedding new standards in everyday life.²⁰
- By continuously generating images, meanings, and teachings, they play an ongoing role in the creation of values.
- They reorder social and behavioral systems, imposing both desirable and undesirable norms.
- As Tony Schwartz argued in *The Media: The Second God*, media traditional and new alike shape beliefs and affect lives as deeply as religion.
- Through social networks, forums, and online communities, new media significantly influence value creation, exposing individuals to both positive and negative models.
- Research confirms that new media rely on consumption-driven consciousness to foster value creation within societies.²¹

Conclusion:

From the foregoing, we can conclude that it is not easy to discuss values and ethics in this era, where media has permeated nearly all aspects of our social life and extended to every social system political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, as well as technological. This difficulty arises simply because the topic is multifaceted in its sources and dimensions. It also became clear that the very term *value* has been used extensively throughout the heritage of social and human sciences, to the point where any researcher who attempts to

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define it finds themselves facing a vast and diverse range of definitions, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly what is being referred to.

Therefore, no matter how much we study and research the topic of values and ethics through media in the interactive society in which we live, we find it to be among the subjects that have attracted the attention of researchers from various fields of knowledge owing to its role in the processes of social construction and transformation. Consequently, ethics and values are considered a mirror reflecting the character of society, given their flexibility, relativity, and variation from one interactive society to another. Moreover, the concept of values is often linked to media (traditional/modern), where the relationship between these two variables has sparked many debates. As a result, new media has become one of the essential factors in the process of consolidating, altering, and even creating values within societies.

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