The Perspectives and Expectations of Mass Communication Students Regarding the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators in Bangkok and Vicinity

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the perspectives and expectations of mass communication students regarding the ethical consciousness of digital content creators. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving a multi-stage sampling technique. The sample consisted of 200 mass communication students. Data were collected through a questionnaire of nine hypothetical situations and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including t-test. The findings revealed that those who had not participated in such training exhibited a moderate level. The study participants generally believed that applying ethical reasoning by digital content creators depended on the situation. Furthermore, content creators were expected to present accurate information to avoid misunderstandings and to promptly rectify any mistakes, as they bear similar responsibilities to traditional media. It was also emphasized that information selection and evaluation should consider the privacy rights of individuals and their families. Moreover,content creators should prioritize the potential consequences of their content rather than merely chasing trends. Ethical considerations must be integrated into content creation to foster sustained engagement and followership.

Keywords : Ethical Consciousness, Digital Content Creator, Expectation, Perspectives, Professional Training

Introduction

Nowadays in digital age, characterized by rapid technological advancements and the pervasive influence of social media, content creators have emerged as powerful figures in society. Wit Sittiweckin (2024) noted in the Thai PBS program "Setthakit Tid Baan," Goldman Sachs estimates the content industry to be worth 8.8 trillion baht in 2024, nearly 50% of Thailand's GDP. This sector is projected to grow even further, potentially equaling the entire GDP of Thailand. Content creators, in particular, wield significant influence due to their ability to communicate effectively and disseminate information widely through digital platforms. The speed and interactivity afforded by these platforms provide a distinct advantage (Logan, 2010; McQuail, 2010; Kaewtep & Chaikhunphon, 2015), making content creation a lucrative and aspirational career for many. The digital age has ushered in a transformative era for content creators, necessitating a paradigm shift in their professional practices.

However, this evolution has also given rise to significant ethical dilemmas. As Yoon (2012) aptly noted, journalists who prioritize speed over depth and breadth risk becoming mere conduits of information, failing to leverage their critical thinking skills to discern fact from fiction. In an information-saturated society, the demand for highly skilled journalists who can analyze, synthesize, and contextualize complex issues has never been greater. A study on "Journalists at Digital Television Newsroom in Britain and Spain Workflow and Multi-Skill in a Competitive Environment" underscores the profound impact of new technologies on journalists' attitudes and practices at both organizational and national levels. A solid grasp of digital tools and techniques is essential for effective journalistic work, demanding a versatile skill set. Evidence suggests that younger journalists in smaller newsrooms in Spain, for instance, often prioritize speed over accuracy in their reporting, reflecting broader concerns about the erosion of journalistic integrity in the face of intense competition. (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020)

The impact of the scandal involving a prominent content creator, which resulted in the termination of contracts with various companies and clients, has brought to light the significant consequences of such actions. Not only has this incident caused substantial damage to organizations and individuals involved, but it has also led to a decline in the

creator's popularity and sparked widespread negative commentary from their followers regarding the inappropriate content disseminated. As content creators, producers of information, and essentially manufacturers of 'intellectual products,' we wield immense influence over the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of our audiences. As the renowned journalist Supa Sirimanont stated in 1987, News is not just a commodity, the knowledge and wisdom of its consumers (Sirimanont, 1987). It can make readers, listeners, and viewers either ignorant or intelligent, bad or good.

In today's digital age, content creation has become a highly sought-after profession. However, with this popularity comes a growing need for content creators to uphold professional standards and assume both professional and ethical responsibilities. Professional ethics emerge from an individual's conscience, allowing them to perceive and learn from experiences that affect both themselves and society. Universities play a pivotal role in preparing students to become high- quality professionals. As the bedrock of knowledge, skills, and creative thinking, universities cultivate ethical behavior in youth (McCay, 2017; Kamlerttong, 1999; Srihaampai, 2000; Taweesak, 2009). This study explores the perspectives and expectations of mass communication students in Bangkok and its surrounding areas regarding the ethical consciousness of digital content creators. Given the diverse ethical challenges faced by digital content creators, this research also examines how their ethical decision-making varies across different situations.

Objective

This research was to investigate the perspective and expectations of mass communication students on the ethical consciousness of digital content creators

Research Hypothesis

1. The perspectives and expectations of communication students regarding the digital content creator's ethical consciousness are different.

2. Communication students who participate in professional training will have significantly different perspectives and expectations regarding the ethical consciousness of digital content creators.
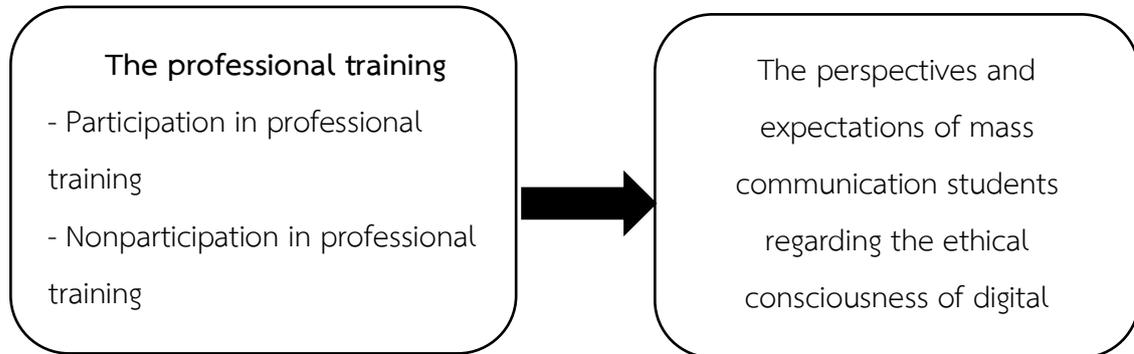
Research Framework

Figure 1 Research Framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the perspectives and expectations of communication students regarding the ethical consciousness of digital content creators.The target population for this study was communication students residing in Bangkok and its surrounding areas. A sample of 200 communication students was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, the population was stratified into four groups public universities (three universities), private universities (four universities), Rajabhat universities (two universities), and the University of Technology Rajamangala. (one university).

The specific institutions within each stratum were Public Universities Thammasat University, Kasetsart University, and Ramkhamhaeng University. Private Universities Bangkok University, Rangsit University, Assumption University, and University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. Rajabhat Universities Suan Dusit Rajabhat University and Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Rajamangala Technology University Rajamangale university of Technology Thanyaburi.

In the second stage, simple random sampling was employed to select participants from each stratum. The sample size for each stratum was determined proportionally based on the total number of journalism students in each institution. A lottery method was used to randomly select participants from each stratum until the desired sample size of 200 was reached. The questionnaire was used as the research instrument to collect data.

The questionnaire was designed to measure the participants' perspectives and expectations regarding the ethical consciousness of digital content creators Data was collected online to ensure a wider reach and convenience for the participants. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the characteristics of the sample and inferential statistics to test the research hypotheses.

Result

A total of 200 participants were involved in the study, of which 126 (67.0%) were male and 74 (37.0%) were female. Regarding professional training, 110 (55%) participated, while 90 (45%) did not. The majority of 54 participants (49.09%) received training through the Thai Journalists Association. Other 24 training providers included the Environmental Journalists Club (21.81%), the Online Journalists Club (22.20%), and 10 people training in Cofect (9.09%). The most popular training topic was "Principles of Writing and Reporting News in Digital Media Responsibly" followed by "Media Ethics" The overall perception and expectation of the sample group regarding the digital content creators' ethical consciousness was found to be at a moderate level, with a mean score of 2.7486. A one-sample t-test was conducted to examine the difference from the hypothesized mean, yielding a t-value of 2.61 (t_{199}=5.622, $P<0.01$), as shown in Table 1

Table 1 Overall Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students Regarding the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators

Overall Perspectives and Expectations	The Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators			
	t	df	Sig (2 tailed)	Mean Difference
	5.622	199	0.000**	0.13861
Overall Perspectives and Expectations Level The Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Std. Error
	199	5.622	0.000**	0.13861

** statistical significance level 0.01

When examining the content creation process under hypothesis. The findings revealed a notable improvement in the quality of news presentations among students who received professional training, suggesting that training can effectively enhance professionalism in this specific aspect of journalism. Especially, the ethical consciousness regarding presentation was highest in items 6 and 7, with mean scores of 3.99, 3.88, 4.41, and 4. 31, respectively. Following this, the selection, verification, and evaluation of information, as represented by items 2 and 3, had mean scores of 2. 90, 1. 90, 3. 08, and 2. 92. In third place was data collection, as indicated by items 1, 5, 8, and 9, with mean scores of 2.67, 2.01, 2.58, 2.12, 2.58, and 2.12, and 2.67, and 2.55, respectively, As a shown in Table 2

Table 2 Perspectives and Expectations among of Communication Students Who Participated and Did not Participate in the Professional Training Regarding the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators

The Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators	Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students					
	Participation			Non-Participation		
	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning
1. Content creators often disseminate unverified information, such as allegations of domestic violence against a celebrity. Relying on hearsay or social media posts, they may quickly share such content, assuming its accuracy without conducting thorough fact-checking	2.67	1.087	Moderate	2.01	0.923	Low
2. Content creator specifically focuses on a case where a content creator is reporting a sexual abuse case involving a 13-year-old girl, her 18-year-old brother, and her 75-year-old grandfather. The content creator wants to share detailed information including names, surnames, addresses, and	2.60	1.182	Moderate	1.90	1.003	Low

accompanying images on their page or on Facebook						

Table 2 Perspectives and Expectations among of Communication Students Who Participated and Did not Participate in the Professional Training Regarding the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators (Cont.)

The Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators	Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students					
	Participation			Non-Participation		
	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning
3. The content creator has uncovered explicit video evidence that could substantiate allegations of financial misconduct and inappropriate behavior by a temple abbot. While the creator acknowledges the sensitive and explicit nature of the content, they argue that the public interest in exposing such wrongdoing outweighs the potential harm caused by disseminating the footage. The creator plans to release this evidence to inform the victims and the public.	3.08	1.040	Moderate	2.92	1.110	Moderate
4. A prominent party politician, known for his positive public image, high education level, and long-standing commitment to social causes, is set to run for a seat in the House of Representatives. However, credible sources have revealed that the candidate is homosexual and exhibits violent tendencies, cohabiting with a male companion. This information was immediately disseminated as breaking	2.28	1.006	Lowest	1.79	0.852	Lowest

news and is being prepared for a special report						

Table 2 Perspectives and Expectations among of Communication Students Who Participated and Did not Participate in the Professional Training Regarding the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators (Cont.)

The Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators	Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students					
	Participation			Non-Participation		
	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning
5. A content creator experiencing financial difficulties, including overdue rent and tuition fees for two consecutive semesters, received financial assistance from a close confidant. The source, who is currently facing personal family issues, provided the aid to alleviate the content creator's stress to facilitate better work performance. The source has requested that their identity and the details of the situation remain undisclosed on social media platforms. The content creator immediately accepted the financial assistance	2.21	1.047	Lowest	1.69	0.885	Lowest
6. A content creator is contemplating producing a video featuring a meal shared between ruling coalition politicians and a TikTok star. The potential for a lawsuit alleging invasion of privacy looms large over this endeavor. However, given the prior dissemination of similar content by other pages, the creator is inclined to defer to legal counsel before proceeding, even at the risk of a delayed release	3.99	1.014	Highest	3.88	0.968	High

Table 2 Perspectives and Expectations among of Communication Students Who Participated and Did not Participate in the Professional Training Regarding the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators (Cont.)

The Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators	Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students					
	Participation			Non-Participation		
	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning
7. A content creator reported a death toll of 550 individuals following a devastating earthquake and tropical storm. However, subsequent investigations revealed that the accurate figure was significantly lower at 255 fatalities. This discrepancy highlights the critical importance of fact-checking and verifying information before dissemination, especially in the context of natural disasters. The immediate correction of such misinformation is essential to maintain public trust and prevent the spread of panic and distress.	4.42	1.042	Highest	4.31	0.942	Highest
8. A content creator's decision to withhold a significant investigative piece exposing corruption and fraud allegations against long-time sponsors. The creator's dilemma highlights the complex interplay between journalistic ethics, personal relationships, and financial considerations.	2.58	1.021	Lowest	2.12	0.925	Low
9. Content creators demonstrate a strong inclination towards disseminating trending news by expanding their distribution networks and employing provocative language to stimulate increased audience participation and information diffusion.	2.67	1.087	Moderate	2.55	1.002	low
Combine mean	2.95	1.04	Moderate	2.55	1.00	lowest

The results revealed significant differences (t_{199}= 5.967, P<0.05) in digital content creators' perceptions and expectations regarding ethical considerations when presenting content across various platforms, as shown in Table 3

Table 3 Perspectives and Expectations among of Communication Students Who Participated and Did not Participate in the Professional Training Regarding the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators

Mass Communication students	Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students Toward the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators' Level		
	t	df	Sig (2 tailed)
	5.967	199	0.000**

Professional Training	Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students Toward the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators' Level			
	N	$\bar{x}$	SD.	Std.Error
Participation professional training	110	2.87	4.531	0.429
Non-participation professional training	90	2.58	3.934	0.423
Combine Mean	200	2.72	4.230	0.420

** statistical significance level 0.01

A majority of communication students surveyed expressed that ethical reasoning in digital content creation is highly situational, influenced by a complex interplay of factors such as the competitive landscape of the digital content industry, family financial circumstances, and interpersonal relationships. Regarding data collection, the students generally agreed that information from social media platforms like Facebook and Line cannot be considered entirely reliable. This is due to the rapid dissemination of content often without thorough fact-checking, making it difficult to distinguish between genuine information and content created for ulterior motives such as commercial or political gain. Participants emphasized the need for careful selection and evaluation of information,

especially given the prevalence of fake news and fraudulent accounts. They highlighted the significant negative impacts that such misinformation can have on individuals and their families, both in the present and future. When it comes to content presentation, the students stressed the importance of accuracy and avoiding the spread of misinformation.

This is particularly crucial for content creators who cover news or hold dual roles as journalists and public figures. Verifying personal and organizational harm still needs more research study and consultation with experts to migrate potential risks.

The overall average perspective and expectation of digital content creators' ethical consciousness among communication students who participated in professional training was found to be moderate. In contrast, students who did not participate in the training exhibited a lower level of perception and expectation regarding the ethical presentation of content by digital content creators. When examining the content production process based on specific scenarios, it was revealed that both the data collection and selection/ evaluation processes significantly influenced these perceptions. Notably, the perception and expectation of ethical consciousness regarding content presentation among students who participated in the professional training were found to be high. However, for those who did not participate, these perceptions remained moderate. As shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Comparison of Perspectives on Digital Ethics Among Communication Students Impact of Training

Content Production of Digital Content Creators	Perspectives and Expectations of Communication Students Toward the Ethical Consciousness of Digital Content Creators' Level					
	Participation			Non-Participation		
	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning	$\bar{x}$	(SD.)	Meaning
1. Data gathering (Situation 1)	2.67	1.087	Moderate	2.01	1.110	Low
2. Data selection and evaluation (Situation 2-3)	2.84	1.110	Moderate	2.41	1.056	Low

3. Reporting and presenting (Situation 4, 6-7)	3.56	0.972	High	3.33	0.970	Moderate
4. Following up and effect (Situation 5, 8-9)	2.49	1.051	Low	2.04	1.024	Low
Combine Mean	2.89	1.055	Moderate	2.45	0.993	Low

Conclusion and Discussion

The study examined communication students' perceptions of ethical considerations within digital content creation. Overall, students demonstrated a moderate level of awareness of the ethical implications involved in producing content for digital platforms. When analyzing specific scenarios related to reporting and presenting information, students exhibited a strong expectation that digital content creators should prioritize accuracy and transparency. The in-depth interviews further emphasized the importance of presenting factual information and promptly correcting any errors. This finding aligns with professional journalism standards and reflects the students' understanding of the content creator's responsibility to the audience. However, while accuracy is crucial, the study also highlighted the need to balance the pursuit of truth with the protection of individuals' privacy. The students recognized that publishing the names, addresses, and images of individuals involved in news stories, even if they are perpetrators, could have legal consequences and potentially cause emotional harm to the individuals and their families.

This perspective is consistent with ethical theories such as Haidt's social intuitionist model and Kohlberg and Elfenbein's stages of moral development, which suggest that individuals often make moral judgments based on a combination of emotional responses, social norms, and personal values. (Haidt, 2001; Kohlberg & Elfenbein, 1975; Hunsaen, Sinlapaprasert, Aiemphaya and Kaewmamuang, 2023). In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that communication students possess a nuanced understanding of the ethical challenges faced by digital content creators. While students value accurate and informative content, they also recognize the importance of balancing these goals with the need to respect privacy and avoid causing harm.

These findings suggest that future communication professionals are equipped to navigate the complex ethical landscape of digital media and to create content that is both informative and responsible. The provided analysis delves into the intricate ethical landscape of content creation, particularly highlighting the tension between utilitarian and deontological perspectives. While utilitarianism prioritizes maximizing overall happiness, deontology emphasizes adherence to duty and principles, regardless of consequences. In the context of content creation, these ethical frameworks often clash, forcing creators to make difficult choices.

The argument presented suggests that content creators, particularly in the competitive digital landscape, face a unique challenge balancing the demands of professional ethics with the pressures of commercial success. The concept of deontological ethics, with its focus on duty and moral obligations, is particularly relevant in this context. By adhering to a strict moral code, creators can ensure that their content aligns with their personal values and societal expectations. However, the real-world complexities of content creation often necessitate a more nuanced approach. While deontological ethics provides a solid foundation, it is essential to acknowledge the role of virtue ethics. This perspective emphasizes the importance of developing a virtuous character and making decisions based on one's moral compass. In the digital age, where content can have far-reaching consequences, cultivating virtues such as integrity, compassion, and fairness is crucial.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights the concept of commercial ethics. As content creation becomes increasingly intertwined with business, creators must navigate the tension between maximizing profits and upholding ethical standards. While it may be tempting to prioritize commercial success, doing so at the expense of one's values can lead to long-term damage to one's reputation and the industry as a whole.

In conclusion, the ethical challenges faced by content creators are multifaceted and require careful consideration. While utilitarianism and deontology offer valuable frameworks, virtue ethics provides a more holistic perspective. By balancing the demands of professional ethics, commercial ethics, and personal values, content creators can produce work that is both meaningful and successful. (Gloor et al, 2018. Contrary to the concept of Patank and Imperiali (1997) who emphasized that technology

makes humans focus more on social needs or mimicry, concluding that the behavior is correct and acceptable, which means an action that produces the desired and desirable result, i.e., the importance of individual or group needs and the professional ethics of the National Press Council (2024), stated in sections 2 and 3 that one must adhere to facts, accuracy, and completeness.

In the case of incorrect information, it must be published immediately, and one should refrain from violating personal rights, except in the public interest. This is consistent with Terdthammakun's (2004) study on the awareness of Thai newspaper journalists towards professional ethics, which found that most journalists had a high level of awareness based on direct questions, but when introducing intervening variables such as time constraints, competition, organizational interests, and personal interests, awareness decreased to a moderate level and significantly decreased measuring professional ethics of newspapers regarding truthfulness and credibility. This study examines the impact of a professional training program on communication students' understanding and application of digital ethics. employing Potter's Box as a framework for analysis, this research explores how students navigate complex ethical dilemmas in the context of content creation.

The findings contribute to the existing body of literature on media ethics, particularly regarding the role of professional training in shaping journalists' values and decision-making processes (Potter, 1965) and relate their arguments to existing literature on media ethics, such as Lambeth's eclectic system and the findings of Ramaprasad (2012) and Cleary (2006). Furthermore, Phuban's (2006) findings on the development of moral consciousness in individuals. It highlights the role of various factors such as education, training, role models, and social institutions.

However, it also acknowledges that professional training does not guarantee ethical behavior, especially in the context of digital content creation. Bunsamsook and others (2013) who found that various factors, including political, economic, and technological contexts, can influence the ethical behavior of content creators. (Mccay, 2017; Mccay, 2018). Behham's (2020) contention that balance and fairness underpin journalistic ethics provides a solid foundation for examining the complexities of news production. While these concepts are fundamental, their practical application in journalism is often nuanced

and subject to interpretation. The absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of "balance" further complicates the issue. The creation of balanced and fair narratives is largely contingent on the individual journalist and the organizational culture within which they operate. This subjectivity has led to calls from the public and policymakers for greater transparency and accountability in news reporting. Notably, there has been a growing interest in understanding the structures that underpin notions of balance and how these structures might contribute to or mitigate imbalances in news coverage.

Limitations of Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the perspectives of communication students regarding digital ethics, several limitations must be acknowledged

1. The sample was limited to students in Bangkok and its vicinity, which may not fully represent students from other regions of Thailand.

2. The study relied on hypothetical scenarios through a questionnaire, which may not completely reflect real-world behavior.

3. The analysis primarily used quantitative methods, which may lack depth in capturing emotional or motivational aspects of ethical decision-making.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for the utilization of research findings Government agencies responsible for policymaking should support and consider promoting legislation that oversees the production of content that is beneficial and creative, aiming to foster and elevate into wisdom society. The digital age has revolutionized the way information is disseminated, granting individuals unprecedented power to create and share content. However, this freedom comes with significant responsibilities. As the proliferation of online platforms continues, so too does the need for guidelines and regulations to ensure the ethical and responsible creation and consumption of content.

2. Recommendations for Future Research Future research should expand to include other groups involved in content production. Qualitative research methods,

such as in-depth interviews, can be employed to gather data for the creation and development of indicators that promote ethical behavior among digital

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