11 Mentions of ethics codes in social media: A Twitter analysis

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Abstract Ethics codes and ethical guidelines are an established way of installing standards in professions, science, technology, and business. They help institutions and organizations address emerging issues, regulate practice-specific contexts, provide support, and are seen as helpful resources for professional-specific teaching. When it comes to the broader role of ethics codes in society and to the question of how ethics codes are seen and perceived outside professional contexts, the picture is much less clear, however. In order to find out about the broader societal role of ethics codes-related topics, we analyzed mentions of ethics codes on the social media site Twitter between June 2016 and May 2017. This chapter will detail the results of the study, which examined the frequency, content, and role of tweets that contain the search phrases "ethics code," "code of ethics," "professional code," and their plural versions. We used the Twitter streaming application programming interface (API) and STACK to retrieve the tweets. It turned out that by far, the most often used term is "code of ethics," with an overall frequency of around 83,000. Topics discussed in the tweets centered around ethical issues in political journalism, politics, media, and sports. While we had assumed we would find an ongoing illuminating conversation between professionals from all kinds of fields that would give us some hints on the current role of ethics codes in an evolving technology-relying society; instead, we found a much more diverse conglomerate of stakeholders partly using ethics codes-related tweets to promulgate their views strategically.

Keywords: social media, Twitter, code of ethics, ethics code, professional ethics, media ethics, journalism ethics

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11.1 Introduction

Ethics codes and ethical guidelines are an established way of installing standards in professions, science, technology, and business. They help institutions and organizations address emerging issues, regulate practice-specific contexts, provide support, and are seen as helpful resources for professional-specific teaching. While there is considerable scholarly work on the role of ethics codes and ethical guidelines in professions, science, technology, business, and education (Davis 1997; Frankel 1989; Mele and Schepers 2013), we still know little about the social contexts in which code of ethics and ethical guidelines are discussed outside of professional practice, science, technology, and ethics education. When it comes to the broader role of ethics codes in society and how ethics codes are perceived outside professional contexts, the picture is not very clear. In order to find out about the broader societal role of ethics codes-related topics and how these topics are being used to justify specific ideas or professional practices, we conducted an analysis of mentions of codes of ethics on the social media site Twitter. We were hoping that this study would also allow us to find new codes of ethics being developed by professional associations, businesses, and other institutions, discover the extent to which codes are being discussed on this social media platform, and learn how existing codes of ethics change in view of significant discussions in the various fields.

The social media site Twitter seems to be a good source of data about the role of ethics codes in society. In 2016, Twitter had about 319 million active users who tweeted about 500 million Twitter messages (tweets) per day (Twitter 2016). With something like 22% of U.S. adults using the site regularly (Perrin & Anderson 2019), Twitter has become a source of data for scholars tracking public conversations on everything from the 2016 presidential elections to the anti-vaccine movement and other controversial topics. Social media platforms facilitate conversations and create connections between users with common interests. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that discussions around ethics codes might also occur in this medium. In growing numbers, professionals and scholars are turning to social media outlets like Twitter to reach audiences beyond their own company, professional society, and geographical area to engage with colleagues and a wider audience (Collins et al. 2016). Twitter itself has been one of the most popular platforms among academics and helps their work reach non-academic audiences (Mohammadi, et al. 2018). For this reason, we chose to focus on this social media platform for our study.

The following questions shaped our approach: What roles do ethics codes have in social media? Which ethics codes are talked about? How do professionals from various fields discuss ethics codes on social media? How do they see the current role of ethics codes in an evolving technology-relying society? Are there new topics and new contexts in which ethics codes are currently being discussed? What is the broader societal role of ethics codes and ethics-codes-related topics?

11.2 Methods: **Data Collection and Processing**

The data was collected through Twitter's Public Streaming Application Programming Interface (API) from June 23, 2016, to May 4, 2017. The project team used this streaming API to request tweets that contained the phrases "code of ethics," "codes of ethics," "ethics code," "ethics codes," "professional code," and "professional codes." All data collected was publicly available. No private tweets, direct messages, or other confidential data were collected during the duration of this study, as laid out in Twitter's Developer Agreement and Policy (2018). The streaming API allows researchers to keep a connection active for a specified amount of time and collects any public data that contains the terms of interest. The software toolkit called STACKS (Social Media Tracker, Analyzer, and Collector Toolkit at Syracuse), developed in 2014 by Syracuse University, allowed the project team to collect a filtered stream of data and process and store data from Twitter using Amazon Web Services.

Tweets were collected using a data extraction template that recorded the publicly available biography of the user, his or her country of origin, and the verbatim text of the tweets posted by the user. In some cases, further demographic information was determined using a combination of online biographies, links to outside websites, and user names.

At the time of this study, tweets could contain up to 140 characters, though this limit changed to 280 characters in November of 2017 (Rosen 2017). Tweets could also include links to outside web content, hashtags, and embedded images and videos. Users can also interact with other users by referring to their username in a tweet and retweeting another user's tweet.

The research team sought formal confirmation by their institutional review board (IRB) that no IRB review or approval was needed as this type of research was not considered human subjects research. Even though all tweets gathered through this study were publicly available, the project team decided to take a precautionary approach and avoid mentioning the user names or Twitter handles and direct quotations from individual Twitter users in the publication of this data. This prevents potential privacy breaches or harm that may result from individual users and their tweets being identified. We took this measure because this research study uses tweets in a different context than initially intended by the users. We do not know whether the users' consent to publish the study results.[1] Two exceptions were made, however. When talking about tweets by media companies (see most influential users), we included detailed information on the company's name and the respective tweets. We also did not anonymize the Twitter account POTUS, which the Trump administration used starting in January of 2017 after President Trump's inauguration, as this is a highly public office and prominent account.

As this study was completed in 2017, the research protocol for this study did not fall under the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation that was implemented in May of 2018. Under this regulation, studies that collect tweets which may contain personal data are now urged to treat all data gathered using this kind of automated harvesting as potentially highly sensitive/or

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[1] For more information on privacy issues in social media research, see Association of Internet Researchers 2012; Taylor & Pagliari 2018; Samuel et al. 2018; Moreno 2013.

at the GDPR's "special category" at the point of collection. Appropriate protocols need to be in place to address this issue (Information Comissioner's Office 2019).

11.3 Results

11.3.1 Tweets collected
Compared to the aggregate 500 million tweets per day worldwide, there were relatively few tweets using the phrases "code of ethics," "codes of ethics," "ethics code," "ethics codes," "professional code," and "professional codes" during the ten and a half months of the study (see Figure 1). The phrase "code of ethics" had the highest number of mentions (83,204), followed by "ethics code" (6,140) and professional code (1,213). The number of tweets collected using the plural versions of the search phrases was relatively minimal. The total numbers of tweets indicated in Figure 1 include unique tweets and tweets retweeted by other users. The term "unique tweets" refers to tweets posted by the original, unique user. These tweets can be once or repeatedly by the user, though the tweets are only counted once in this study unless noted otherwise.

Figure 11. 1: Total number of tweets collected during the study duration

Keyword in Tweets	Total number of tweets collected
code of ethics	83,204
codes of ethics	952
ethics code	6,140
ethics codes	327
professional code	1213
professional codes	201

For this analysis, the term "unique users" refers to Twitter users who wrote tweets involving one of the search phrases, "mentioned users" refers to users who had their user names mentioned in one or more tweets involving one of the search phrases, or whose original tweets were retweeted (see Figure 2).

Figure 11.2: Tweets Collected for Phrases Being Studied

Phrase	Total Tweets	Unique	Unique	Unique

		Tweets	Users	Mentioned Users
Code of ethics	83,204	58,139	38,839	16,928
Ethics code	6,140	5,024	4,706	1,174
Professional code	1,213	1,021	1059	385

Since among the searched phrases used, "code of ethics" is by far the most often mentioned, in what follows, we confine our analysis to "code of ethics." This phrase appeared in a total of 83,204 tweets, of which 58,139 were unique tweets and 25,065 retweets. A total of 38,839 unique users tweeted this phrase, and a total of 16,928 unique mentioned users were seen in these tweets.

What follows now is a closer look at the kinds of users appearing with the search phrase "code of ethics" and tweet spikes that capture a surge of tweets around the search phrase.

11.3.2 User characterization
In analyzing Twitter users, we distinguish between three types of top users in the context of the use of the phrase "code of ethics":

- Most influential users - measured by users with the highest number of followers who tweeted about "code of ethics";
- Most active users - measured by the number of tweets they tweeted using the phrase "code of ethics";
- Most mentioned users - measured by the number of times their Twitter handle was mentioned in other users' tweets and retweets containing the phrase "code of ethics."

Most Influential Users

By far the most influential users producing tweets with the term "code of ethics" were news outlets such as the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC, which has three Twitter handles, BBC News, BBC World, and BBC Breaking), the *Washington Post*, *The Times of India, Wired Magazine*, the British newspaper *The Guardian,* and ABS-CBN News, a major news outlet in the Philippines. Not surprisingly, these sources have many followers, and each of the tweets directly refers to an article published by their newsroom. However, during the study, each of them tweeted only one tweet in which the phrase "code of ethics" appeared.

- The three BBC accounts tweeted and retweeted a news story about FIFA president Gianni Infantino being cleared of allegations of violating FIFA's Code of Ethics (BBC 2016).
- Two tweets from ABS-CBN News and the Times of India discuss news from FIFA, specifically, how on December 6, 2016, former FIFA president Sepp Blatter lost his appeal against a six-year ban for ethics violations(Homewood 2016).
- *Wired* tweeted the link of an article that discusses the need for augmented reality games

such as the then-newly-released Pokemon Go to adopt a code of ethics (Cross 2016).
- The *Washington Post* had a tweet leading to their article from November 16, 2016, which discusses the lack of an ethics code for Trump's transition team (Byers 2017).
- The *Guardian* tweeted on August 19, 2016, an article describing a British pro-Jeremy Corbyn grassroots organization's struggle with their interim code of ethics (Syal 2016).

Figure 11.3: Most influential users for "Code of Ethics."

Username	Description	Tweet	Followers
BBCBreaking	BBC Breaking News (Media Company)	Fifa president Gianni Infantino cleared over allegations he breached governing body's code of ethics	30.8M
BBCWorld	BBC News World (Media Company)	R.T. @BBCBreaking: Fifa president Gianni Infantino cleared over allegations he breached governing body's code of ethics	18.8M
washingtonpost	The Washington Post (Media Company)	Trump gets to decide if his transition team will have a code of ethics	9.64M
timesofindia	The Times of India (Media Company)	R.T. @TOISportsNews: CAS rejects @SeppBlatter appeal, says ex-FIFA leader 'breached code of ethics'	9.57M
WIRED	WIRED (Media Company)	Augmented reality games like Pokemon Go need a code of ethics—now:	8.45M
(BBCNews)	BBC News, United Kingdom (Media Company)	R.T. @BBCBreaking: Fifa president Gianni Infantino cleared over allegations he breached governing body's code of ethics	8M
guardian	The Guardian (Media Company)	Momentum drops pledge to non-violence from code of ethics	6.41M
ABSCBNNews	ABS-CBN News (Philippines) (Media Company)	Football: CAS rejects Blatter appeal, says ex-FIFA leader 'breached code of ethics' I via @AFP	5.17M

Most Active Users

In order to narrow down the category of users with the most tweets about the phrase "code of ethics," we used the cutoff of users who had more than 100 tweets that were captured by this search, which left 11 users in this category. The most active users tweeting about "code of ethics"

generally posted only a few unique tweets"; these tweets were repeated by the same account several times, in some cases over three hundred times during the study.

Eight of the eleven most active Twitter accounts were managed by private citizens, with the three remaining accounts belonging to a professional ethicist and two media companies. The tweets cover a wide variety of topics, such as talking about a code of ethics in yoga practice, calling for the need for politicians and government officials to follow a code of ethics, blaming journalists for breaking their code of ethics, discussing engineering codes of ethics, or distributing lyrics from a Christian rock band called "Code of Ethics."

Furthermore, there was one Twitter account from a private individual seeking to build support for whistleblowers who have faced retribution from their employers. This account seems to be related to another account run by someone who identifies himself as the CEO of a business ethics institute that also tweeted about a whistleblowing case against the same company mentioned by the account managed by the private individual.

Three accounts, including the two media outlets, posted links to news about actual codes of ethics, including a delay in enforcement of a code of ethics for human resource offices, a tweet on the development of a code of ethics for pharmacists in Kenya, and a post about a code of ethics for breeding micro pigs.

Overall, most of these most active users had a limited number of followers. One private citizen had slightly over 5,000, and the other most active users had between 32 and 1,300 followers. While three of the tweets did indeed provide links to a code of ethics or news articles about codes of ethics, there was little to no discussion about these tweets between followers, and these tweets were not widely shared. So, the impact of the code of ethics-related tweets by these most active users is relatively limited.

Figure 11.4: Most Active Users Tweeting about "Code of Ethics"

User Classification	Followers	Unique tweets	Top tweets	Top tweet counts (tweets repeated # of times)
Private Citizen (account suspended)	32	3	Codes of ethics in yoga practice	3 separate tweets, repeated 360, 352, and 11 times.
Private citizen	293	6	Whistleblowing, exposing corruption energy company.	Five separate tweets repeated 442/27/25/10/10
Professional ethicist	128	5	Whistleblowing, exposing corruption in energy company	Individual tweets on the same topic 297/30/25/9

Private Citizen	5284	17	Call for a need for government employees to follow the code of ethics for government service, avoid bribery and conflict of interest	Individual tweets on the same topic 148/51/32/11
Institution: Media Company	1395	1	Consequences of a delay in finishing a code of ethics for human resource professionals	139
Private citizen (Account suspended)	349	6	Retweet tweets that blame journalists for breaking their code of ethics	Individual tweets on similar topic 111/15/7
Private citizen	213	4	Advertising personal blog post discussing engineering codes of ethics.	Individual tweets on similar topic 59/38/34
Private citizen	367	1	Tweet about a song by Christian rock band, "Code of Ethics"	122
Private citizen	647	8	Five separate tweets asking why politicians in Canada and the president of the U.S. do not have a code of ethics.	Individual tweets on same topic 32/30/21/16/12
Private Citizen	1270	1	Development of a code of ethics for breeding micro pigs	112
Institution: Pharmaceutical News Corporation	614	1	Development of a code of ethics for pharmacists in Kenya	100

Most mentioned users

During the study, 16,928 unique users were mentioned in tweets with the search phrase "code of ethics". Only around 25 unique users were mentioned over 300 times.

The majority of the most mentioned users had many followers and were usually either journalists, public figures, politicians, news outlets, or individuals who ran their own blogs.

Figure 11.5: Most mentioned users with "Code of Ethics"

User Classification	Followers	Unique tweets	Subject of Tweets	Top tweet counts
Private Citizen-Political Blogger	42.1K	4	Journalism ethics	1556/20/17
Professional-Journalist	834K	9	Journalism ethics	1224/4
Professional-Journalist	221K	5	Journalism ethics	1223/4
Parody Account	219K	2	Journalism ethics	1226
Professional politician (POTUS)	18M	71	Journalism ethics	901/8
			Code of Ethics for government service	11
Professional-Journalist	1.33M	12	Journalism ethics/government ethics	900/6
Institution-Energy Company	37.4K	4	Whistleblowing	712/40/4
Professional-Journalist	823	3	Police, code of ethics	679
Private Citizen - Music Enthusiast	438K	1	Music, absence of code	580
Institution-Media Company	8.95M	9	Augmented reality / autonomous cars	409/108

(WIRED)				
Institution-Media Company (CNN)	35.4M	180	Journalism ethics	146/58/56/20/17

Note: Only unique users mentioned in tweets and/or retweeted more than 10 times are listed here.

In the list of tweets including the most mentioned users, the main topic covered is journalism ethics, and the individuals mentioned in these tweets include media companies (2), professional journalists (4), and a politician (POTUS).

The tweets surrounding this topic often centered around calling out a journalist or media company as having violated a journalism code of ethics, such as the Society of Professional Journalists' (SPJ) Code of Ethics or the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTNDA) Code of Ethics. The tweets referred to how journalists should treat one another during interviews, the inaccuracy of news coverage on a television station, the issue of a historically inaccurate movie, a media company that changed the title of an article, or criticized media companies when covering the Trump presidency (Schmidt 2017).

WIRED magazine appears on this list due to an article discussing the need for a code of ethics for augmented reality games (see most influential users). The other non-media institution that appears in this group of most mentioned users is a Brazilian energy company that appears in a series of tweets from one of the most active users in this study. This former employee uses two accounts to write about his experience blowing the whistle. The ninth most-mentioned user in the list is an individual who included a quote from a musical artist whose song lamented the absence of a code of ethics.

Overall, the most mentioned users have a considerable number of followers. Ethical issues in journalism are a prominent topic, with codes of ethics being mentioned or cited as standards for good journalistic behavior. Dominant in the group of most mentioned users are professional journalists, media outlets, or private citizens related to media. Others mention them in tweets that contain the phrase "code of ethics."

11.3.3 Spikes of Tweets Containing "Code of Ethics."

In order to get a better understanding of the discussion of "code of ethics" related topics on Twitter over time, we tracked the number of tweets containing the phrase over the study time (see Figure 5). In particular, we analyzed the five most significant spikes of tweets containing the search phrase "code of ethics," which captures a surge of tweets around the search phrase (see Table 6).

All five most significant spikes referred to ethical issues in journalism, politics, and media ethics.

The first spike in June 2016 concerned a tweet by a blogger advertising a post he wrote in which he criticizes journalists for breaking their code of ethics. It focuses on media coverage and advertising in the Philippines.

The second spike in November 2016 concerned two news posts; the first was an article that discussed whether President-elect Trump's transition team would adopt a code of ethics (Rein and Viebeck 2016). The second news article focused on an exchange between a well-known alt-right blogger and a journalist over his coverage of the election of Donald Trump. The tweet accused the journalist of breaking his media company's code of ethics.

The third spike also concerned the publication of a series of unverified memos alleging Russian operatives had compromising personal and financial information on then-President-elect Trump (Nolte 2017). The tweet about developers having a code of ethics originated from an article posted on a site that provides news and consulting services to technology executives.

The fourth spike concerned a newspaper article, the title of which was changed by the editorial staff. The Twitter post cited in the retweeted message was from a member of a conservative website, which accused the newspaper of breaking its code of ethics because of the change in the article's title (Schmidt 2017; Evon 2017).

The fifth spike in January 2017 concerned the portrayal of a historical figure in a film; it accused the media company involved og violating its code of ethics (Vyas 2017).

Overall, the five most significant spikes concerned media ethicsin the context of political disputes and tended to accuse others of breaking their code of ethics.

Figure 11.6: Code of Ethics Spikes Timeline
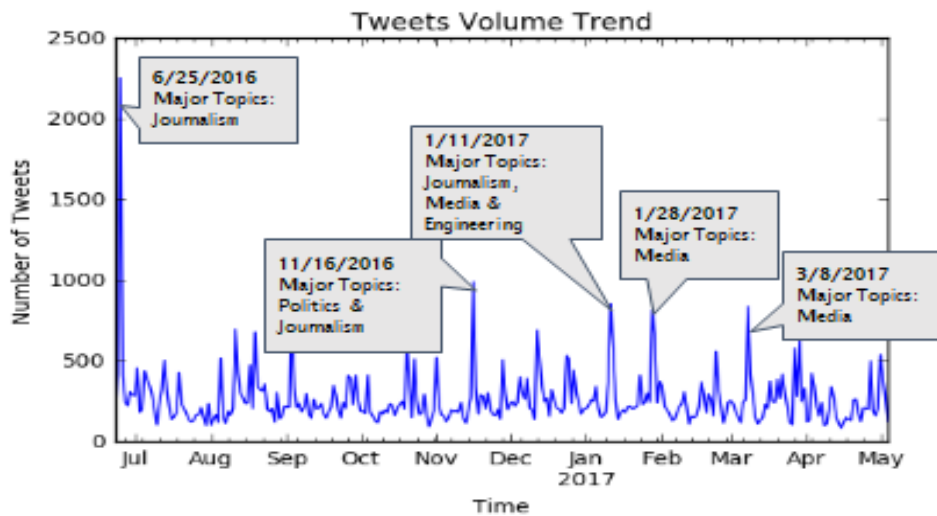
Figure 11.7: Code of Ethics Spikes Date and Total Tweets

Spikes	Date	Top Tweets (paraphrased)	Count of Top Tweets
1	6/25/2016	R.T.: Journalists break the code of ethics	1664
	6/25/2016	Journalists break the code of ethics	261
2	11/16/2016	Will Trump's transition team have a code of ethics?	315
	11/16/2016	Did journalist break media company's code of ethics while covering Trump campaign during election?	289
3	1/11/2017	Journalists violate every code of ethics in journalism.	359
	1/11/2017	Did Buzzfeed break their code of ethics when releasing potentially inflammatory documents involving Trump and Russia connections?	76
	1/11/2017	Should software engineers have a code of ethics?	51
4	3/8/2017	New York Times apparently has no code of ethics.	640
5	1/28/2017	Television company's code of ethics is worthless.	633

11.4 Discussion

In our analysis, "code of ethics" was by far the phrase most often used in ethics codes-related tweets, with "ethics code", "professional code", and the plural forms of these phrases having been used considerably less often. In tweets that used the phrase "code of ethics", the most relevant topics discussed are ethical issues in (political) journalism, politics, and media, and sports. We found minimal discussion on Twitter of ethics codes in science, medicine, entertainment, technology, and engineering. This could be a product of a a relative lack of interest in ethics by users of this platform, or profession-specific discussions could be confined

to different communication modes, such as listservs hosted by professional associations and academic societies. We hypothesize that if this study were repeated in 2021, we would find a far greater discussion around ethics codes, especially around the areas of big data and artificial intelligence.

A broad spectrum of users tweeted about "code of ethics." In particular, journalists, media companies, and users with political interests tweeted about the topic "code of ethics" or were mentioned in tweets. According to our study, professional institutions and professional associations in science and technology were not very active tweeters. They did not actively use Twitter to disseminate information on their code of ethics or to raise awareness of new developments regarding their ethics code.

Overall, one of the most relevant results of the analysis is the considerable discrepancy between our initial working hypothesis and the actual findings. We had assumed that we would find several ongoing illuminating conversations between professionals from all kinds of fields that would give us some hints on the current role of ethics codes in an evolving technology-relying society. Instead, we found a much more diverse conglomerate of stakeholders partly using ethics codes-related tweets to promulgate their views strategically. This is partially due to the approach our research took – focusing on the most influential, most active, and most mentioned users and the most significant tweet spikes. Especially in the cases of the most influential users, these tweets tended to be about articles from relatively well-known publications such as BBC News, the Washington Post, and the Times of India. We cannot exclude that there may have been more detailed conversations about professional codes of ethics happening on the Twitter platform among the over 83,000 tweets with the search phrase "code of ethics" collected during the search period. Given the difficulty of tracking every tweet, our approach did not bring these conversations to the surface. There is undoubtedly a significant amount of ethics-code-related tweeting that we were unable to cover and analyze; our analysis and our claims are only about the relative significance and role among all the tweets collected. Also, it may be that users are discussing ethical issues in their fields, without directly using one of our search terms.

When looking at the users, we found that while the most active users (users who tweeted the most) showed us an intriguing mixture of topics being attached to the phrase "code of ethics," these users tended not to have a very high following and minimal discussion was generated by these tweets. The list of most influential users was entirely made up of news outlets who, not surprisingly, had the most number of followers. The tweets emanating from these accounts always included the term "code of ethics" as part of an article title to which the tweet was linked. These articles either mentioned a scandal (such as the breaking of the FIFA Code of Ethics) or, more interestingly for this paper, discussed an institution's (such as as the Trump Administration and a U.K. political organization) interactions with a code of ethics (or lack of one). In the case of the *Wired* article, the article provided a more in-depth look into the role code of ethics might play in shaping a profession and its work (discussed more below). There was minimal discussion about these tweets on the Twitter platform themselves, however. As shown in the tweet spikes, some posts were widely shared, but that was an end to the influence of these posts.

In the study results, tweets related to ethical issues in journalism and politics dominated the discussion. This may be due to the intense political debate in the United States around the presidential election and the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 45th president of the United States during the study period. At that time, politics and issues related to journalism, media ethics, and adequate covering of the political developments were discussed vigorously in both traditional media and on social media.

Overall, our study points towards a broader social role of ethics codes on Twitter that goes beyond the way ethics codes are traditionally seen in the academic literature.

In general, the academic literature characterizes ethics codes and guidelines as a method for instilling standards in professions, science, technology, and business. They help establish special standards of conduct in situations where common sense is not adequate, help educate new members of that profession or organization, and provide a framework for settling disputes even among members with considerable experience (Davis 2015). At their best, codes of ethics help institutions and organizations address emerging issues, regulate practice-specific contexts, provide support, and are seen as helpful resources for professional-specific teaching (Davis 1991). Externally, codes of ethics help the public, or individuals outside the group, understand what they may justifiably expect from members of that profession or institution and a method for evaluating the ethical performance of individual members of a professional group (Davis 2005; Frankel 1989).

In our study, a handful of the tweets on ethics codes exemplified these more academic approaches to the role ethics codes play. Tweets that fell into these categories saw ethics codes as a standard for good professional behavior (in journalism, politics, etc.), and sometimes were used in an attempt to educate both fellow professionals and the public on the proper standards of conduct to follow in a given situation or context.

Some examples of this use of tweets include the aforementioned Wired article from August 2016 that discussed the need for designers working on augmented reality games like Pokemon Go to adopt a code of ethics that seeks to protect gamers' safety the public alike. A series of tweets from a professional journalist was captured in our study who happens to also be a member of the Society for Professional Journalists' ethics committee, asking his fellow professionals to remember the SPJ code of Ethics when covering significant news events. Though Wired has a relatively large Twitter following of around 8 million users, that particular news article was only retweeted a total of 409 times, and there appeared to be no discussion on Twitter about the article beyond tweeting the link. Of the 14 tweets the SPJ member/professional journalist posted mentioning the SPJ Code of Ethics, only one tweet was retweeted 217 times, and all the others were shared between 49 and 1 times. If discussions about the use of professional codes as defined by the academic literature are occurring, it is either happening beyond the scope of this study or via a different venue than Twitter.

The other use of mentioning ethics codes in tweets included pushing one's agenda, or to promote one's (political) view or to help give credibility and persuasive power to one's views. The majority of tweets and retweets captured concerned these purposes. A tweet on journalists breaking the code of ethics was the top re-tweeted tweet on June 25, 2016 that originated from a

blogger who writes about politics in the Philippines. The other tweet spikes that do not specifically relate to a news article include the following: a question about the historical accuracy of a program released by New Dehli Television Limited (Vyas 2017), the tweet "N.Y. Times lacks a code of ethics," posted by a member of the conservative web site Judicial Watch, which accused the New York Times of breaking their code of ethics because of the change in an article's title (Evon 2017), and allegations against Buzzfeed stating "Buzzfeed violates every code of ethics in journalism (paraphrased)," (Byers 2017).

A controversy in media ethics sparked each of these tweets. However, these tweets' focus was not so much on the actual ethical violation (issues of accuracy, truth, and the publication of potentially unverified documents, respectively); the posts and retweets on Twitter focused far more on validating the authors' political opinions. These tweets are marked by the use of the phrase "code of ethics" as a kind of touchstone of "what is right," without actually delving into the principles contained within.

The Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ) most recently updated its code of ethics in 2014, and the Radio and Television Digital News Association (RTNDA) most recently updated its code in June of 2015 (RTNDA, 2015). The 2014 revision of the SPJ code substantially revised its section entitled "Seek Truth and Report It," and also edited its 12th provision to read, "[Journalists should]…Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government. " (SPJ 2014; Slattery 2016). The RTNDA also expanded its section on truth in journalism, retitling its 2000 section "Truth" to "Truth and accuracy above all" and adding a provision that addresses the influence of social media on reporting.[2] In both cases, these codes obviously seek to stress the press's critical role in politics and its overwhelming commitment to truth, accuracy, and transparency in reporting. The question remains, how can these codes – or any professional code – be used to help build and reinforce public trust in that profession?

In 2017 Kathleen Bartzen Culver published an article ("Disengaged Ethics") that reported her interviews with eighteen participants who assisted in updating both the SPJ and RTNDA codes, as well as participants in the Online News Association who launched its "Build Your Own Ethics Code" project in 2014. In these interviews, participants talked about the perceived stakeholders of the codes and the issue of public participation in journalism (Culver 2017;487-488). While eleven of the eighteen interviewees pointed to the public as one of the main stakeholders in the codes, participants could only identify how their organization tried to involve the public in the revision or development of their codes project, posting the suggested code revision on their public website. Culver reflects on this lack of public engagement:

> In an era of increasing interaction between journalists and the public and participation in journalism —through such things as serving as sources, reader comments, and crowdsourcing—ethics discussions offer another way to involve the public, but the opportunity was missed here. Code developers failed to understand the impact of a networked age on their work or the opportunity it presented to open the conversation on media ethics to the very people journalism is supposed to serve. In this, they remained

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[2] " 'Trending,' 'going viral' or 'exploding" on social media may increase urgency, but these phenomena only heighten the need for strict standards of accuracy." (RTNDA 2015)

insulated and isolated from citizens and thus undercut the legitimacy of the codes they produced. (Culver 2017, 490).

11. 5 Conclusion

The question arises, why do professionals and professional associations not use Twitter to share more often about ethics code-related topics or engage more with the public on professional ethics issues? Among possible reasons are that: 1) The professionals in question may not use Twitter at all. 2) The professionals in question may find Twitter's word limit on tweets to confining. They prefer a more flexible medium. 3) They may not want to discuss their ethics code publicly. Referring to a profession's ethics code may be something that is done in internal conversations happening via in-person meetings, online forums, and other social outlets hosted by a professional association or other institution. There also may be different, more powerful pathways for professionals and professional associations to distribute information on ethics codes and ethics codes-related developments, such as journals, magazines, or emails. Furthermore, ethics codes may not play a considerable role in everyday communication, so that what we see on Twitter may reflect the overall situation. However, as ethics codes often are not well known, social media like Twitter could be a chance to raise public awareness. However, many professionals and professional associations miss the opportunity to raise public awareness of their ethics codes on Twitter and the opportunity to have a public discussion that may lead to their ethics codes having a greater role in society.

Beyond the field of media ethics, how the phrase "code of ethics" is represented on Twitter shows that Twitter users are interested in specific topics, that they care about ethics in certain fields, and that they think referring to ethics codes as standards is helpful, even if a more nuanced understanding of ethics codes might be lacking. Ethics codes are considered to shape behavior in these fields. While referring to ethics codes in tweets may make a very theoretical topic such as professional ethics more accessible to the public, it seems that users do not understand what an ethics code is or what it refers to.

This study shows that in tweets containing "code of ethics," Twitter users care about ethical practice in politics, journalism, media, sports, etc. These are fields of public interest, fields, and topics people get aware of in the media. In contrast, ethical issues in other professional fields may not be as well known publicly. Social media may not be the best tool for professionals to potentially engage members of the public about the importance of codes of ethics in shaping a profession and help build trust in their work. Still, perhaps it is one that we ignore at our peril.

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