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The “Holy” Triad in Media Ethics: A Conceptual Model for Understanding Global Media Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Media ethics is an area of inquiry that has been of great concern among journalists and public relations professionals as well as scholars across the world. Empirical research on media ethics of comparative nature has increased, providing a descriptive account on the current situations across different countries. Yet, theoretical efforts to explain global media ethics are so far inexistent. The scope of this paper is to provide a conceptual model for explaining media ethics decision-making processes that takes into account personal, professional and environment values as main influencing forces. The proposed model suggests that besides considering personal factors, such as education, background, experience, gender, etc., and country specific factors, such as political, economic, socio-cultural conditions, one should first and foremost understand the degree to which personal, professional, and environment values influence one's judgment. This model is the first of its kind in providing an explanation of differences in global media ethics by considering the interconnectedness of different values at micro, meso, and macro levels.

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1. Introduction

Media ethics has long been at the center of attention for media scholars and public relations professionals. The level of ethical standards employed by both journalists and public relations professionals impacts how media relations activities are conducted and what types and quality of contents may shape public opinion. Media ethics are devolved on fundamental values of democracy, freedom, truth, honesty, objectivity, and privacy (Craig, 2010). A prominent line of research in media ethics concerns with the study of those factors and variables affecting fundamental media values and consequently the level of media ethics in a country. Early studies indicate that public relations is one of those key factors because public relations practitioners act as sources of information and even influencers of media agenda (e.g., Cameron, Sallot, & Curtin, 1997; Shin & Cameron 2003). Specifically, the approach used by public relations professionals to influence journalists' news decision making has implications for media ethics in terms of transparency and self-censorship (Tsetsura, 2011), and as such it deserves to be studied together with other factors that may influence journalists.

Previous studies on media ethics, which considered public relations influence, have, for instance, focused on the concept of transparency and interests' disclosure in media relations, for the reason that low levels of media ethics are often imputable to both journalists and public relations professionals' non-transparent practices. Such studies pointed out that ethics in media

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relations is a rather ambiguous and porous concept across the world (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Tsetsura, 2008; Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2011). Media non-transparency, or media opacity, is defined as “any form of payment for news coverage or any influence on an editor or journalist’s decision that is not clearly stated in the finished journalistic product” (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2011, p.10). Despite the presence of professional code of ethics, researchers have identified forms of media non-transparent practices such as *envelope journalism* (Shafer, 1990), *cash for new coverage* (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), or *paid news* (Tsetsura, 2015). This phenomenon is also referred to in different slang words around the world: *jinsa* in Ukraine (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009), *red envelope* in China (Tsetsura, 2015), and *pay-for play* in the USA (Tsetsura, 2008). The evidence of media non-transparent practices calls for investigation of what factors affect decision-making processes and overall media relations ethics and media and public relations credibility (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2011).

This conceptual paper examines one specific aspect of media ethics that is decision-making processes. Early studies suggested the concept of value among several factors that affect human behavior, including news decision-making processes (Craig, 2010; Sylvie & Huang, 2008). Yet, the concept of value has only been given marginal relevance in public relations studies and has not been examined in depth. This conceptual paper ought to fill this gap by offering a global model for understanding media ethics (as applicable to both, public relations and journalism professionals) that is centered on the concept of value. The paper proposes and analyzes three main constitutive forces of media ethics: personal, professional, and environment values and illustrates how these three sets of values interact with one another and may influence the decision-making processes in media ethics. Reflections on the value of the proposed conceptual model for media scholars and public relations professionals are discussed and recommendations for future research are offered.

2. Media ethics’ decision-making processes

A great number of media ethics studies have dealt with investigating journalists’ practices and decision-making processes in the newsroom. Scholars investigated what makes such practices ethical (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Craig, 2010). To explain differences in journalists’ practices, researchers typically refer to personal factors, such as education, background, experience, gender, etc., of a journalist (Craig, 2010) or impute differences to the role of country-specific factors, such as specific political and socio-economic conditions (Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2015). Yet, another research stream in media ethics studies focused on studying which values ought to drive good journalism (Plaisance & Deppa, 2009). Scholarship about normative behavior is an important stream of research in media ethics, especially in sociological studies of journalism (Zelizer, 2004). However, there is another, sometimes under-regarded, focus, which is oriented toward individual conscience and is particularly effective for making sense of the internal perspective that journalists bring to ethical dilemmas in practice. Hove (2007) noticed that “in their normative language, media critics tend to stress the individual and personal dimensions of conscience, obligation, responsibility, and commitment” (p. 3).

The individualist approach to media ethics emphasizes journalists’ subjective decision-making processes and personal ethics as a fundamental basis for understanding how journalists perceive their jobs and perform their responsibilities (Craig, 2007). Although media ethics has to do with standards and practices, media are made up of individuals, and ethical concerns of mass media are ethics of individuals. Donsbach (2004) concluded that most journalists’ work is about perceptions, conclusions, and judgments. Thus, media ethics is connected with personal decision-making processes. Quinn (2007) emphasized the importance of internal view of media ethics that utilizes an internalized moral psychology for journalists based in virtue. Black and Barney (1985) insisted that individual professionals should transcend socially approved conventions codified by regulators and should become social catalysts in their own rights and values. Battistoli (2008) showed that the key to effective codes in journalism lies in a bottom-up approach built on individual, experience-based codes of ethics of journalists. What these studies seem to concur is that media ethics differs across countries not necessarily because journalists understand ethics in different ways, but because their professional decision-making processes are affected by their individual conscience, morality, and judgments. Yet, media ethics is also directly affected by the level of ethics of public relations professionals who can enact unethical media behaviors by offering something in return for news coverage. While most of previous work underlines the importance of having enforced journalists’ and public relations’ codes of conduct and codes of ethics to explain the level of media ethics, it is argued that other factors play a role in defining media ethics decision-making processes. The next section illustrates in more detail how media ethics is connected with values.

3. Values and media ethics

Numerous scholars have suggested that values provide the basis for the development of individual attitudes which lead to specific decision-making behaviors (Fritzsche, 1995). Therefore, to understand media ethics decision-making processes one must look at the values held by media organizations and public relations professionals. The concept of value is a multi-faceted one. In sociological terms, values are “concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states or behaviors that transcend specific situations, and guide selection or evaluation of behaviors and events” (Schwartz, 1992; p. 4). Strictly speaking, values are normative guiding principles that tend to have objective meanings but subjective interpretations (Argandoña, 2003). Values are different from ethics as they do not distinguish actions according to *right versus wrong*. This distinction is important, because previous studies on media ethics tend to approach media ethics in journalistic and public relations practices according to the dichotomy of *right versus wrong*, which is treated as fundamental and is based on what Olson (2004) called an *intrinsicist view on ethics*. Intrinsicism is the notion that an activity holds a specific value solely on

features intrinsic to such activity, no matter the context. What constitutes ethical media relations is often appraised on the basis of features intrinsic to a defined conceptualization of codes of conduct and codes of ethics (Kruckeberg, 1993). Yet, as existing global media ethics studies showed (Pratt, 1994; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009; Tsetsura, 2015), there are several variances in the way and the extent to which media ethics is enacted, indicating that there may be differences in either the types of values constituting individual and/or organizational media ethics' decision-making processes or the ways different values are interconnected in the minds of journalists and public relations professionals and are interpreted in a given context or situation.

Social psychologist Milton Rokeach (1973, 1979) developed a classification system of values to explain the nature of human values and relate them to preferable modes of conduct. He identified two macro-categories of values: (1) instrumental values, those values that represent preferable modes of behavior, and (2) terminal values, those values that are desirable states of existence representing objectives that are sought to be achieved. Typically instrumental values are at the core of professional codes of ethics and professional associations, whose aims are to provide guiding principles for correct behaviors among members of a specific profession. For example, transparency and accountability can be considered two instrumental values of both journalists and public relations professionals. Terminal values, on the other hand, represent end-states of existence as they often describe a position in life or society a person wants to achieve through his or her behavior. Credibility, for instance, is a terminal value achievable through behaviors that promote instrumental values such as expertise, knowledge, honesty, etc.

Yet, professional values are not sufficient indicators of the level of media ethics in a country. Literature on values and business ethics shows that personal values play an important role in influencing the behavior of managers (Freeman & Gilbert, 1988; Fritzsche, 1995) and impact leadership style (Shim, Lusch, & Goldsberry, 2002). In journalism studies, it is unclear to what extent individual preferences and predispositions play a role in journalists' decision-making although some scholars tend to believe individual values might play a role in decision-making processes in some countries (Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2015). Those studies, which investigated journalists' values and perceived roles and editors' values as well as their decision-making styles support a relationship between personal values and journalistic roles or behaviors (Craig, 2010; Plaisance & Skewes, 2003; Sylvie & Huang, 2008). Similarly, some agreement exists between different disciplines that organizational values, that is the values that guide the perspective of an organization as well as its actions impact professional behaviors and organizational culture (Hafez, 2002; Hatch, 1993; Meglino & Ravlin, 1998) and influence employees' work satisfaction and decision-making (Schwartz, 1999).

Social values that are acquired through personal networks, such as family, friends, and community, also play a role in decision-making (Sylvie & Huang, 2008). In public relations, culture as a mediating variable has been reported in several studies as an important predictive factor explaining differences in public relations practices and in publics' responses as culture influences social values (Sriramesh, 2009). In relation to non-transparent practices, Valentini (2009) argued that specific cultural factors ascribed in societies determine the extent by which certain public relations practices are considered gray or black PR and the level of their acceptance in societies. Activities such as gift giving, exchanges of services, hosting dinners and cocktails for journalists, and some other forms of gray public relations are frequently associated with corruption practices (Tsetsura, 2009, 2015; Valentini, 2009). Yet, such practices are common and accepted in countries with strong collectivism or family orientation (Muzi Falconi, 2009; Nguyen & Tsetsura, 2015), with predominantly masculine character (Cohen, Pant, & Sharp, 1996; Vitell, Nwachukwu, & Barnes, 1993), with high power distance (Husted, 1999; Sanyal & Samanta 2001), and with a societal structure promoting hierarchical power, for instance through the role of hierarchical religions (La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, & Vishny, 1997; Valentini, 2009). Additionally, many recent studies demonstrated that individual predispositions and behaviors can often be affected by organizational values, which are specific values that function as a moral compass for organizations.

Societal values and organizational values are part of what we called environment values. These values are more complex and far-reaching and account for many variations within societies and organizations, which are based not solely on cultures, but are intertwined with specific political, economic, socio-cultural, and professional factors. Here it is important to make a distinction between factors and values. The political, economic, and cultural situation of a country, or a community, cannot be called value. Values are a set, a combination of person's judgment and principles, which may be formed as a result of exposure (nurture, socialization, etc.) to various factors and under the influence of cultures. Most studies in public relations have looked at country-specific factors and organizational factors and referred to both of them as a culture (organizational culture, societal culture) or as a factor. But a culture is much more than a set of values and a factor is not a principle that transcends specific situations (cf., Schwartz, 1992). Hence, the concept of value, which previous studies in global public relations have not addressed, is not equivalent to the concept of factor or culture. Given that values drive human modes of conduct, it is argued that studying how values affect media ethics decision-making processes has its importance both for public relations professionals and journalists.

Based on early studies that attribute a role to country-specific factors and culture on differences in professional practices, this paper postulates that environment values, which include societal and organizational values, may, for example, explain differences between how journalists and public relations practitioners work (Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2015), the levels of generalized trust in society (Tsetsura & Luoma-aho, 2010), the acceptance of gift and gift-giving in various professional and social situations (Nguyen & Tsetsura, 2015), and the perceptions of what constitutes a gift (Tsetsura, 2015). Research across disciplines seems to support this postulation as it concurs that decision-making processes and individuals' behaviors are not determined by one single factor but represent a complex cognitive assessment of diverse sets of values (personal,

professional, and environment values) that are intervened by country-specific factors and other personal variables such as training, education, background, gender, and experience (Craig, 2010; Hafez, 2002; Mollada & Moreno, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009; Sylvie & Huang, 2008). Yet, while acknowledging the importance of values in decision-making processes, most of the research has not particularly paid attention to the interplay between different sets of values in media ethics, but rather focused on country or personal specific factors. Given that values provide the basis for the development of individual attitudes, which lead to specific decision-making behaviors, a conceptual model for explaining media ethics decision-making processes is proposed. The model is based on three main constitutive variables: personal, professional, and environment values. The combination of these three sets of values forms an individual's value system. Next sections separately discuss each set of values.

3.1. Personal values

Personal values are those values that resonate high at an individual level. Love, friendship, family, being part of a group, economic security, etc. can be considered types of personal values. In journalism studies, along with journalists' attitudes, education, background, and specific characteristics of the journalist, such as age, gender, ethnicity etc., personal values have been considered an important referent to explain journalists' news coverage and agenda setting preferences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Donsbach (2004), for instance, argued that journalists' decision-making process are influenced by two main psychological mechanisms, a need for social validation of perceptions and a need to preserve one's existing predispositions.

Predispositions are a form of attitude, and attitudes are molded by values. Chong and Druckman (2007) and Brüggemann (2014) identified individual predispositions and values as important moderators of framing effects in journalists' news coverage practices. More recently, Klyueva and Tsetsura (2015) explored Russian journalists' practices and news room behaviors and identified poor economic conditions as an explanatory variable for non-transparent practices. Seeking economic security was thus a determinant for journalists' decision-making assessment. Economic security can be considered a personal, terminal value. Recent studies (Nguyen & Tsetsura, 2015; Tsetsura, 2015) on public relations practitioners in China and Vietnam indicated that personal values also affect how public relations practitioners think about and perceive ethics. In addition, much of personal values that are driven by a moral compass (Bowen, 2005) can be categorized as terminal or instrumental values and can affect an individual approach to a decision-making process.

3.2. Professional values

Typically professional values are those values that ascribe to codes of conducts and codes of ethics and that constitute the core values of professional organizations and associations, accredited or not, which may define a professional culture (see, for instance, discussion of journalism culture by Hanitzsch, 2007). Professional values differ from personal values in that they are not based on individual predispositions and thus offer fewer variations based on personal circumstances. Values have been thus used as parameters to evaluate the level of professionalism of an occupation. In journalism, terminal values, such as freedom, equality, and order (McQuail, 1992), and instrumental values, such as fairness, balanced representation of social reality, and autonomy, are often ascribed to professionalism. In public relations, professionalism is often evaluated against terminal values, such as building mutual relations, dialogue, symmetry (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006), and instrumental values, such as acting in the public interest (Bivins, 1993), credibility, transparency, and correctness (Boynton, 2002). The presence of an established body of knowledge, ethics, and certification has been regarded as fundamental to develop public relations professionalism (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; Ehling, 1992; Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006). Yet, critical scholars have noted the problem of formalized ethical norms for public relations, given that different opinions exist on what constitutes the public relations profession and ethical behavior (Boynton, 2002). Similarly in journalism studies, the effectiveness of code of ethics in disciplining the profession has been questioned (Joseph & Boczkowski, 2012).

Recent studies demonstrated that professional values, however, might be the single most unifying set of values for public relations practitioners, especially those who are members of international and national professional organizations and associations. In a global survey of more than 500 public relations practitioners and journalists around the world, Tsetsura (2008) found that both professionals adhere to what they call professional values, which are linked to elements of professional codes of ethics. Through social network analysis of 41 professional codes of ethics from 33 countries Taylor and Yang (2014) identified six common global ethical values of the profession: professionalism, advocacy, moral standards, client's interests, expertise, and relations. The reason why professional values might be more similar across the world than any other set of values is that, over the past decade, the profession of global public relations has established its global professional values through professional associations and commissions (such as a Global Commission on Measurement and Evaluation or Global Commission on Public Relations Education). These organizations contribute to what Jablin (1985) called anticipatory socialization when people learn about work in general, what occupation does in its work, and how organizations perform certain aspects of work. Anticipatory socialization into profession within the largest professional association in the USA (PRSA) fosters networking communities, promotes exchange of information and best practices, and contributes to common understanding of the profession (Taylor & Kent, 2010). Thus, anticipatory socialization into the global and regional professional associations of public relations (such as the Global Alliance, International Public Relations Association, International Association of Business Communicators, European Public Relations Education and Research Association, African Public Relations Association, DirCom, and Middle-Eastern Public Relations Association) and journalism (such as International Federation of

Journalists, International Association of Journalists, and International Press Association) around the world may contribute to the development and acceptance of global professional values as socialization is the process through which individuals identify with the field and with professional practices.

3.3. Environment values

With the term environment values we refer to those values that are dominant in a specific context. The context can be at a meso-level, for instance, at the organizational level, or at a macro-level, for instance a specific society or sub-group, such as a tribal community (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2008). Both organizational and societal values, in fact, act as social cognitions that facilitate an individual adaptation to an environment. In practice, values help individuals to adapt through assimilation and accommodation to the information and norms they explicitly and implicitly receive from their environment. According to the social adaptation theory (cf. Kahle, 1983; Kahle, Kulka, & Klingel, 1980; Piner & Kahle, 1984), if corruption, for instance, is widely spread across different levels of society, it is more likely that public relations and journalists' practices are opaque, because individuals adapt to the environment by assimilating common behaviors and accommodating their own behaviors toward those established in those social contexts. Multiple media non-transparent studies confirmed that argument (Nguyen & Tsetsura, 2015; Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2011). Societal culture (and the societal values that constitute it) may explain differences in both public relations practices and in publics' responses to such practices (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009), as well as in journalism practices (Hafez, 2002). Yet, at the organizational level, a strong organizational culture, grounded in specific organizational values, could overtake the influence of specific societal values on professional decision-making processes. The ethical beliefs of managers in organizations have been found to determine the ethical standards in organizations (Bowen, 2004). In practice, organizational values can function as tools "for managers who want to maintain high standards of ethical behavior in their organizations" (Fritzsche, 1995).

Although justifying variances in practices through the concept of cultural diversity has been criticized (Rittenhofer & Valentini, 2015) at both societal and organizational levels, the concept of culture is used as a container to capture diverse factors and sets of values that characterize human interactions and socialization. Yet, from a decision-making perspective, focusing on environment values allows understanding attitudes that drive professional behaviors by accounting for the fluctuating nature of contexts in which global media ethics are formed. Country-specific factors, which influence environment values, need to account not only for the stable characteristics of the infrastructure (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009) but also for the ever-changing political, economic, socio-cultural, and market-driven conditions. A contextualized comparative research is particularly helpful in that regard as it demonstrates how these factors influenced the ways public relations is practiced in countries in transition and in flux: for instance, in Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela (Molleda & Moreno, 2008), in China and Vietnam (Nguyen & Tsetsura, 2015; Tsetsura, 2015), and in Russia (Klyueva & Tsetsura, 2015; Tsetsura & Luoma-aho, 2010). These fluctuating factors may play a role in influencing professionals' environment values in these countries. Yet, environment values must be considered together with personal and professional values in any conversation of global media ethics.

4. A conceptual model for studying global media ethics

Based on the concepts of personal, professional, and environment values outlined above, a conceptual model for understanding decision-making processes in global media ethics is proposed. Global media ethics differences are explained through the lenses of how diverse sets of values interplay one another, and not on the basis of how journalists and public relations practitioners understand ethical standards. Depending on which set of values is dominant, different levels of media ethics are enacted in decision-making processes. The model suggests that, in addition to individual factors, such as background, gender, and experience, and country-specific factors such as politics, economics and socio-cultural factors, media ethics is influenced by journalists and public relations practitioners' own value systems that are based on a combination of personal, professional, and environment (e.g. societal and organizational values) values. These types of values affect individuals' attitudes and predispositions toward accepting specific practices and act as cognitive referents to decide what to do and how to approach decision-making practices in media relations, in other words, whether to offer or accept a coverage of a story for a payment or gift, whether to manipulate or alter information, etc. The three types of values are interconnected and are forced to operate simultaneously at the individual cognitive level as they affect individuals' judgments on modes of conducts. Whereas personal factors are more or less stable at the individual level, a person's value system is not. Depending on circumstances, one set of values may become dominant. Normatively speaking, when the three sets of values, personal, professional, and environment, are aligned, they work in a synergic manner by reinforcing specific modes of ethical behaviors. It can be argued that when personal values of an individual reflect those of society and of the organization for which this individual works (environment values), practices are considered moral and acceptable. In addition, when these values correspond to international codes of ethics and professional standards of good practices, one can find it effortless to behave ethically in global media relations. The aligned values facilitate alignment between journalists' and public relations practitioners' decision-making processes by offering a coherent value-based justification that bridges together these three types of values into one value system. Furthermore, when these values are aligned, they can function as reinforcing mechanisms for best media ethics practices. Fig. 1 shows a triangle that illustrates a normative model of interconnectedness among the

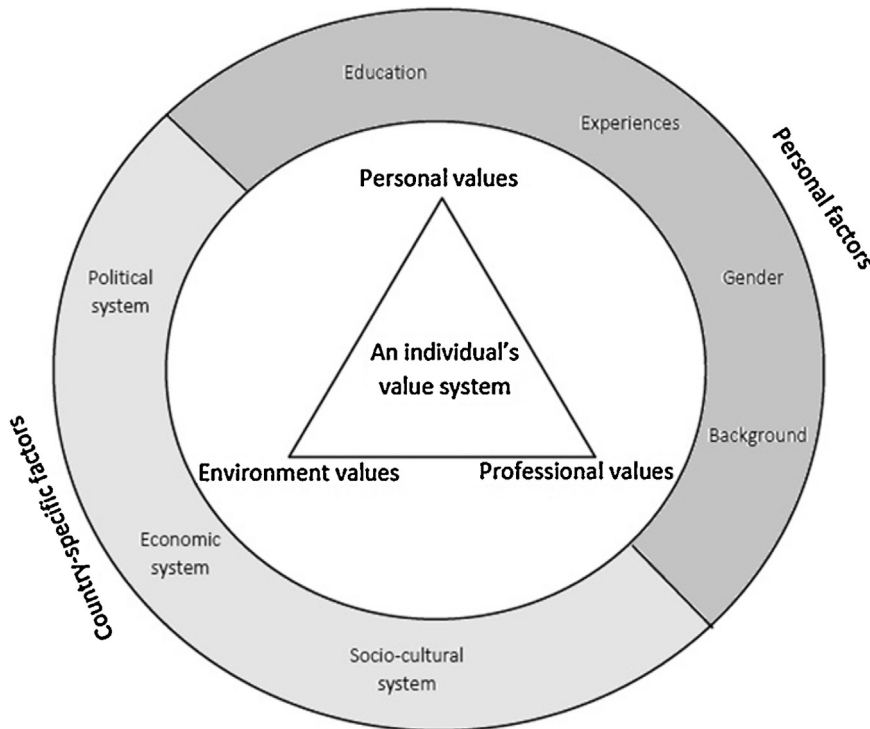


Fig. 1. A balanced account of personal, professional and environment values in media ethics decision-making processes.

three types of values. When the triangle is isosceles, all three types of values are balanced as equally important. The triangle can be rotated; yet, can still be stable and keep shape.

On the other hand, when professionals give different weight to these three types of values or have to cope with substantial and irreconcilable differences across these three sets of values, different forms and understanding of media ethics – which may seem opaque according to well accepted international standards – may occur. As Fig. 2 shows, unbalanced triangles indicate that these three types of values are not equally important. When these three triangles are rotated, they will not be stable and thus will not sustain their balanced decision-making potential. Thus, each of these triangles will seek equilibrium on its most stable side – an abutment, or a hypotenuse of a triangle – to balance the lack of one of the elements. By stretching one aspect (one angle), it will emphasize two other sets of values in the decision-making process (as they become bigger in their influence on this process). In the process of decision making, one set of values (the one that corresponds with a wider angle) will be minimized and its importance will be reduced or diminished.

In an unbalanced situation, professionals are left to make decisions based on a situational evaluation of costs and benefits and prior personal or professional experiences. In practice, when one or more of the three sets of values are not aligned, journalists and public relations professionals are coated in value-based tensions and can lack normative grounds for acting ethically. They have to base their judgments on value prioritization. This does not mean that, when journalists and practitioners are facing unbalanced sets of values, they will not act ethically. Ethical practice can occur even in such situations if, for instance, the professional values are predominant or if the personal values are driven by high morality. Yet, unequally stretched sets of values require a higher cognitive evaluation to remain in balance because the individual needs to ponder each set of values and what consequences he/she may expect by prioritizing one set of values over another. This process may result in a more time-consuming decision, with possible long-term consequences that are often difficult to forecast given that both journalists and public relations practitioners often have to make very rapid decisions on what to publish/communicate. The level of peaks' assertion in one's mind or in one community's value system may ultimately define how media ethics decisions will be made inside the media ethics triangle.

5. Conclusion and implications for future research

Media ethics has been an area of great interest among journalists and public relations professionals, as well as scholars across the world. Comparative empirical research on media ethics has increased in the past several years and provided multiple descriptive accounts of current situations around the world. Yet, conceptual efforts to explain global media ethics are so far skimpy. This work offered a conceptual model that explains media ethics decision-making processes. The model takes into account personal, professional, and environment values as main influencing variables. It contributes to both public

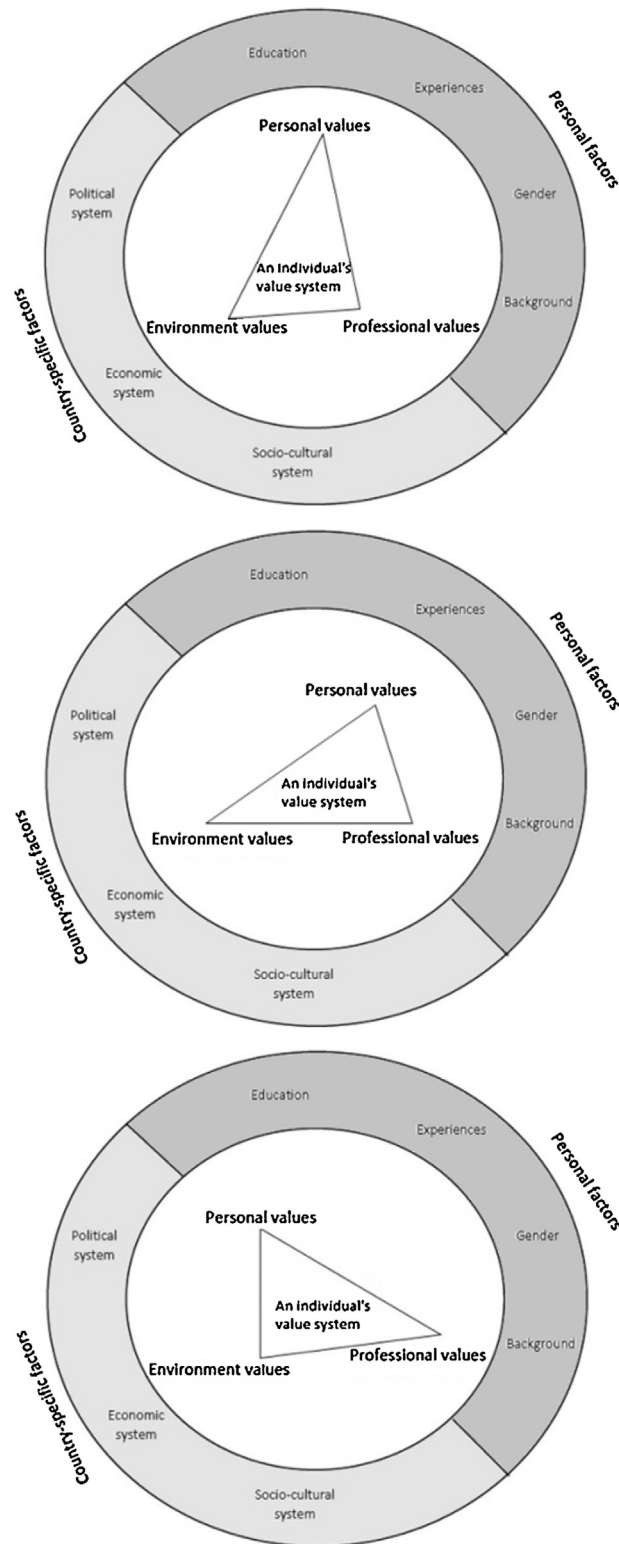


Fig. 2. Different forms of unbalanced personal, professional, and environment values in media ethics decision-making processes.

relations and journalism scholarships by offering a model for studying these communication professionals' propinquity to enact ethical behaviors in newsrooms and in media relations.

While the model acknowledges the importance of personal and country-specific factors, it focuses on the concept of value as a core element explaining human ethical behavior. It identifies three main types of values: personal, professional and environment values, which act as catalyzing forces in media ethics and ethical media relations. The model suggests that a normative level the ideal situation for a decision-making process in media ethics is an isosceles triangle that offers an equal importance of all three sets of values. Yet, variations are possible and probably typical in some situations in different countries. The model postulates that these variations can be explained by looking at three identified sets of values and how they interplay one another. Hence, to accurately and completely understand the mechanisms of media ethics decision-making processes in different countries around the world, besides considering country-specific factors, such as political, economic, social factors, and specific personal factors, such as education, background, experience, gender, etc., one should understand the degree to which personal, professional, and environment values influence one's judgment because an understanding of a professional's value system can provide a more solid explanation for deviations of predispositions and behaviors toward media ethics than simply looking at personal and country-specific factors. Although studies that address professional values and environment values exist, they typically examine these values as independent variables. Personal values are undoubtedly more methodologically challenging to operationalize and to access in large samples, since personal values, by definition, are individual-based and thus not generalizable.

This paper contributes to the development of conceptualization of global media ethics by offering a new normative model. This model provides an explanation of differences in global media ethics by considering the interconnectedness of different sets of values constituting a person's value system that operate at micro, meso, and macro levels. The model presents some limits due to the lack of empirical validation. However, testing the model was not the goal of this particular work. The purpose of any conceptual model is to provide explanations that are meaningful and useful to capture key drivers that are applicable across contexts and situations. The proposed conceptual model in its simplicity captures major forces affecting global media ethics and provides theoretical explanations – based on the concept of value – for differences in global media ethics practices.

This conceptual model suggests that global media ethics researchers should focus less on determining whether international standards and codes are implemented and more on determining under which conditions and country-specific factors or personal factors, certain sets of values (personal, professional or environment) are most determinative and how they interact with each other. The latter would provide a way to better understand current public relations and journalism practices and reasons for such practices.

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