Moral dilemmas raised by social media and how can they be improved

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Abstract. With the continuous acceptance and use of social media, some moral dilemmas caused by social media have followed. The sense of powerlessness brought by moral dilemmas is long-lasting and has a great impact on people's physical and mental health. The researches now are also gradually pay attention to the moral dilemma caused by social media, but still not enough. Therefore, this study mainly aims to use the method of case analysis to investigate three major moral dilemmas raised by social media, including the conflict between the social media and real-life collectivity and media ethical anomie. For the conflictions to the real life, enhancing the sense of collective atmosphere or running a public website within the community could be effective; for the problems raised by media ethical anomie, the intervention by the government is a significant part, as well as the improvement of public awareness.

Keywords: Social media, Moral dilemmas, Media ethical anomie.

1. Introduction

On April 21, Hootsuite and We Are Social released their April 2022 Global Digital Report, which covers the latest statistics on Social media. Here's the key statistic from the report: There are 5 billion Internet users in the world, accounting for 63% of the world's population. Added 196 million Internet users over the past 12 months (+4.1%). With the number of people using social media continues to increase, the moral dilemmas caused by those particular functions and characteristics of social media platforms also need to deserve attention from people. When people are in moral dilemmas, they often feel miserable, tied behind their backs, ignored, not heard or understood. It's also easy for them to be controlled by anger, disgust, fear and frustration. Gradually, such emotions fill our lives with anxiety, exhaustion and despair [1]. Repeated moral dilemmas without intervention can lead to persistent maladaptation that accumulates in a specific sense, leaving a "moral residue" (also known as a "progressive effect") even after any crisis is over and perpetuating it in our lives. Now that the use of social media has become normalized, these platforms have also become the birthplace of some ethical dilemmas, which have had a considerable impact on the users of social media. Those people in moral distress desperately need some advice to help them make better decisions.

For many young people and teenagers who need to communicate nowadays, social media is an indispensable way to socialize with friends and colleagues. People tend to form small groups on social media to vent their frustrations. However, the communication mode of social media is very convenient and fast, so these remarks can easily cause the disintegration of the whole group. Therefore, the first type of moral dilemma is a sense of detachment in the real-life collectivity. To improve this situation, the managers could create a more relaxing atmosphere within the community, or run an public website if possible. The second and the third types are both about media ethics anomie, it is that journalists violated the norms of media ethics when reporting. This kind of ethical anomie affects significantly in comment posters and viewers. For the situation of too much fake news on social media, the government and platform itself need to have stricter settings of comment sending and to make severe punishments the media that spread this kind of news. As for the viewers, the government also need to guide the public to enhance self-awareness and rationally judge the news on social media.

2. Moral dilemmas raised by social media

From now, a huge amount of information appears on every social media due to its multifunctional factories, including the convenience of posting or releasing messages. To a large extent, this function causes news publishers to release information without strict censorship, so it is difficult for viewers to distinguish true information from false information. Also, as information dissemination becomes faster and faster, the public sentiment is easier to be incited, which likely leads to many moral dilemmas, which has caused a great impact on society. Three moral dilemmas (A sense of detachment in the real-life collectivity, the influence of media ethical anomie on posters and viewers) will be discussed in the following description.

3. Analysis of the problems

3.1 A sense of detachment in the real-life collectivity

Social media has become an indispensable communication tool for middle and high school students, college students, and working young people. Recent research shows that attending social activity, and sharing common interests are the top two things of college students using social media [2]. As a way of communication between young people, social media is more private than direct conversations in reality. Moreover, most of them have more communication with people who are going well with them and establish some small groups on social software. Because of this kind of secrecy, which is different from direct communication in real life, and the existence of small groups, people can speak freely in those groups. Therefore, it is not difficult to find that the communication between young people on social media in daily life is even greater than the communication in real life. Social media, with its functions of building small groups and the privilege of anonymity, has become an outlet for people to vent their suspicions and defamation. Research has found that most students may question the results of class committee elections on social media but not in the class [3], and employees may vent their dissatisfaction with higher authorities online, too. People tend to be more interested in these kinds of comments, so they spread very quickly on social media even though the person who commented might have just sent it to a private friend or a private group, and more likely than not, it would have spread to everyone in the community. This will greatly affect the unity of the whole class or the whole unit and weaken the efficiency of people’s study and work. People who experience such moral dilemmas, such as the author of the statements, the rumormonger, and the person targeted by the comments, would all feel uneasy or guilty. For those who publish and spread rumors, on the one hand, their doubts have caused a great influence on the whole group and are more likely to be responded to; on the other hand, they may feel guilty because their remarks may not be very rational or objective. For those people who are the target of the rumor, they may also be in dilemmas, because if they do have a problem, they have to choose between denying the rumor or apologizing.

3.2 The influence of media ethical anomie on posters

Publish information on social media is very easy and convenient, all kinds of releases do not need sufficient evidence or have to go through strict checking from the program. For those informal news media, they could get huge benefits from it. They don’t need to work hard to get a lot of evidence, but can also get a huge amount spreading, then they would earn more money. Viewers often see there are a lot of articles on social media headlines and content exist discrepancy, or the content is getting too much exaggeration [4]. Also, the platform itself likes this kind of news, because it can get people’s attention to the software. Then we can always see some rumors with no factual evidence appearing on popular social media. So, most news on social media are not true because there’s no cost to creating rumors. But later, sometimes with the gradual development of factual evidence on the event, public opinion is easy to be deflected, too. Leading to the generation of inversion news. Reversal news emerges endlessly, causing serious harm to society and the public. Mostly, the reports of inversion

news are also biased and tendentious, which can easily cause social conflicts and arouse group emotions, and reduce the public's enthusiasm for social affairs. So those who publish rumors, also have a moral dilemma, they have to choose between easily getting more views and money, and making great efforts to find evidence to publish the true news. Moreover, if their fake news is refuted, they may face network violence and high punishment.

3.3 The influence of media ethical anomie on viewers

The characteristics of openness, anonymity, low cost, and fast communication speed of social media cause the communication channels more diversified, informative, and emotional. This not only expands the freedom of information dissemination and acceptance, but also makes it difficult to control the behavior of the social media users, and difficult to supervise and manage the whole communication activities on the platform. Today's people are more willing to read fragments of information, don't pay attention to details, and therefore easily confused by some false, vulgar information. Some social media users' consciousness is weak, cannot check information, there are many non-standard and illegal behaviors in the communication activities. Again and again to widen the spread of fake news, and affect other viewers' awareness of the event. Social media users exaggerate and distort the facts, attack and abuse the facts under environmental pressure, breeding cyber violence[5]. For the reasons of maintaining social morality, the viewers denounced the parties involved in the incident on social media to exert their sense of justice, but they did not realize that they have already polluted the network environment and caused serious psychological and spiritual damage to the victims of violence under fake news. So the majority of the users of social media regard these platforms as an outlet for their negative emotions and will show a lot of extreme and irrational states in the face of rumors because of their impulses[6]. While after those rumors were been clarified, they are often accompanied by guilty and regrets. This is the moral dilemma raised by social media users.4. Suggestions

3.4 Sense of detachment in the real-life collectivity

4.1.1Enhance the sense of collective atmosphere

Schools and companies need to conduct some activities to enhance the community environment atmosphere. For example, set some novel and interesting team activities regularly, especially some sports activities, this kind of activities could help young people to reduce their dependency on social media using [7]. At the same time, the teacher or management personnel can try to arouse the enthusiasm of people, for the whole class or a unit to create a lively atmosphere of fun. Instead of private conversations appearing on social media, encouraging people to do straightforward communication in real life is also very important. For managers of a community, letting people feel warm in the collective is a clever way to reduce moral dilemmas. With a relatively relaxed and happy atmosphere, mutual suspicions and complaints among members will be largely reduced, then they will not only tend to do private discussions on social media.

4.1.2 Run a public website within the community

Many times, people choose to show their complaints about some leaders and teachers with their friends or colleagues on social media, mostly because they don't have a formal and public platform in their community to let them ask these questions, or express their feelings. A public website inside a community provides some opportunities for employees and students to raise questions and express their dissatisfaction, which also enables managers to collect suggestions, to find and improve problems better. As a unique BBS formed, excellent personnel to manage and operate this platform is also needed. When operating staff answer these questions on the platform, they must be honest and sincere, as perceived leader integrity as a mediator between ethical leadership and ethical climate [8].

3.5 The influence of media ethical anomie on fake news' posters

4.2.1 Let social softwares have stricter settings

The informal media and some social software often use fake, exaggerated news to get traffic and exposure, so as to earn profit from it, which is not "morally good" and has a significant negative impact on the whole society. So one of the best pieces of advice is that the government needs to monitor the media market to set up some stricter regulations and send specific staff to check this news on social media every time. They need to retain and promote positive news with detailed evidence, so that fake news, obviously rumor-mongering news, news that touches on sensitive topics can not be published, or limit their exposure extent.

4.2.2 Severely punishes media that spread fake news

It's not ethical to spread fake news, but the fact is that there are a lot of informal media companies that are working hard to spread fake news. Because the other side of this moral dilemma is that they can easily benefit tremendously from it. Nowadays, rumor spreading is almost cost-free, therefore, to curb the negative impact of this moral dilemma on society, the government should formulate stricter laws and regulations to turn this moral dilemma switch into a positive side. For example, after identifying the media who intend to post and spread fake news, let them pay more fines, and restrict the operation of these individuals or companies, so that more media see this imbalance moral dilemma, they choose the right way, report the right news and get reasonable remuneration due to the cost-benefit model. This model describes a decision-making process in which a person weighs up both the advantages and disadvantages of helping. If it seems beneficial to help,then the person is more likely to do so; if the risks are too great, they may refrain. Apart from the helping behaviour, when the fake news posters have a deeper understanding of this law,they would weigh the cost and benefit effect of done this job. This kind of law warns them that they will pay a high price for such behavior, thus the cost outweighs the benefit, they tend to choose the positive side more likely.

3.6 The influence of media ethical anomie on viewers

4.3.1 Guide the public to improve their self-awareness

It is especially convenient to spread and forward information on social media. The boundary between news communicators and audiences is increasingly blurred, leading to the fact that most viewers are also disseminators. Audience blindly listening to various information on the Internet will easily lead to the spread of personal emotions and personal tendencies. Studies have also shown that the public would more attention to fake news and rumors [9] due these stories are more appealing in terms of exaggerated descriptions. Therefore, it is really important to improve the audience's self-awareness, that is, to enhance people's ability to consider independently, in case they may feel guilty for the victims after their spreads and abuses. They also need to enhance the awareness of personal privacy protection to avoid personal real information leakage.

4.3.2 Call on the public to rationally judge the news on social media

Impulsivity has a huge impact on what people post on social media today [10], most users would not judge things rationally and objectively. They just use their impulse to vent their negative feelings, or their impulse to express their sense of justice to spread this fake information. This impulse is extremely irrational and has individual differences. Therefore, the government should guide the public to think rationally and critically, be fair, rational, and objective when making comments on major social events [11], and should not be affected by extreme personal emotions. To avoid this moral dilemma, viewers need to be self-disciplined and regulate their communication behaviors consciously.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes and discusses the three particular moral dilemmas caused by social media, and gives reasonable suggestions from the perspective of collective managers, government social media managers. This study is helpful toto give some inspiration to those who are troubled by these moral dilemmas, so that they can make wiser decisions in moral dilemmas. The specific analysis of these moral dilemmas will also make them aware of their own issues, so that they can pay more attention to this type of moral dilemma, beware of being swayed by impulsive emotions, and make some mistakes that they might regret. The shortcomings of these suggestions given are that they are very subjective and have not been confirmed by any scientific method and get reliable data, it may face the difficulty to implement, too. Therefore, in future studies, there may be more targeted research methods for a certain moral dilemma to confirm that these suggestions are valid and reliable through some measurement or experiments.

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