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# **Building a Coordinate System: An Ethical Framework for Analyzing Media Coverage of Disasters**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Ethical decision making is increasingly emphasized in daily media practice. The pervasive reportage of disaster is a ready context to analyze journalistic ethical orientations. This study examines several classic approaches and their applications in covering disaster, in order to develop a comprehensive ethical framework (an ethical coordinate) for researchers to examine journalistic ethical orientations in disaster coverage. The coordinate is tested in the analysis of cases of disaster coverage reported in previous studies. Examination of journalistic ethics in a broader context can also use this ethical analysis framework.

## **KEYWORDS**

Ethical Reasoning Approaches, Ethical Loyalties, Ethical Coordinate, Deontology, Teleology, Personality, Communitarianism, Libertarianism

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Since the Hutchins report was published (The Commission on the Freedom of the Press, 1947), the need for more moral and responsible media has grown stronger (Merrill, 1997). Ethical journalism is demanded, not only because it presents credible reportage to an audience, but also because it coordinates interests from all sides, including the journalist's own (Patterson & Wilkins, 2004). Few journalistic textbooks begin with a chapter on ethics, and yet now ethical decision making has gained more and more emphasis in daily media practice (Christians, Rotzoll & Fackler, 2005).

Disaster is a good context to analyze social affairs. Webster's College Dictionary (1999) clarified disaster as "a calamitous event, especially one occurring suddenly and causing great loss of life, damage, or hardship, as a flood, airplane crash, or business failure" (p. 375). The word is used in this article with a broader meaning that refers to any situation where a dramatic social tension is involved, including war, political crisis, or accidents. As Clarke (2004) put it, "studying disasters is an excellent way to study important things about how and why society works as it does" (p. 137). He also mentioned several sociologists who studied disasters to analyze the society. Samuel Henry Prince published *Catastrophe and Social Change* in 1920, providing general sociological insights through a Halifax disaster. Twenty years later, Sorokin published *Man and Society in Calamity*, trying to use a range of catastrophes to understand people's psychic orientation and social changes. Kai Erikson's (1978) *Everything in Its Path* used the Buffalo Creek flood on February 26, 1972, to analyze community, meaning, and trauma. In his book, *Heat Wave*, Eric Klinenberg (1995) studied a devastating heat wave in Chicago that caused 739 "excess deaths," exploring problems about the neighborhood, community, government, media, and social organizations. Clarke (2004) noted how the social environment contributed to disasters (p.138).

Media have a close relationship with disasters. Shepard, Trost, and Brokaw (2002) found that the public's approval of the press went downward because serious news had been squeezed by the scandal, celebrity, and conflict; it was the September 11 terrorist strike that made the press start to supply news people urgently wanted to know. They described 12 photographers who rushed to the site when the World Trade Center was hit by the planes, three of whom died in the disaster. In an age of global villages, instantaneous stories of disasters on the earth are more frequently reported by the media to raise many concerns. Examining how the journalists behave in their coverage of disasters, which make the social connections more dramatic and give little time for the interest groups to respond, thus will provide a clearer picture of the media's moral orientation.

## **I. Fundamental Theories: Ethical Reasoning Approaches and Ethical Loyalties**

Except defining the situations and identifying the values when analyzing specific cases, the Potter Box developed by Ralph B. Potter, Jr. also proposed two significant steps for analyzing the general ethical reasoning cases: identifying the ethical principles that need to be followed, and identifying the object to which the ethical decisions were devoted (Christians, Rotzoll, & Fackler, 2005). Similarly, Merrill (1997) also categorized traditional ethical theories in two ways: one way categorized the theories, based on ethical reasoning approaches, as rational theories, which include duty-emphasized deontology and consequence-emphasized teleology, and non-rational or an actor's virtue-emphasized personality theories. The other way categorized the theories, based on the actor's loyalty, as communitarian theories, which emphasize serving group interests, and libertarian theory serving individual interests).

### *i. Ethical Reasoning Approaches: Deontology, Teleology, and Personality*

Deontological ethics (also called legalism in texts such as Fletcher, 1966) sets “definite rules, maxims, or principles” that journalists can follow in order to be ethical. Following the rules is ethical, and breaking the rules is unethical. It is hard to set down the rules, but once the rules are made, ethical decision making becomes easy. Deontological journalists will feel unethical if they know the names of rape victims but cannot disclose them (Merrill, 1997, p. 62).

Representative philosopher of deontologic theory, Immanuel Kant, held that an action could be morally justified only when it was conducted from duty, regardless of the consequences. His categorical imperative “is concerned, not with the matter of the action and its presumed results, but with its form and with the principle from which it follows, and what is essentially good in the action consists in the mental disposition, let the consequences be what they may” (Kant & Paton, 1948, p. 84). Kant proposed two kinds of duties: Strict duties include not murdering, not breaking promises, and not lying; meritorious duties include aiding others, developing one’s talents, and showing gratitude (Merrill, 1997). Under Kantian ethics, as Patterson and Wilkins (2004) pointed out, journalists can claim few privileges like to lie or to invade privacy.

Deontologic ethicists, as Patterson and Wilkins (2004) mentioned, would also have dilemmas. For example, if a man takes a gun at a deontologist’s door and asks him where another man is, or who is actually hidden in the deontologist’s closet, what should the deontologist do? Tell the truth to kill the hidden man, or lie to save the hidden man’s life?

Teleological ethicists, however, pay attention to the end (*telos*). They consider the consequences (they are therefore also called consequentialists in some texts), and speculate about the results of their actions. Teleologists may weigh results based on the aggregated happiness (Mill, 1863), love (Fletcher, 1966), good (Rand, 1964), or other concepts. Teleologists are not necessarily against duties and universal laws; instead, they follow a moral law or violate it according to the projected results, say, the need of love in Fletcher’s (1966) theory, or the individual’s long-term survival in Rand’s (1964) objectivism ethics. Pragmatists, from Charles Peirce (1992-1999) to John Dewey (1999), are another type of teleologists, who intrinsically doubt fundamental beliefs and always examine the truth or ethics of a subject by experimenting and observing consequences. Teleological journalists, also taking ethical loyalties into consideration, can be utilitarians that are altruistic, or egoists that care about themselves most (Merrill, 1997, p. 66). Representatives of teleological ethicists, such as utilitarian John Stuart Mill, believed that the consequences of actions were important in deciding whether the actions were ethical. Utilitarians, for instance, hold that it is ethical to hurt one person for the good of a large group, which is actually the moral justification for investigative reporting (Patterson & Wilkins, 2004). Only calculating the good, Patterson and Wilkins (2004) note, would also lead to ethical gridlocks, when each group has the same strong claim of interest, and few ways can be chosen among them. Meanwhile, utilitarianism may result in focusing on short-term benefit, which is often shortsighted. The influence of teleology in the journalism profession can be observed from the famous Hutchinson Commission report (The Commission on the Freedom of the Press, 1947), which argued that if the press did not adjust itself and cover society in a more responsible way, it would lose its freedom when the government interfered.

Grcic (1989) explained the difference between teleology and deontology in this way:

Teleology theories hold that the ultimate criterion of moral goodness is either the sum total of good over evil consequences that the action brings about or whether it promotes individual functions and development. A teleologist holds that an action is moral if it is a means to the appropriate moral good. A deontological approach, however, holds that the morality of an action is not primarily determined by its consequences but by certain intrinsic features of the intention or mental aspect of the contemplated action. A deontologist emphasizes doing one's duty and the nature of our motives and intentions, not the consequences that may result from our action. (p. 4)

Personalitism bases its ethical decision making model on subjective matters, such as intuitive, spiritual, or emotive actions, or what we call conscience (Merrill, 1997). Merrill (1997) considers Aristotle as a representative of personalitism theorists, whose ethical theory is often summarized as the golden mean. For Aristotle, "moral excellence, or virtue, is the disposition of choosing the middle course between the deficiency and excess, as determined by a man with practical wisdom" (Aristotle, 1961, p.71). Virtue lies at the mean, a range of behaviors that varies individually, between two extremes. For some actions or attitudes that are essentially evil and have no middle point, moral people need to avoid them (Aristotle, 1961). Patterson and Wilkins (2004) pointed out that Aristotle emphasized the actor, Kant emphasized the action, and Mill emphasized the outcome.

Some moral philosophies may not neatly fall in the three categories. For instance, the tradition of social contract, from Thomas Hobbs, to John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and John Rawls, seemingly lingers between deontology and teleology. When the individual's consent was deemed as a duty to the original contract by Kant (1797), social contract theory seemed to be deontological; when individual consents to the social contract (Hobbs, 1651) or public justification (Rawls, 1999) are required, the theory looked more like teleology. Moral relativism, represented by French sociologist Emile Durkheim's (1912/1995) cultural analysis of religions, contains deontology components as it acknowledges the absoluteness of the moral rules within a culture, but seems more like teleology as it ultimately denies any absolute moral values across cultures. Overall, nevertheless, categorizing ethical reasoning theories into the three approaches helps us sort out the big picture of these existing moral philosophies.

## ***ii. To Whom Are Journalists Loyal?***

*Communitarianism and libertarianism.* People's internal ethical loyalties are usually categorized as communitarianism and libertarianism. The movement of public discourse toward communitarian philosophies of the public sphere, Christians and colleagues (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009) argue, has provided a basis for the common good of the society and directly challenged communication theories of libertarianism and social contract. Communitarians are also called group-orientated ethicists. They base personal ethical values on societal desires and expectations. They "are suspicious of pluralistic or individualistic ethics — of libertarianism in ethical decision making" (Merrill, 1997, pp.38-39). The communitarian journalist would emphasize a harmonious and agreeable society, maintaining that social justice is the predominant moral value, while the libertarian would exalt diversity and contention to fulfill the balanced development of individuals (Patterson and Wilkins, 2004). From a communitarian viewpoint, Patterson and Wilkins (2004) hold that

journalism can't separate itself from the political and economic system in which it operates. Christians and his colleagues (2005) compiled five entities to which people usually owe moral duty: (1) themselves, (2) clients/subscribers/supporters, (3) organizations, (4) professional colleagues, and (5) society. While the first two entities are close to libertarian ethical goals, the latter three are apparently ethical goals communitarians are more likely to choose.

*Four angles: global, national, news organization, and individual.* Taras (1995) studied journalists' moral duties from external factors. He found that all of the three major external factors (societal established interests, news media's organizational goal, and journalists' professional group interests) provided a valid but limited explanation to the controversy around a series of documentary films about World War II aired by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Taras (1995) proposed three levels for researchers to observe journalistic morality: national level, news organization level, and individual level. But now people live in an age of global village, and there is a movement toward global ethics for journalism (Ward, 2005). Callahan (2003) holds that in the new global world, journalism should ask the basic questions again: "What is journalism, and what is it for? What ethics presently govern journalism, and why? In the future, can there be universal ethical standards for journalism to meet the challenges of globalization?" (p. 3). So, when we examine journalists' moral loyalties in covering disasters, it is appropriate for us to add another angle, global level, to Taras's (1995) three levels to build up four angles of analysis.

## II. The New Framework and Its Applications

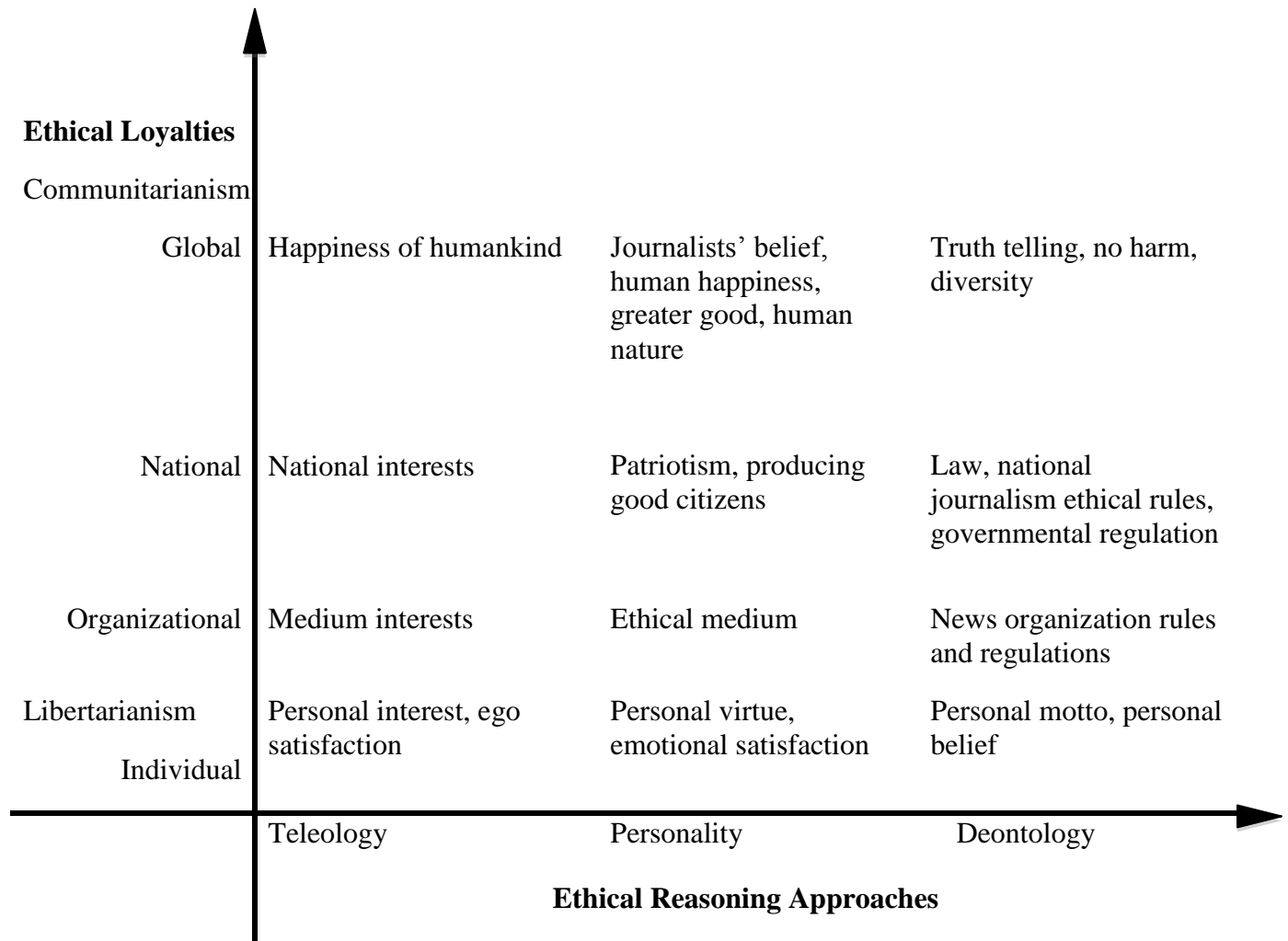
Merging theories addressing ethical reasoning approaches and ethical loyalties, with theories addressing ethical reasoning approaches on one axis and theories addressing ethical loyalties on the other, we then have a coordinate system of ethical theories. Based on literature reviewed above, we have four levels on the ethical loyalties axis: global level, national level, and news organizational level in the category of communitarianism; and individual level in the category of libertarianism. Three categories are on the axis of ethical reasoning approaches: deontology, teleology, and personality. Twelve specific ethical orientations are developed in the synthesized ethical theoretical coordinate system (see Figure 1). Although we cannot simply attribute a relationship of higher value to lower value with this coordinate system as we can do with the mathematical coordinate systems, mapping the relationships of the ethics theories in this way will still help us to build a better tool to examine different journalistic moralities.

In the coordinate system, the difference between the column of teleology and the column of personality is that, a teleologist makes decisions by counting the consequences, but a personalist makes decisions by consulting the decision maker's conscience or emotion. When, for instance, both of them are ethically loyal to a group, the teleologist supports finding the interests by democracy and voting, and the personalist would like an oracle to make the decision. The differences between communitarians and libertarians are in their loyalties. While global journalists devote themselves to the global community or the entirety of humankind, national journalists emphasize their fellow citizens and nation. News organizations are also a common entity for journalists to offer their loyalties, and of course, there are many journalists who just care about individuals, or themselves.

The specific ethical orientations in the framework are not exclusive, and most ethical decision makers tend to adopt several specific ethical orientations simultaneously. Merrill (1997)

found that the communitarian journalist would “want to see more absolute or universal ethical norms and less social contention,” inclining to be a deontologist, while “the libertarian journalist would support more flexible, relative, and personal ethics,” and would more likely be a teleologist (p. 52).

*Figure 1: Disaster Coverage Framework: An Ethical Coordinate System*



*Note: The ethical coordinate system is developed by using the ethical reasoning approaches on the horizontal axis, and the ethical loyalties on the vertical axis. Twelve specific ethical orientations are generated, which can be used to conduct comprehensive ethical analyses.*

Ethicists have proposed several models for journalists to make their ethical decisions in a situation of covering disasters, most of which combine several specific ethical orientations to coordinate different interests involved in the ethical decisions. The ethical decision making model introduced by Bok (1999), based on actor empathy and maintaining social trust, seems to

combine both personality and teleology approaches. In the first two steps of the three-step model, decision makers are advised to consult their own conscience for rightness and to consult experts (personally, from speeches, or writings) for alternative actions, which are apparently to satisfy the personalistic concern. In the third step, Bok (1999) suggests decision makers conduct a real conversation (or a hypothesized one if the other party is not available for the conversation) with the people who are involved in the action, which is one way of counting the goodness.

Another five-question decision making model proposed for journalists (Elliott, 2004) integrates the approaches of deontology, teleology, and personality. The first question makes journalists consider the outcome (teleological reasoning) and the essence (deontological reasoning) of the action. The second question helps journalists to think if the action will prevent or punish a greater evil (teleological reasoning). For the third question, based on the personality theory, Elliott (2004) suggests journalists ask themselves if they are the appropriate people to conduct the action. While the fourth question is not relevant here, the fifth question requires journalists to defend their ethical decisions in public, which could also be seen as a counting of goodness.

Garry Bryant (1987), a photographer of the *Desert News*, Salt Lake City, built a four-question model for himself to make decisions in covering a disaster, in which both ethical reasoning approaches and ethical loyalties were taken into consideration. First, he asks himself: Should this moment be made public? This is comparing the situation with the rule of newsworthiness in a deontological approach. Next, he asks: Will the pictures send the subjects into further trauma? This is computing the consequences to satisfy the teleological need. The third question is: Am I at this distance as minimally intrusive as possible? This question can be understood as either deontological thinking to observe the no harm rule, or teleological thinking to avoid the harm's triumphing over the good. Finally, he asks himself if he is acting with compassion and sensitivity, which is a personalist question. Bryant (1987) disagrees with two claims: one based solely on personalist theory, claiming that society will understand that photographers shoot instinctively; the other based solely on deontological theory, claiming that journalists just seek facts and take pictures.

Bovee (1991) has suggested a five-question model for photojournalists covering disasters: (1) Are the means immoral or merely unpopular? (2) Is the end a truly good one? Or does it only appear good? (3) Is there any alternative means to the good? (4) Is the good end more valuable than any evil means to obtain it? (5) Will the means used to achieve the end stand the test of publicity? The first question in the model is a deontological one, and the latter four are teleological questions, which help photojournalists calculate consequences of their recording acts.

Mixed adoption of the specific ethical orientations also appeared in other studies on journalism ethics. Ward (2005) maintains that global journalism should have three claims: credibility, justifiable consequence, and humanity. While credibility is close to an organizational or professional loyalty to exist in a deontological approach, the claim of justifiable consequences is clearly a teleological concern. The third, humanity, emphasizes the personalist approach, and perhaps a global loyalty. In the three principles that Perkins (2002) presented for trans-national or cross-cultural journalism ethics, truth telling is still a deontological claim; and both independence and responsible freedom can be seen as produced from personalist approach.

Having inherited many ethical theories, now scholars and journalists rarely just use one approach or level of loyalty to build their specific ethical orientations.

### **III. A Brief Examination of Disaster Coverage with the Framework**

Ethical loyalties of the media, scholars found, change subtly at times. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, American press declared that it would be serious to serve its country. Later, Hurricane Katrina reminded the press of news seriousness again, especially awareness of race, poverty, and endearment issues, which seems to be a humankind (global) loyalty (Cunningham, 2005).

#### ***i. Global and Humankind Loyalty***

When nuclear proliferation, global warming, terrorism, poverty and global disease such as the recent avian flu become imminent global threats to human society, media should help to broaden the public discourse by, in addition to warning, analyzing the governments' solution plans (Cunningham, 2005). People need the media to inform them about what happened. In this informational global village, even official agencies are often not aware of disasters until they receive information from the media (Scanlon, 1980).

But media do not fulfill their global loyalty very well. They may play with disasters in other areas treating them differently than those in their own society. Wallisa and Nerlich (2005) examined how five major British newspapers covered SARS in 2003, and found that the newspapers tended to use military language and metaphor, such as portraying SARS as a killer. Washer (2004) found that the British newspapers described SARS as unlikely to personally affect the UK readers because the Chinese were so different to "us." In Canada, a survey conducted by Bergeron and Sanchez (2005) found that, although university students believed that media had over-covered SARS, the coverage brought little awareness about the disease.

More often, however, media coverage of global disasters brings unnecessary panic. Washer (2004), for example, found that UK newspapers' framing of SARS also undermined the faith of many people that medicine could overcome infectious disease. After examining several cases in which media coverage of crisis brought moral panic, Zgoba (2004) holds that it is not the frequency of the crimes, but the sensationalized media reports and political crusading, that are responsible for panic. Palermo and Farkas (2001) also reported how an infrequently happened child-abuse crime "generated an enormous amount of media attention and ignited fear, passion, and outrage of various individuals and groups" in a society (p. xv).

#### ***ii. National Loyalty***

Taras (1995) maintained that journalistic routine and practice tend to reinforce the dominant values in society. Herman and Chomsky (1988) also noticed that the media "serve to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity" (p. xi). Richard T. Hughes (2004) identified five myths in US journalistic works: (1) the chosen nation, (2) the Christian nation, (3) nature's nation, (4) the millennial nation, and (5) the innocent nation. Nation has become a major object of journalists' ethical loyalties.

*National teleology.* Teleological journalists who shed loyalty to their nations seem easily to cooperate with the government in disaster coverage to gain the greatest good for their fellow



citizens. Sometimes that is necessary in handling a disaster, because media, especially radio or TV, are a more effective channel for emergency directors to inform the society (Dynes, 1970; Scanlon, Alldred, Farrell, & Prawzick, 1985), a specific group of people, such as medical personnel (Scanlon et al, 1976), or a special language-speaking crowd (Scanlon, 1982). Scholars even suggest that emergency directing officials should be familiar with which media outlet carries what particular audience, so that they can use it more effectively during a disaster (Scanlon et al, 1985).

The teleology way, nevertheless, may hurt journalistic moral rules. Too much willingness to cooperate, along with a national mythology, strips journalists of skepticism for the information released by the government or the implicated companies. Examples are over-exalting the performance of the missile Patriot in the first Gulf War, under-investigating the performance of the Enron company, and accepting the Pentagon's explanation of Pat Tillman's death in Afghanistan (Cunningham, 2005). Cunningham (2005) also mentioned that major US national teleological media began to support a neoconservative ideology of the noble lie, which those in power often believed that they had a right to make because they knew more about what were at stake than ordinary people (Patterson & Wilkins, 2004). Although Bok (1999) held that a white lie might be understandable when it produced little harm but substantial benefits to the deceived, she also insisted on a deontological rule that all lies must stand on fairness and mutuality. Meanwhile, when national teleological journalists work with the government to help people who are suffering in a disaster, they should not forget that people also need the media to push the officials to be more effective, and help set the agenda (Cunningham, 2005).

*National deontology.* In covering disaster, national deontological journalists will stick on their duty attributed by the national society and follow the laws. Although research has shown that public administrators feel more relaxed when they work in an atmosphere devoid of media "record[ing] their actions, question[ing] their decisions, and air[ing] the remarks of their critics" (Scanlon et al, 1985, p. 123), the media are indispensable in a disaster. Their watchdog role will make the disaster handling more effective. The American Society of Newspaper Editors, now American Society of News Editors, for example, urged President Bush to post online the distribution of the \$62.3 billion fund used in the Hurricane Katrina relief, because "public discourse deters fraud and abuse" (Baish et al, 2005).

National deontologists observe national laws and governmental regulations, which can cause some loss in journalistic roles. Burch (1995) complained that "during the Persian Gulf War the US government's interest in national security was not narrowly tailed and the press operated under overly broad strict military control" (p.18). Xu (2000) found that most news programs in China deprived journalists of creativity and enthusiasm because of the Chinese government's regulation.

A case study (Patterson, 2004a) suggested that both deontology and teleology should be used in journalists' ethical decision-making process. In a fire, a photojournalist took four frames of two girls who were forced to fall from the fifth floor. The photojournalist thought deontologically that his pictures would not be published when he heard that the older girl died hours later. His newspaper, however, published them, and the Associated Press distributed the pictures worldwide, which soon were used around the country to promote fire safety facilities. These consequences brought a great praise to the photojournalist, including a 1976 Pulitzer Prize.

### *iii. News Organization Loyalty*

If reporters refuse to disclose confidential sources to protect the relationship between the media company and its sources, Christian et al (2005) argued, reporters are loyal to their company. More often, journalists choose organizational loyalty, not because they are willing to do so, but because they cannot effectively resist the organizational pressure and regulation, especially when the media organization wants to behave like an ethical decision maker. Journalists, as Taras (1995) notes, are under the direct control of the media owners or managers.

*Organizational teleology.* The media should not make an ethical decision if its own business affairs are involved in the ethical decision making process. Scholars often found that the media paid less attention to the inconspicuous disaster than to entertainment, which could attract more audiences and generate more advertising revenues (Cunningham, 2005). For instance, over 240 people died in one day in the 1995 Chicago heat wave, and poor people were still suffering from heat in the suburban areas, but some suburban editions of the *Chicago Tribune* that day still carried a feature story of a horse photographer with a picture of a horse on the front page (Clarke, 2004). Christians and his colleagues (2005) also criticized a newspaper for publishing a sensational spy-disclosing story, which made the retired spy commit suicide. The newspaper, Christians et al (2005) argued, should not omit the rule of minimizing harm. Godbold and Hartman (2004) discussed a case in which a newspaper rushed to publish pictures of little girl who has been taken as hostage and whose condition was still uncertain after being saved. The second day, calls poured into the newsroom, asking the situation of the girl and questioning why the paper would run such pictures.

*Organizational personality.* When the media institutions act as ethical decision makers, they tend to behave in a personalist way. In 2003, when the editor of *The Times-Picayune* was asked what he worried about most, his first answer was hurricanes. In 2002, the paper ran a famous series talking about what would happen if a hurricane hit the city directly. It warned that the city would be filled with water. So the capability of transferring thousands of poor people to safe places in great calamity needed to be ensured (McCollam, 2005). If the warning had been taken seriously, McCollam (2005) believes, New Orleans would have better survived the Katrina disaster. Pogrund (2000) also described a South African newspaper, which hired tenacious journalists who persisted in promoting democracy in that nation. It became a better and more relevant paper before it was closed.

The media's adoption of the personalist approach can be dangerous. The Hutton report has pointed out that the British Broadcasting Company, in the death inquiry of the former weapons inspector Kelly, aired a false story because of its inappropriate operation of editorial control and its unconditional support to a particular governmental official (Doig, 2005). Sandman and Paden (1979) presented an example in which a newspaper offered wrong advice to its readers during a nuclear accident. Cunningham (2005) thus suggests that media, in the rebuilding of New Orleans, exercise solid reportage on the possibilities in an aftermath of disaster, rather than just guess with soft foundations about what will happen. A disaster plan will greatly help the media to perform better in disaster coverage (Scanlon et al, 1985; Shepard, 2002).

#### *iv. Individual Loyalty*

Journalists' consciences, Christian and his colleagues (2005) hold, at many times might be a best solution, but it is also often seen that, under the name of following personal conscience, some journalists follow their own personal interests.

Photojournalists can be professional violators of the people's right to keep personal space free from violation (Goffman, 1959). They may be able to justify their conducts by serving for a greater value (Junas, 1980), but violating those rights for professional ambition cannot gain applause. When a picture containing the body of a drowned boy and his distraught family was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, it did not win because the moral standard for photojournalism seems clear: Photojournalists have a moral obligation to others not to publish esthetically offensive pictures except for pursuing a greater public good (Hodges, 2004).

When adopting a teleological approach and calculating the social consequences, journalists need to be cautious that they do not weight their own interests excessively. Patterson (2004b) mentioned a case in which a photographer took a picture of a mother kneeling down in her two-month son's blood who was hit by a car. After a dispute, the editors decided to publish it, claiming that the picture might prevent future accidents by warning bold drivers and careless parents. Readers' responses against running it poured in. Patterson and Wilkins (2004) pointed out that the photographer and the newspaper should not treat the desperate mother as means to the end of most people. They doubted if the message of safe driving could cost a victim's privacy.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Suggestions**

With abundant ethical theories cumulated from previous generations, today's journalists have more than one theoretical support to make ethical decisions in their practice. It is often seen that several ethical reasoning approaches and loyalties mix in an ethical decision. A more sophisticated ethical analyzing tool needs to be developed. This article made such an attempt. Based on traditional theories addressing ethical reasoning approaches and ethical loyalties, a new framework with twelve specific ethical orientations is developed and used to analyze some ethical decision making models and disaster-coverage cases.

There are two main limitations in this study. First, ethical decision making is a subjective process. It is helpful to analyze journalists' ethical behaviors in a more complicated ethical environment that journalists are facing today. Even though the framework as an ethical coordinate system is developed from classic ethical theories, it cannot work as accurately as mathematical coordinates. Second, due to lack of cases, some specific ethical orientations in the framework are not particularly discussed. Further research can either try to refine the framework, or apply it in examining journalists' practices in disaster coverage or other reporting.

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