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MORAL ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION ETHICS AS FOUNDATIONS FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT
The rapid development of digital media and communication technologies has transformed the ways individuals interact, share information, build relationships, and participate in society. However, these developments have also created ethical challenges, including misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy violations, online polarisation, manipulation, and the irresponsible use of artificial intelligence. This study examines the relationship between moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing in the twenty-first century, with particular attention to how ethical communication promotes human dignity and social well-being. The study is anchored in virtue ethics, communication ethics, and Christian ethics. The study uses a conceptual literature review methodology**,** drawing on relevant scholarly literature to critically examine the ethical dimensions of contemporary communication. The study addresses a gap in existing scholarship by integrating moral ethics, communication ethics, and human flourishing into a unified framework for evaluating ethical communication in the digital age. The findings reveal that moral values such as truthfulness, respect, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity are essential for responsible communication, trust, and meaningful human relationships. The study further finds that ethical communication can promote human flourishing by supporting dignity, social participation, mutual understanding, inclusion, and well-being, while unethical communication can undermine these conditions. Based on the reviewed literature, the study proposes the Moral Ethics–Communication–Human Flourishing (MECHF) Model, which explains how moral ethics guides communication towards human dignity, social well-being, and human flourishing within the opportunities and challenges of the digital environment. The study concludes that ethical communication and responsible use of digital technologies are essential for promoting human dignity, social well-being, and the common good.

Keywords: Moral Ethics, Communication Ethics, Human Flourishing, Human Dignity, Digital Responsibility

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Introduction

Human civilisation has always depended on communication for exchanging ideas, interacting with others, preserving culture, and organising social life. Every community develops moral standards that guide communication because language can shape people's thoughts, actions, and collective identity. Ethical communication therefore goes beyond information transmission; it involves using language responsibly in ways that respect human dignity and promote justice (Algarra et al. 120).

The twenty-first century has transformed communication through social media, artificial intelligence, and mobile technologies. These innovations have created opportunities for connection and collaboration while also raising concerns about accountability, autonomy, and responsible communication (Gunkel). As communication increasingly shapes public discourse, ethical reflection is necessary to ensure that technological developments serve rather than undermine human dignity.

Closely related to these concerns is the concept of human flourishing, rooted particularly in Aristotle's philosophy as discussed by Curren and Park. Human flourishing involves the realisation of human potential through meaningful relationships, social participation, and the pursuit of the common good. Contemporary perspectives also recognise psychological and environmental well-being, emphasising that flourishing requires more than economic or technological advancement; it also depends on communication grounded in trust and mutual respect (Medina).

The growing influence of artificial intelligence has further intensified ethical concerns about communication and human agency. AI offers greater accessibility but can also influence beliefs and decisions through personalised, data-driven strategies, raising questions about autonomy, transparency, and accountability (Floridi). Religious perspectives similarly emphasise honesty, love, compassion, and respectful dialogue as essential to human dignity and responsible communication.

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to examining moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing. While existing studies have addressed these areas separately, limited attention has been given to their integration and to communication as a contributor to human well-being. The study therefore examines how moral ethics can inform communication practices and contribute to human flourishing in the twenty-first century.

Aim

The overall aim of this study is to examine the interrelationship between moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing in the twenty-first century, with particular attention to how ethical communication practices can support human dignity and social well-being in an era shaped by digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

Objectives

1. To examine the role of moral ethics in communication.
2. To identify ethical challenges in contemporary communication.
3. To examine the relationship between communication and human flourishing.
4. To explore how ethical values promote human dignity and social well-being.

The relationship between moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing has attracted many scholars' attention due to the transformation brought by civilisation, globalisation, innovation, and communication. All these concepts have been studied, and recognized that ethical communication is indispensable for individual well-being and sustainable development.

This section reviews existing literature on moral ethics, communication ethics, and human flourishing, and the challenges that emerge within 21st-century communication environments.

Concept of Moral Ethics

Moral ethics is the branch of philosophy concerned with the rightness and wrongness of human actions, moral responsibility, and human well-being. According to Curren and Park, Aristotelian ethics views virtue as essential to happiness (eudaimonia) and the common good through the development of good character. Moral ethics therefore provides principles for evaluating human conduct and its consequences for individuals and society.

Aristotelian virtue ethics emphasises good character and virtues such as justice, honesty, courage, and moderation (Curren and Park). In contrast, Kant's deontological ethics focuses on moral duties and respect for human dignity, while utilitarianism evaluates actions according to their consequences for happiness and suffering. Although these approaches differ in their understanding of moral conduct, they each provide a basis for assessing responsible behaviour. However, virtue ethics may not always specify how to resolve conflicting moral choices, duty-based ethics may encounter competing obligations, and utilitarianism may overlook individual rights when prioritising collective benefits.

These differences suggest that moral responsibility involves character, duties, and consequences rather than a single ethical consideration. Applied to communication, these perspectives provide a basis for examining truthfulness, respect, accountability, and the effects of messages on others. They also establish the ethical foundation for the MECHF Model, which examines how moral values can guide communication towards human dignity, social well-being, and human flourishing.

Communication as a Moral Activity

Communication is a process through which information, ideas, feelings, and meanings are exchanged between individuals and groups. Beyond transmitting information, communication is a moral activity because it can educate, encourage, heal, harm, persuade, or manipulate. Pearson and Nelson define communication as "the process of understanding and sharing meaning" (6), highlighting the responsibility of communicators to consider how their messages affect others.

Communication ethics focuses on the principles guiding communicative practices, including honesty, fairness, respect, transparency, and accountability. The National Communication Association emphasises truthfulness, integrity, responsibility, and respect for human dignity. These principles establish standards for responsible communication, but their effectiveness depends on how they are applied in practice. For instance, a message may be factually accurate yet communicated in a manner that humiliates or discriminates against others. Ethical communication must therefore consider both the truthfulness of a message and its implications for human dignity and well-being.

Dialogue further demonstrates the moral nature of communication. Habermas' theory of communicative action emphasises mutual understanding through dialogue, while Peters and Besley connect Habermas' concept of the "ideal speech community" with the justification of validity claims in ordinary discourse (669). While ethical principles establish standards for responsible conduct, the emphasis on dialogue highlights the importance of reasoned engagement and mutual understanding. However, these ideals may be difficult to achieve where power imbalances, coercion, or manipulation prevent participants from expressing themselves freely. This limitation suggests that ethical communication requires not only moral principles and dialogue but also conditions that protect participants' dignity and freedom.

Trust is another important dimension of communication. Honest and respectful messages can strengthen cooperation and social relationships, whereas deception, discrimination, and manipulation can weaken trust and promote exclusion. Communication is therefore not automatically beneficial; its contribution to individual and collective well-being depends partly on the ethical values guiding its practice.

Although these perspectives explain the importance of ethical principles and meaningful dialogue, they provide different emphases on responsible conduct and communicative interaction. This study brings these concerns together by examining how moral ethics can guide communication and how ethical communication can contribute to human dignity, social well-being, and human flourishing. The proposed Moral Ethics–Communication–Human Flourishing (MECHF) Model provides an integrated framework for examining these relationships.

Human Flourishing: Philosophical and Contemporary Perspectives

Human flourishing is a central concern in moral philosophy and is closely associated with Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, as discussed by Curren and Park. Aristotelian ethics understands flourishing as living well through rational activity and virtuous conduct rather than temporary pleasure (Curren and Park). Symons and VanderWeele explain that eudaimonia involves rational activity in accordance with virtue and the development of human potential. Aristotle also recognises the importance of friendship, health, wealth, and social participation, suggesting that flourishing depends on both personal character and external conditions (Symons and VanderWeele).

Contemporary perspectives broaden this understanding by emphasising individual opportunities and social well-being. The capability approach associated with Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum focuses on people's freedoms to achieve valuable ways of living. Similarly, Stiglitz, Fitoussi, and Durand argue that economic performance alone cannot adequately measure human well-being. While Aristotelian ethics emphasises virtue and good character (Curren and Park), contemporary approaches give greater attention to the social conditions and opportunities that enable people to flourish. Together, these perspectives suggest that human flourishing involves both personal development and a supportive social environment.

Communication contributes to flourishing by enabling people to access information, build relationships, express themselves, and participate in decision-making. Conversely, deception, discrimination, and manipulation can undermine trust, dignity, and social well-being. Although existing perspectives explain important dimensions of human flourishing, the relationship between moral ethics, communication, and flourishing requires further integration. This study addresses this gap through the proposed MECHF Model, which examines how moral ethics can guide communication towards human dignity and social well-being.

Digital Communication and Emerging Ethical Challenges

The development of digital communication technologies has transformed how people access, produce, and share information. Social media, mobile technologies, and artificial intelligence have expanded opportunities for communication and participation, but they have also created ethical challenges relating to truth, privacy, accountability, and human dignity. These developments show that the benefits of digital communication depend partly on how the technologies are used and the ethical principles guiding their use.

Misinformation is a major concern because digital platforms allow users to circulate information without verifying its accuracy. Marin argues that sharing misinformation raises questions of responsibility, including when users share misleading content they did not create. This suggests that responsibility in digital communication extends beyond content creators to

those who distribute information. However, the ease of sharing information can make verification difficult, reinforcing the need for users to consider the accuracy and possible consequences of their messages.

Cyberbullying and online harassment also demonstrate how digital communication can undermine human well-being. Abusive messages, threats, and public humiliation can damage relationships and affect victims' psychological and social well-being. Pazri et al. discuss the serious consequences of cyberbullying for victims (990–91). Although digital platforms enable interaction across geographical boundaries, their reach and persistence can amplify harmful behaviour. This highlights the tension between increased connectivity and the responsibility to protect human dignity.

Privacy presents another ethical challenge. Social networking platforms allow users to share personal information while collecting and processing data about their activities. Chen and Chen note that privacy concerns influence users' attitudes and behaviours on social networking sites. The issue is therefore not simply whether information is shared, but whether individuals understand and have meaningful control over how their information is used. Ethical digital communication requires transparency, consent, and responsible data management.

Artificial intelligence introduces further questions about accountability, bias, privacy, and the spread of misleading content. Bowen identifies misinformation, disinformation, privacy and data use, bias, and social disruption among the ethical concerns associated with AI. Although AI can improve the speed and efficiency of communication, these benefits do not automatically guarantee responsible outcomes. Human oversight and accountability remain important in ensuring that technological systems serve people rather than expose them to manipulation or unfair treatment.

Political communication presents a related challenge. Social media can encourage political participation and expose users to different viewpoints, but uncivil discussions may contribute to perceptions of political division. Mak, Li, and Rojas examine the relationship between social media affordances, uncivil political discussion, and perceived political polarisation. This demonstrates that digital platforms can support participation while also creating conditions that weaken constructive dialogue. Responsible digital communication therefore requires civility, openness to differing views, and respect for others.

These challenges reveal that digital communication is not ethically neutral. While existing studies examine issues such as misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy, artificial intelligence, and political polarisation, these concerns also raise a broader question about how ethical principles can guide digital communication towards human well-being. This study addresses that concern through the MECHF Model, which connects moral ethics with responsible communication and human flourishing, with particular attention to dignity, accountability, trust, and social well-being.

Moral Ethics, Communication, and Human Flourishing

Moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing are interconnected because communication shapes human relationships, social participation, and individual well-being. Algarra, Rodríguez-Virgili, and Torregrosa describe communication as a foundation of social life that contributes to community and social cohesion (120). However, communication does not always produce positive outcomes. Its effects depend partly on whether communicators act with honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

Moral ethics provides principles for evaluating these effects. Kolić identifies truthfulness, transparency, professional integrity, competence, loyalty, and social responsibility as important

principles in communication. These values suggest that communication should be assessed not only by its effectiveness but also by its moral implications. A message may achieve its intended purpose while still misleading, manipulating, or harming its audience. Ethical communication therefore requires attention to both communicative outcomes and the dignity of those affected.

Virtue ethics further connects moral conduct with human well-being by emphasising character and responsible action. Plaisance applies virtue ethics to digital environments, highlighting authenticity, privacy, autonomy, and responsible discourse as important considerations for human flourishing online. Similarly, Gunkel argues that emerging technologies require renewed consideration of communication ethics because technological systems increasingly influence communication and human interaction. While virtue ethics emphasises the character of individuals, the ethical challenges of digital technologies also demonstrate the importance of examining the systems and environments in which communication takes place.

Communication can support human flourishing by promoting trust, meaningful relationships, inclusion, and participation. Conversely, deceptive, discriminatory, and manipulative communication can undermine dignity and social well-being. This relationship highlights an important distinction: communication is a means of human interaction, but its contribution to flourishing depends on the values and practices that shape it.

Although existing scholarship discusses communication ethics, virtue, and the influence of technology, these perspectives do not necessarily provide a single integrated explanation of how moral ethics guides communication towards human flourishing. This study addresses that gap through the proposed Moral Ethics–Communication–Human Flourishing (MECHF) Model. The model connects moral values with ethical communication and examines how these practices can promote human dignity, social trust, and collective well-being.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the reviewed literature and theoretical perspectives, this study proposes the Moral Ethics–Communication–Human Flourishing Model (MECHF Model) to explain the relationship among moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing in the twenty-first century. The model is based on the understanding that communication is not morally neutral, as the values guiding communicative practices can influence human relationships, dignity, and social well-being.

The first component is moral ethics, which provides values such as honesty, integrity, respect, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and justice. These values establish the moral foundation for communication. Virtue ethics supports this component by emphasising good character and moral responsibility. However, possessing moral values does not automatically guarantee ethical communication; these values must be reflected in communicative choices and actions.

The second component is ethical communication, which involves truthfulness, respect, fairness, transparency, accountability, and meaningful dialogue. Habermas' theory of communicative action supports this component by emphasising mutual understanding and participation. Nevertheless, meaningful dialogue may be difficult to achieve where manipulation, coercion, or unequal power relations prevent open participation. The model therefore emphasises the importance of applying ethical values in ways that protect dignity and encourage responsible interaction.

The third component is human flourishing, understood in relation to human potential, meaningful relationships, participation, agency, and overall well-being. The model identifies

human dignity and social well-being as important links between ethical communication and flourishing. While respectful communication can promote trust, inclusion, and cooperation, harmful communication can weaken these conditions. The capability approach supports this dimension by drawing attention to the opportunities and freedoms people need to achieve valuable ways of living.

The model also recognises the digital environment, particularly social media, artificial intelligence, and mobile technologies, as a context that influences communication. These technologies create opportunities for information sharing and participation but also present challenges such as misinformation, privacy violations, cyberbullying, manipulation, and polarisation. Their effects on human flourishing depend partly on how individuals and institutions address these ethical challenges.

Overall, the MECHF Model proposes that moral ethics provides the values that guide ethical communication, while ethical communication can promote human dignity and social well-being, thereby contributing to human flourishing. The digital environment influences this relationship by creating both opportunities and ethical challenges. By bringing these dimensions together, the model provides an integrated framework for examining how morally guided communication can contribute to individual and collective well-being.

Methodology

This study adopts a narrative literature review approach. This approach explores conceptual relationships and ethical principles concerning moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing rather than measurable causal relationships. A conceptual/narrative review enables the study to bring together and critically interpret relevant ideas, theories, and scholarly arguments from different disciplines to develop an integrated ethical framework for understanding communication and human flourishing.

The study draws on scholarly literature from communication studies, journalism, philosophy, theology, Christian ethics, and related fields. The literature includes peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and established theoretical works addressing virtue ethics, communication ethics, Habermas' theory of communicative action, the capability approach, human dignity, digital media ethics, and artificial intelligence. Recent scholarship addressing misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy violations, and AI-mediated communication is also examined.

Relevant literature was identified through searches of academic databases and scholarly platforms, including Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and institutional academic databases**.** The principal search terms included combinations of “moral ethics,” “communication ethics,” “ethical communication,” “human flourishing,” “human dignity,” “communication and well-being,” “digital communication ethics,” and “social media ethics,” The review primarily covers literature published between 2015 and 2026**,** while earlier seminal works, such as Aristotle's virtue ethics and Habermas' theory of communicative action, were included where necessary because of their foundational theoretical significance. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives. The selected literature was then grouped thematically into five major areas: moral ethics and communication; ethical challenges in contemporary communication; communication and human flourishing; human dignity and social well-being; and digital communication and emerging technologies**.**

The selection of literature is guided by the four objectives of the study, focusing on the role of moral ethics in communication, ethical challenges in contemporary communication, the relationship between communication and human flourishing, and the contribution of ethical

values to human dignity and social well-being. The selected literature is critically examined and synthesised according to the identified themes rather than treated as a systematic statistical sample.

The findings from the literature are synthesised to examine the relationship between moral values and communication and to develop the Moral Ethics–Communication–Human Flourishing (MECHF) Model**.** The model proposes that moral ethics guides communication, ethical communication promotes human dignity and social well-being, and these conditions can contribute to human flourishing, particularly within the opportunities and challenges created by digital technologies.

No primary data are collected because the study is conceptual and normative rather than empirical. The major limitation of the approach is its dependence on existing scholarship and the interpretive nature of narrative literature analysis. This limitation is addressed by prioritising relevant, credible, peer-reviewed, and interdisciplinary sources and by organising the literature around clearly defined conceptual themes and research objectives. The methodology therefore provides a foundation for critically examining ethical communication, digital responsibility, human dignity, and human flourishing in the twenty-first century.

Discussion

The analysis of the reviewed literature revealed four major findings in relation to the objectives of the study.

First, the study found that moral ethics play an important role in communication. Values such as honesty, respect, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity influence the way individuals communicate and interact with others. Ethical values help promote trust, mutual understanding, and responsible relationships, while their absence can encourage deception, manipulation, and conflict.

Second, the study revealed that contemporary communication, particularly digital communication, presents significant ethical challenges. Misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy violations, online polarisation, manipulation, and the irresponsible use of artificial intelligence were identified as major challenges. These issues can undermine trust, autonomy, human dignity, and responsible participation in society.

Third, the findings showed a strong relationship between communication and human flourishing. Ethical communication can support human flourishing by promoting meaningful relationships, access to information, social participation, mutual understanding, and individual well-being. Conversely, harmful communication can negatively affect relationships, social trust, dignity, and opportunities for individuals to participate meaningfully in society.

Finally, the study found that ethical values contribute to human dignity and social well-being. Communication guided by respect, compassion, justice, truthfulness, and responsibility creates conditions that encourage inclusion, cooperation, trust, and peaceful coexistence. The findings therefore support the MECHF Model, which proposes that moral ethics guides communication, ethical communication promotes human dignity and social well-being, and these conditions contribute to human flourishing in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of integrating moral ethics into communication practices to promote human dignity, trust, and social well-being. Its central contribution is the Moral Ethics–Communication–Human Flourishing (MECHF) Model, which provides a conceptual framework for understanding how moral values can inform communication and contribute to human flourishing. By bringing these concepts together, the model offers a basis for

examining the ethical responsibilities associated with communication in contemporary society, particularly in an increasingly digital environment.

The practical implications of the study extend to individuals, media organisations, technology developers, policymakers, and other communication stakeholders. Media organisations should strengthen ethical guidelines for content production, verification, and dissemination, while communication professionals should uphold truthfulness, fairness, accountability, and respect for privacy. Technology developers and policymakers should also promote responsible digital practices and safeguards against misinformation, cyberbullying, and the misuse of personal information. These measures can help create a communication environment that prioritises human dignity and the common good.

Despite its contribution, this study is limited by its reliance on existing literature and its non-empirical approach. The MECHF Model has not been tested using primary data, and its applicability across different communication contexts remains to be established. Consequently, the model should be understood as a conceptual framework that requires further investigation rather than an empirically validated explanation of the relationship between moral ethics, communication, and human flourishing.

Future research should test and refine the MECHF Model through empirical investigations using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. Researchers could conduct content analyses of social media posts to examine the relationship between ethical communication practices and the prevalence of misinformation, abusive content, and respectful online interactions. Surveys and interviews involving media professionals and audiences could further investigate how ethical values influence trust, perceptions of communication credibility, and social well-being. Comparative studies across interpersonal, organisational, traditional media, and digital communication settings could also establish the model's relevance in different contexts. Findings from these investigations would provide evidence for evaluating the model's assumptions, identifying areas for refinement, and determining its practical usefulness in promoting ethical communication and human flourishing.

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