**The DMT Project: Ethics**

*Six Principles of News Literacy*

These six principles are to guide producers and consumers of news and information.

**1. Free expression is the foundation — the cornerstone — of democracy**

The First Amendment is based upon the conviction that all human beings have inalienable rights. The foundation of journalism is the professionals’ understanding of their obligation to accurately, thoroughly and completely inform their communities, so people may become more effective and active citizens. This notion of civic responsibility will empower communities to make enlightened decisions, to express their disagreements and to seek common ground.

When ideas are allowed to flourish, it is the public’s responsibility to determine what ideas and concepts to accept and which to embrace, to question or to reject. The First Amendment is based on the premise that people who can freely share information (especially about their government) will be informed and able to make sound choices about what leaders to elect, to take responsibility for the welfare of their communities and to respect the rights of people with different viewpoints and beliefs.

**2. Discerning fact from opinion is a basic skill – and obligation**

Journalists must clearly separate and label fact from opinion in their reporting of information to communities and they should make concerted efforts to ensure that citizens know how to tell the difference. This includes news and news analysis, the news organizations’ and individuals’ opinions (columns, commentary, editorials, letters to the editor), advertising, advocacy ads and advocacy reporting.

The public must make it a priority to learn the difference between fact and opinion and make it a skill to help others in their communities know the difference. Individuals must wield the right to challenge what communicators claim is fact and what is opinion. People must demand transparency and credibility of information. Readers and viewers must look at information beyond their circle of comfort so they obtain complete and thorough data before acting. These obligations include evaluating what they receive and verifying what they develop on their own.

**3.** **When the process of gathering and reporting is transparent, news and information are more meaningful, trusted and credible.**

Journalists must present information free of bias and agendas. They should clearly identify issues or limitations on that information, including reporting that the information might be incomplete or from questionable sources. Journalistic independence is essential to this process.

Readers and viewers must understand a source’s agendas, motivations and backgrounds so they can make full use of that information, assessing what is true. They need to insist on independent journalists, professionals free of outside obligation and limitation, so they can trust the information they receive. They need to hold media accountable for the quality of information delivered. If members of the public are news sources, they must identify their biases and be transparent in their actions.

**4. Effective communication of news and information requires synthesis of multiple sources into meaningful context and comprehension of its impact**

Journalists must make sense of information, using the most credible and reliable resources, so audiences can make meaningful use of it, in context, with a minimum need for clarification.  In short, journalists must get it *right*. And it must be presented in a relevant, engaging manner without sensationalism, speculation and bias.

Citizens must take responsibility to make every effort to understand information received, including asking questions and pursuing their own versions of it. They must demand credible and reliable information sources, not infotainment based on information that is not *right*. And they must be taught the importance of seeking information of consequence.

**5. Information requires verification to be effective**

Journalists must find the best resources and substantiate what they say. They should present information in coherent ways as well as keep it clear, meaningful and relevant. The purpose of news is not diversion but the sharing of usable and reliable information in an engaging and relevant way. Journalists must question sources without advocacy or disengagement. Journalists’ roles can be called “engaged independence.”

Individuals must expect that the information they receive is accurate, thorough and reliably sourced and that the media delivering this information is responsible and credible. Communities must not accept information without critical thought and analysis, including comparison and evaluation. In evaluating such information, they should be involved, skeptical and challenging, in what they act on.

**6. Information in today’s society must empower forums to give voice to citizens and to monitor the free flow of information**

Journalists must reflect their communities, but, when the need arises, they must first be able to challenge a community’s values and preconceptions to maintain the free and accurate flow of information. Journalists must report information from all stakeholders, especially from those who might not otherwise have a chance to be heard, by creating a forum that adheres to journalistic principles. Journalists are the “watchdog” for society. They can bring about change by being journalistically responsible as well as by offering voice to those traditionally unheard.

Individuals should expect to have a forum to air their views. That forum must also involve the responsibility to listen to the views of others. Individuals can join journalists in the “watchdog” function not only of society but also of the media, and can also provide the important function of giving voice to those traditionally underserved.

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