

Should Freedom of Speech be Accepted Universally?

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Abstract: Multinational companies (MNCs) face ethical dilemmas when dealing with countries that have different ethical standards and understanding of human rights from their home country. In 2019, examples of this situation were in the news about Disney and Google operations abroad. Using South Park's "Band in China" (season 23 episode 02), we discuss issues created by censorship and how America's view of freedom of speech is currently at the center of a debate: While the First Amendment should reflect universal values, many countries do not agree with this idea.

We show how MNCs can use the business ethics literature to guide decisions. Companies should train employees in Thomas Donaldson's (1985) heuristic for decisions reconciling international norms. Donaldson's heuristics is based on three questions: Is the conflict between countries rooted in economics or basic cultural differences? Is it necessary to engage in this practice in order to do business in this country? Does engaging in this practice violate fundamental human rights?

Although these questions might be difficult to answer, thinking about them should improve companies' understanding of the conflict at hand, its root causes, and alternatives for dealing with the problem and focus on long-term issues their decisions might create.