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Examining Fifteen Years of Ethics Research in the Journal of Accountancy: 2002 to 2016

CLARENCE GOH

ABSTRACT

In the past fifteen years, ethics has come under the spotlight in the accounting profession. In this study, I examine ethics research in accounting by looking at publications in the Journal of Accountancy, a leading professional journal in accounting, over the period from 2002 to 2016. I found that 32 out of 4,851 (0.66%) articles published in the journal were ethics-focused. Further, I observed spikes in the percentage of ethics-focused articles in the years 2003 and 2009/2010, following key events such as the passing of SOX and the global financial crisis. I also perform content analysis of the ethics-focused articles by categorizing them to one of four research areas: (1) code of conduct, (2) corporate culture, (3) ethical decision making, and (4) reputation management. Given that the majority of ethics-focused articles published relate to encouraging ethical behaviour among accounting professionals, my results suggest that such articles present a good source of information that accounting professionals can turn to when making decisions which have ethical implications. My study makes important contributions by providing insights into the overall proportion of ethics-focused articles that is published in the journal, and assesses the progress/evolution of ethics research over the time period. From a broader perspective, the findings in my study also add to the overall literature on business ethics by highlighting significant themes that accounting researchers have focused on. In addition, it provides insights into how ethics research has been incorporated into the area of accounting, particularly from a practice perspective. It also highlights four key areas of ethics research in accounting, and helps identify areas of future research.

Keywords: Accounting; ethics

INTRODUCTION

In the past fifteen years, ethics has come under the spotlight in the accounting profession. High profile accounting scandals involving companies such as Worldcom in 2002 and Saytam in 2009, and also prominent business personalities such as Bernie Madoff in 2008 have led to the public becoming more sceptical of the accounting profession's ability/willingness to perform its role as a gatekeeper in the marketplace and protecting the interests of market participants (Cullinan 2004; Hartman, DesJardins & MacDonald 2015). Over the same period, other significant events that have impacted the ethical mind-sets of accountants have also occurred. Following a series of egregious cases of accounting fraud, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act was passed in 2002 to protect investors and other market participants from potential fraudulent accounting activities by corporations (Stephens & Schwartz 2006). In 2008/2009, the global financial crisis wreaked havoc on the global economy, leading to tremendous job losses and economic slowdowns across countries around the world (The Economist 2013). In an attempt to curb the unethical behaviour that was widely perceived to have been responsible for the onset of the crisis, the Frank-Dodd Act was enacted in 2010 to prevent/root out the kinds of unethical behaviour that led to the crisis.

Given the importance of ethics to the accounting profession, and the significant impact that ethical lapses

by accountants can have on investors, other market participants, and the wider economy, it is important for us to examine the ethics research that has been conducted in accounting. In particular, it is important for us to understand how practitioners and researchers have responded to the ethical challenges that have arose in the past fifteen years in the profession. In this study, I examine ethics research in accounting by looking at publications in the Journal of Accountancy, a leading professional journal in accounting, over the period from 2002 to 2016. Specifically, to gain insights into the number of type of ethics-focused articles that have been published over this period, I examine the number and type of ethics-focused articles that have been published. This fifteen-year time period was selected because it is long enough to capture a relatively wide spectrum of research. Also, the key events that occurred during the period, as discussed earlier, provides a rich source of material for research and analysis.

All articles published in the Journal of Accountancy over the period were downloaded using the Business Source Complete database. The search was further streamlined to identify ethics-focused articles by searching for articles that contained the words "ethics" and "ethical" in their titles. The ethics-focused articles that were downloaded were then assigned to one of four categories - (1) code of conduct, (2) corporate culture, (3) ethical decision making, and (4) reputation management – that each represent an

important area of ethics research (Hartman et al. 2015; Robertson 2008).

An analysis of the articles published in the *Journal of Accountancy* from 2002 to 2016 reveals that 32 out of 4,851 articles (0.66%) are ethics-focused. Further, I observe spikes in the percentage of ethics-focused articles in the years 2003 and 2009/2010, following key industry-wide events such as the passing of SOX and the global financial crisis. In analysing ethics-focused articles assigned to each of the four categories, I find that the largest category of articles relate to codes of conduct. In all, 21 of 32 (65.63%) ethics-focused articles are related to research on codes of conduct.

One key implication of my results relates to the important role that ethics-related articles play in shaping ethical behaviour/mindsets in the accounting profession, especially following prominent ethics-related events such as the passing of SOX and the global financial crisis. In particular, given that the majority of ethics-focused articles published from 2002 to 2016 relate to encouraging ethical behaviour among accounting professionals (by focusing on codes on conduct, corporate culture, and ethical decision making), my results suggest that such articles present a good source of information that accounting professionals can turn to when making decisions which incorporate ethical implications.

My study contributes both to research and to practice. It is the first to examine ethics research in accounting in the *Journal of Accountancy* over the period from 2002 to 2016 where significant events impacting the industry occurred. It provides insights into the overall proportion of ethics-focused articles that has been published in the journal, and assesses the progress/evolution of ethics research over the time period. Further, it identifies four categories of ethics-research that accounting researchers have focused on. By focusing my analysis on the *Journal of Accountancy*, which is a leading professional journal, my findings provide insight into what researchers and editors at the journal feel are important areas that impact practitioners in the accounting profession. From a broader perspective, the findings in my study also add to the overall literature on business ethics by highlighting significant themes that accounting researchers have focused on.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. The Accounting and Ethics section highlights the importance of ethics in accounting. The Methodology section describes the methodology used in examining the published articles and the Results section presents results from the analysis. Finally, the Conclusion section discusses the findings and concludes.

ACCOUNTING AND ETHICS

Accountants play an important role in the marketplace (Satava, Caldwell & Richards 2006). Their roles have been likened to that of 'gatekeepers' because they ensure that those who enter the marketplace play according to the rules and conform to the conditions that ensure that the market functions as it is supposed to (Hartman et al.

2015). The investing public has traditionally depended on audited financial statements when making their investment decisions. In doing so, they depend on auditors and professional accountants to confirm the accuracy and completeness of financial statements (Kane 2004). However, because of the recent spate of high profile accounting scandals (e.g. Enron in 2001, Worldcom in 2002, Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme in 2008, Saytam in 2009) where the accountants involved were perceived to have not performed the gatekeeper role to the extent that is expected of them, the public has become less trusting of the accounting profession's ability/willingness to protect the interests of market participants (Cullinan 2004). To be sure, the accounting profession is increasingly focusing its attention on ethical principles and the need to reinforce the importance of the role that ethics plays in the profession. While many accountants (and non-accountants) hold the view that mastery of accounting or audit techniques is the most important skill that a professional accountant should possess, relatively few accounting scandals have been caused by methodological errors in the application of techniques or related disclosure. Instead, many accounting scandals can be traced to accountants displaying a lack of attention to the ethical values of honesty, integrity, objectivity, due care, confidentiality, and commitment to the interest of others before their own interests (Brooks & Dunn 2015).

Over the fifteen-year period covered in this study, from 2002 to 2016, several notable events that occurred have had significant impacts on the accounting profession. One of the most significant events to have occurred in the period was the passage of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) in 2002 to protect investors from possible fraudulent accounting activities by corporations. Specifically, SOX provides legislation which addresses the following four key areas: (1) defining appropriate relationships between independent auditors and the companies being audited, (2) specifying appropriate corporate governance practices and inappropriate corporate activities, (3) stipulating provisions with respect to corporate fraud and accountability, and (4) establishing requirements that companies implement and document internal control systems to help ensure the integrity of financial information being reported to the public (Stephens & Schwartz 2006). Another significant event to have occurred over the period was the global financial crisis which occurred in 2008/2009 (The Economist 2013). The financial crisis saw the US economy shrink by five percent and lose almost nine million jobs over the period from the peak of the business cycle in late 2007 to the trough in the middle of 2009 (Berge 2012). The events which led to the crisis can be traced to unethical behaviour by many companies such as AIG and Lehman Brothers. In response to this, the US passed the Dodd-Frank Act in 2010. A total of sixteen provisions are enacted within the act. Among others, the act created the Financial Stability Oversight Council (FSOC) which looks out for risks that can affect the entire financial industry (Koba 2012).

Given the importance of ethics to the accounting profession and the far reaching impact that ethical lapses by accountants have had not only on investors and market participants but also on the wider economy, it is crucial to assess the state of ethics research in accounting. In particular, it is important to examine what research has been done in the area, especially with respect to how the profession and practitioners are responding to the ethical challenges in the accounting profession.

METHODOLOGY

The Journal of Accountancy has a significant impact on the field of accounting. It is published monthly by the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA), and focuses on recent developments in the accounting profession. Its publications reach more than 500,000 accounting and finance professionals from a variety of backgrounds including public accounting firms, corporations, government agencies, and not-for profit organizations (Journal of Accountancy 2016b). At the same time, the Journal of Accountancy is also a well-regarded journal for publications among academics. In a recent study, Cook, Raviv & Richardson (2010) used a branch and bound algorithm to develop a ranking of accounting, auditing, and taxation journals and found that the Journal of Accountancy was ranked 26 out of a total of 140 journals. Therefore, the Journal of Accountancy was selected because it is a leading professional journal that is widely read by accounting professionals and is at the same time also well regarded among academics in accounting.

The fifteen-year time period from 2002 to 2016 was selected for the analysis. In addition to having the advantage of being recent, the fifteen-year span is also long enough to capture a sufficiently broad spectrum of accounting research. Various high profile accounting scandals (e.g. Bernie Madoff's investment scandal, Worldcom), financial crises (e.g. global financial crisis of 2008/2009), and anti-corruption legislation and agreements (e.g. Sarbanes-Oxley Act) also occurred during the period, creating a rich variety of ethical topics with specific relevance to accounting.

To identify articles to be examined in the study, I used the Business Source Complete database to download articles published in the Journal of Accountancy over the period from 2002 to 2016.¹ To further identify ethics-related articles, I then streamlined my search by downloading articles published in the Journal of Accountancy over the same period but which contained the words "ethics" or "ethical" in their titles. A running count of the annual total number of articles and number of ethics-focused articles was maintained.

Next, I examined each ethics-focused article and classified them as belonging to one of four categories: (1) code of conduct, (2) corporate culture, (3) ethical decision making, and (4) reputation management. Each of these four categories are relevant to ethics in research and in practice. First, codes of conduct are one of the most common strategies used by organizations to reduce

unethical behaviour (Bryne 1988). The 'ethical community' perspective has frequently been used to explain why/how codes of conduct can encourage ethical behaviour (Solomon 1992). Specifically, in the context of the workplace, an employee is a citizen of his/her community, and is required to accept standards of (ethical) behaviour that are consistent with his/her role within that community. In this context, judgments regarding the ethicality of an employee's actions will then be based upon whether the employee behaves in accordance with the company's expectations of how an employee should act in a given situation. Codes of conduct, from this perspective, can encourage ethical behaviour by providing a clear, unambiguous statement of what a company expects of its employees. Consistent with this, McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield (1996) find that there is a positive relationship between the presence of a code of conduct and ethical behaviour in the workplace, especially if employees perceive the codes to be strongly embedded and implemented in the company.

Second, corporate culture can influence ethical behaviour within an organization (Hartman et al. 2015). Nwachukwu and Vitell (1997) assert that "the contention that organizational culture influences ethical decision making is not disputable." In examining how corporate culture can influence ethical behaviour, Hunt, Wood and Chonko (1989) further suggest that organizations may have some norms which help establish and maintain the standards of the 'right' thing to do. Such standards can then, in turn, influence employees' choices, leading to more ethical behaviour.

Third, it is also important to examine and understand how and why managers make ethical/unethical decisions. Prior research examining ethical decision making has led to the development of various ethical decision making models. For example, Trevino (1986) developed a general theoretical model of ethical decision making while Hunt and Vitell (1986) established a model focused on marketing ethics. Jones (1991) extended the literature in this area by developing an ethical model which took the characteristics of the ethical issue itself into consideration when making ethical decisions.

Finally, an 'ethical brand' can enhance a firm's overall reputation. Indeed, an organization's reputation is intrinsically linked to how ethically/unethically it is perceived to conduct its business (Brunk 2010; Worcester & Dawkins 2005). Further, positive reputational capital can distinguish a company from its competitors and act as a source of competitive advantage (Keller 2008). Hence, from this perspective, ethical considerations are an important aspect of reputation management as it allows managers to understand how being perceived to behave ethically/unethically can influence an organization's overall reputation.

Therefore, each of these four categories correspond to an important area of ethics research. Consistent with this, codes of conduct, ethical decision making, and reputation management were classified by Robertson (2008) in a list of qualifying topics in ethics-focused research. Corporate

culture has also been identified as a key factor that influences ethical behaviour in the workplace (Hartman et al. 2015).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents a summary of the total number of articles and total number of ethics-focused articles published in the Journal of Accountancy annually from 2002 to 2016. A total of 4,851 articles were published in the Journal of Accountancy over the fifteen-year period. Of these, 32 (0.66%) were ethics-focused articles. On average, 323.4 articles and 2.13 ethics-focused articles were published per year over the period. The year with the largest number of ethics-focused articles published was 2003 which saw 5 (1.77%) ethics-focused articles published. In contrast, the years with the lowest number of ethics-focused articles published were 2007 and 2011 which saw no ethics-focused articles published.

SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY EVENTS

Several trends were also observed over the fifteen-year period. In the first five years, from 2002 to 2006, an average of 2.6 ethics-focused articles were published per year, taking up 0.81% of total publications over the period. In the second five years, from 2007 to 2011, an average of 1.8 ethics-focused articles were published per year, taking up 0.51% of total publications. In the third five years, from 2012 to 2016, an average of 2.0 ethics-focused articles were published per year, taking up 0.68% of total publications. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the number of ethics-focused articles published over the period from 2002 to 2016.

Interestingly, spikes were observed in the number of ethics-focused articles published in 2003 and in 2009/2010 following notable industry events.² Following the passing of the Sarbanes-Oxley act in July 2002, there were five ethics-focused articles published in 2003, comprising 1.77% of total publications that year. Reflecting the scale of the impact that the passing of SOX had on the accounting

TABLE 1. Total number of articles and total number of ethics-focused articles published in the Journal of Accountancy annually from 2002 to 2016

		Article Type	
		All	Ethics-Focused
Year	2002	322	2
	2003	282	5
	2004	257	2
	2005	366	1
	2006	376	3
	2007	443	0
	2008	397	3
	2009	359	2
	2010	271	4
	2011	302	0
	2012	211	2
	2013	242	1
	2014	275	4
	2015	345	1
	2016	403	2
	Total	4851	32

profession at the time, the cover story for the February 2003 edition of the Journal of Accountancy was devoted to an article titled 'Ensuring Ethical Effectiveness' which discusses the recently passed SOX (Myers 2003). The article explains the rationale for the passing of SOX, and also discusses some of the requirements that publicly traded companies in the US have to comply with following the passing of the regulation. It further focuses on one particular requirement – the need for publicly traded companies to disclose whether they have adopted a code of ethics for their senior financial officers, and if not, why – and explores how a code of conduct could encourage more ethical behaviour. It also provides recommendations for how companies without codes of conduct could begin to develop one.

Also, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008/2009, there were 6 ethics-focused articles published in 2009/2010, comprising 0.95% of total publications



FIGURE 1. Number of ethics-focused articles published from 2002 to 2016

over those two year. As the financial crisis developed, one key take-away for many market participants was the critical role that ethics played in events leading to the crisis (Santoro & Strauss 2012; Weitzner & Darroch 2009). It is likely that the intense media attention on ethical issues following the crisis also played a role in the higher level of research interest in ethics in accounting in those years, particularly in exploring the role that ethics plays in business and accounting (Wayne 2009).

This is reflected in the variety of ethics-focused articles published in the Journal of Accountancy during those two years. While not specifically addressing the financial crisis, Leibowitz and Reinstein (2009) published an ethics-focused article which provides a guide for accountants in making decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas. Reflecting the increased interest in ethics-related issues in the profession at the time, another article highlights a survey which finds that an increasing proportion of college graduates say that they would not work for an organization that has committed various unethical acts (Journal of Accountancy 2009). Reflecting the desire of the accounting profession to learn more about the role of ethics in business and accounting, Bolt-Lee and Moody (2010) also published an article which highlights the recent academic ethics research that had been conducted in accounting and finance, and how it could have practical implications for the accounting profession.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

I also performed a detailed content analysis of the thirty-two ethics-focused articles published over the time period. As part of the content analysis, the articles are assigned to one of four thematic categories as discussed in the previous section: (1) code of conduct, (2) corporate culture, (3) ethical decision making, and (4) reputation management. Table 2 presents a summary of the number of ethics-focused articles assigned to each thematic category while Figure 2 presents the breakdown of

TABLE 2. Number and percentage of ethics-focused articles published across four research categories

	Number	Percentage
Code of Conduct	21	65.63%
Corporate Culture	5	15.63%
Ethical Decision Making	4	12.50%
Reputation Management	2	6.25%
Total	32	100.00%

the number of ethics-focused articles assigned to each thematic category by year.

The most prominent theme of research examines codes of conduct. A total of 21 out of 32 (65.63%) ethics-focused articles published over the fifteen-year period focus on codes of conduct. In the first five-year period, from 2002 to 2007, 12 out of 13 (92.3%) ethics-focused articles published relate to codes of conduct. Overall, an average of 2.4 articles relating to codes of conduct were published per year from 2002 to 2006. From 2007 onwards, there was a notable decrease in the number of articles relating to codes of conduct that were published. In the five years from 2007 to 2011, an average of 0.8 articles relating to codes of conduct were published per year while in the five years from 2012 to 2016, an average of 1.0 article was published per year. Overall, the majority of articles relating to codes of conduct focus on examining and interpreting codes of conduct that apply to professional accountants (such as AICPA's code of conduct). Codes of conduct are an important means of promoting ethical behaviour, and articles published in the Journal of Accountancy over the period often sought to facilitate the interpretation and application of the code by practitioners. For example, over the period under study, a variety of articles published in the journal focused on ethical issues covered by the AICPA's code of conduct which they examined in the form of quizzes (e.g. Goria 2014a; Raspante 2002), interpretations of the code (Journal of Accountancy 2006), and case

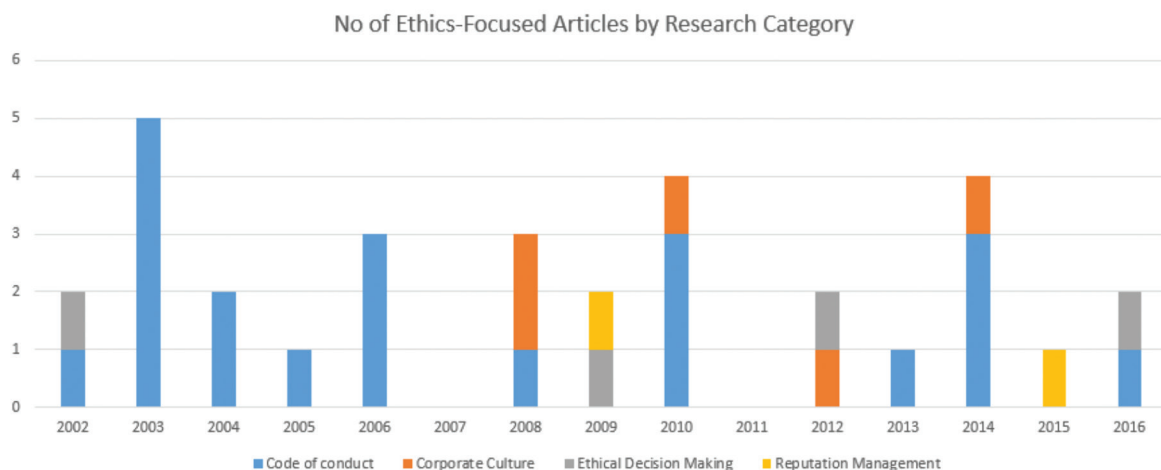


FIGURE 2. Number of ethics-focused articles published across four research categories from 2002 to 2016

studies (e.g. Goria 2014b). Research in the area of codes of conduct in the *Journal of Accountancy* has also compared different codes of conduct to examine how differences between codes could lead to differing ethical outcomes. For instance, Allen (2010) compares the International Federation of Accountants's (IFAC) Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (IFAC Code) with AICPA's code of conduct and examines the degree to which applying both these codes in similar situations may lead to differing (ethical) outcomes. In addition, the extent research in the journal has also focused on codes of conduct whenever changes or revisions have been proposed or introduced to existing codes. For example, Goria (2014a) published an article in the journal which examines how practitioners could apply and prepare for revisions that were being made to AICPA's code of conduct. A quiz was also published to help practitioners prepare for the revisions that were being made (Goria 2014a).

The category with the second largest number of articles is corporate culture, with a total of five (15.63%) articles published between 2008 and 2014. While no articles relating to corporate culture were published in the first five years from 2002 to 2006, an average of 0.6 and 0.4 corporate culture-related articles were published per year from 2007 to 2011 and from 2012 to 2016 respectively, suggesting that the importance of corporate culture in ethics grew in relevance over the period under study. The articles in this area focus mainly on examining how a firm's corporate culture can encourage/inculcate ethical behaviour/mind-sets among employees. In particular, Bolt-Lee, Wu and Zimmerman (2014) and Bolt-Lee and Moody (2010) examine the extent academic ethics research in accounting and finance, and discuss how corporate culture relates to ethics and how the findings in relevant studies can be applied in a practical context. At the same time, another stream of research in this area investigates the ethical culture that is dominant in firms, and sheds light on how an ethical culture can lead to practical benefits for these firms. For example, Hagel (2012) discusses the results of a survey which finds that although firms have generally taken steps to build an ethical corporate culture and that finance-related roles are now seen as having greater responsibility for ethical standards, many firms continue to lag behind in terms of applying policies and standards that can help establish a truly ethical culture. Another study (*Journal of Accountancy* 2008) reports the findings of a study which indicate that openness in leadership leads to a more ethical environment with a greater focus on values.

The category with the next largest number of articles is ethical decision making, with four (12.50%) articles published in 2002, 2009, 2012, and 2016 respectively. The articles in this area mainly discuss ethical considerations for practical decision making in the workplace. For example, Leibowitz and Reinstein (2009) highlight practical issues in ethical decision making and how accountants can use AICPA's code of professional conduct as a guide when faced with ethical dilemmas. Research in this area also focus on ethical decision making in areas of topical interest

to accountants. For instance, a recent article (*Journal of Accountancy* 2016a) discusses ethical issues in relation to big data which is an area of work that accountants are increasingly becoming involved with (e.g. Vasarhelyi, Kogan & Tuttle 2015).

Lastly, there were two articles (6.25%), published in 2009 and 2015, that relate to reputation management in ethics. Articles in this category mainly examine how a reputation for being ethical can provide benefits by improving a firm's or a manager's overall reputation. For example, Hagel (2015) discusses the importance of business ethics and compliance in promoting transparency in the workplace and notes that safeguarding reputation is the primary motivation when companies seek to establish and embed ethical standards. Consistent with this, another study (*Journal of Accountancy* 2009) reports the results of a survey which finds that the ethics of a corporation plays a major role in the choice of college graduates seeking a job.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I examined the ethics-focused research published in the *Journal of Accountancy* over the fifteen-year period from 2002 to 2016. I found that overall, 32 out of 4,851 (0.66%) articles published in the journal over the period were ethics-focused articles. I further categorized each of the 32 ethics-focused articles into one of four categories, each corresponding to a key area of ethics research. I found that ethics-focused articles were most frequently published in the area of codes of conduct, followed by corporate culture, ethical decision making, and then reputation management.

The findings in my study provides key insights into the areas of focus and research, in the area of ethics that have been published in the *Journal of Accountancy*. Specifically, it provides insights into how ethics research has been incorporated into the area of accounting, particularly from a practice perspective. It also highlights four key areas of ethics research in accounting, and helps identify areas of future research.

My study makes important contributions to academic research. By being the first to examine ethics research in accounting in the *Journal of Accountancy* from 2002 to 2016, it provides insights into the overall proportion of ethics-focused articles that has been published in the journal and assesses the progress/evolution of ethics research over a fifteen-year period where significant events impacting the industry occurred. From a broader perspective, the findings in my study also add to the business ethics literature by highlighting significant themes in ethics that accounting researchers have focused on.

My study also makes important contributions to practice. In particular, by focusing my analysis on the *Journal of Accountancy*, which is a leading professional journal that is widely read by professional accountants, my findings provide insights into what researchers and editors at the journal feel are important areas that impact practitioners in the accounting profession.

One limitation of my study relates to the content limitation that comes from only examining articles published in the *Journal of Accountancy*. While the *Journal of Accountancy* is widely considered to be the top professional journal in the profession, it is inevitably limited in its scope of coverage given the number and range of accounting journals that publish ethics related research in accounting. Another limitation relates to the methodology employed in determining the four categories of ethics research used in the study. Given the lack of research in this area (Robertson 2008), it is hoped that the list of topics developed for this paper forms the basis for future research in this area.

Another limitation related to how many ethical issues are local (rather than global) in nature (Hartman et al. 2015). The understanding of many ethical issues may be shaped by local culture and contexts. In this respect, the focus and implications of many ethics-related events that have occurred in the last fifteen years may have been different when viewed through the lens of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) which publishes the *Journal of Accountancy* and other publications published by equivalent bodies in the Asian region such as the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) and the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants (ISCA).

The findings from my study also suggest interesting areas for further research. For instance, I examine ethics-related articles published in the *Journal of Accountancy* which is focused on ethics-related issues from the perspective of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). In addition, my study examines articles published in the fifteen-year period from 2002 to 2016. Future studies could extend my findings by examining articles published prior to 2002 and investigating how articles published in an earlier period differ (or are similar) to those published from 2002 to 2016.

Given the local nature of ethics related issues, another interesting area for future research could focus on examining ethics-related articles published by equivalent Asia-focused journals published by the MIA and ISCA.

NOTES

- ¹ Only document types categorized as “articles” were downloaded
- ² A third spike, in 2014, where four ethics-focused articles were published, was substantially due to the release of the revised AICPA Code of Professional Conduct that year. I do not discuss the spike in ethics-focused articles published in 2014 because they relate to a change made by a professional body rather than to a significant industry event.

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