

**Importance and Relevance of Media in the Present-Day Scenario : An
Ethical Perception**

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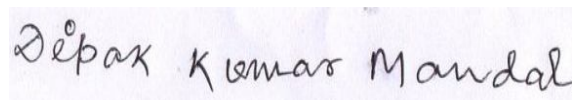
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Abstract: Media is regarded as one of the strongest pillars of democracy because it has outstanding contributions and vital roles in this modern civilization and therefore I think that strong ethical basis must be required in every sphere of social, economic and political aspect of media and without it everything will be chaotic and dangerous. In this modern age of communication, media either print or electronic has tremendous impact on its readers and viewers of our society. But unfortunately, sometime it exercises so many unethical practices and it forgets the sole purpose of service for the welfare of the people. The main problem of our media is to refuse moral values and refusal of moral values is the main source of corruption and even due to this lack of moral values various incidents of corruptions are found, on a large scale, among the section of politicians, public servants, judiciary and even defence services. So the big problem of mass media is the lack of the sense of moral values and another problem of mass media especially electronic media is the dominance of utilization and eroticism.

Keywords: moral value, eroticism, Doordarshan, mass media, practical ethics, Social network.

Aims and objectives: The aim of this paper is to show that the impact of media on its readers and viewers and to find out different incidents where the media violates the established ethical principles and journalistic norms. The paper also searches for the ethical values, opportunities and continuous challenges of mass media and also understands the influence of ethics on Indian news media in particular.

Introduction: In the modern age of communication, media plays a very important role in our daily lives because whatever information we get, is conveyed to us by the media and therefore it has become very powerful mode of communication. But media has to be ethical; media should be guided by some ethical norms and media can never function properly and smoothly without following a code of conduct. So it is quite clear that some moral, ethical rules must be there which can regulate each and every aspect of media – print as well as electronic media of the country. Media ethics is a branch of practical ethics which is being emerged for last few years and as the influence, impact and existence of media have become widespread its moral outlook adherence to ethical rules have become important issue.¹ And it deals with the specific ethical principles and moral standards of all forms of media including print, broadcast, film, theatre, advertising and internet. The last two decades have witnessed a rapid development of traditional media into new media that contains digital, computerised and networked information. We are aware that human civilization has witnessed so many changes in the world from the early age of discovery of fire. Now we are living in the digital age and to understand the digital age, we must have to understand the process of communication.² We know that there are so many communication systems in which people can communicate and each communication system evolves a number of people in a specific way.

Discussion of subjectmatter: Now the question: what ethics is? The word ‘ethics’ is not a modern term because it has been used by the people especially by the Greek philosopher in some 2500 years ago. So the word ‘ethics’ is derived from the Greek word ‘ethos’ which means ‘custom’ or ‘character.’ So ethics can be defined as the science of human conduct or behaviour and it is a study of good and bad, right and wrong and it refers to vicious or virtuous actions of individual. Ethics not only describes principles and standards by which we judge

individual action to be right or wrong, but also concerns itself with justification of those principles and standards. So ethics is an important subject because it allows us to function as human beings. Ethics help us to act responsibly and it also allows us to implement our divergent values in a variegated environment. Besides that ethics not only a theoretical study, rather it is an application of moral arguments to justify human choices and actions.³ So practical ethics is a subject which highlights the practical consequences of the views about the nature of life and human thoughts. Practical ethics is not just a matter of subjective opinion and its proposals are not specific to particular individuals but apply equally to all. In this connection one important point of Gandhiji is very relevant because he would regard that morality is good for all, the rich and the poor, young and old and it should be sought for his own sake as an end in itself. Without morality, society cannot just survive and for Gandhiji morality and truth was something as to the passionate love of our lover for his beloved.⁴ Ethics is the branch of philosophy that evolves what is right and what is wrong, impartial, fair, just and responsible. Ethics therefore, is concerned not only with what should we do or how to judge human practices as right and wrong; but is also concerned with what we should do to change certain morally objectionable social practices towards creating a better society or a better world.

The Role of Media: The role of media in the history of freedom struggle of India was remarkable because media was the powerful weapon of freedom fighters. The great leaders of the nationalist movements expressed their views, motivated the people and mobilized support for the various movements through their writings in the press and published their own newspapers for the people. So many great leaders of the nationalist movement like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Aurobindo Ghosh, Balgangadhar Tilak and other dignitaries depended on newspaper for expressing nationalist views and sentiments.⁵ So the mass media at that time which became not only a weapon of the Indian freedom struggle but also identified itself with the independence movement of the nation.

The television was another important emerging mass media and the only available network was Doordarshan which was controlled by the Government and the ruling party decided its contents and programmes. The anti government attitude and expression become more frequent and the news paper started to lookout for alternative voices and news sources forcing on various issues like developmental work of society, empowerment and concentrate on investigative journalism. The press circulated news and findings on the issues which were controversial and even secrete news but which had important social consequences. So there was not so change of status of media still under the supervision of the government but the emergence of the satellite television under private ownership somewhat revolutionized television satisfied viewership expectations. The audio-visual impact of media along with penetrative news, proximity to issues transmitted through live television and chances of instant interaction talk show and live phone calls broadcast. The press also was not to be left behind in this competition and it started on line editions of their printed version.⁶ So the two most acceptable traditional mass media – the press and the television outdo themselves to ensure visibility, accessibility and newness to overwhelm their readers and audience.

The two mass media also started to use internet as news source. In the initial stage, the internet was a news source for the other mass media and gradually it became a useful news source for the masses themselves thereby reducing the importance of the traditional mass media. The reason of usefulness of the internet is become a source of low-cost information and the internet is useful way to obtain information that cannot be obtained from traditional sources. The online news papers gave the traditional media an opportunity to avoid some of the challenges through its flexibility and easy availability for getting information but unfortunately they have changed their approach to news presentation and become more desperate sometimes giving up ethical values and moral standard.⁷

Necessity of ethics in the field of media: Now the central question is, why do we need ethics in the field of media? In the present world media is undoubtedly an important medium while in the ancient time it was not so and most people lived without it. The purpose of the media is to make us aware of the outside world. In the modern civilization it is necessary even the people of the remote areas feel the necessity of it. However, the media does not play a satisfactory role. Depending on the genetic code and environment, different people have different character, integrity and behaviour. Modern civilization is a collective presentation and contribution of all these diverse personalities. This is of course essential for growth in different direction. Mere growth is not enough. It should be healthy, perfect and have to be acceptable by all. Harmful growth is growth too but it is not desirable. Herein lays the importance of ethics. As blood reaches in all the cells of our body for nourishment, growth and development, media like blood reaches to all the segment of the society and have tremendous impact over them. Ethics acts as a controller; it questions the place of any untoward incident that is likely to produce ill effect in the media. Ethics can be compared with the Pituitary gland, a master gland of human body. Just as organs are controlled by hormones, similarly organizations are controlled by ethics.⁸ Medical profession is controlled by medical ethics, marketing division is controlled by business ethics and likewise media is controlled by media ethics.

Journalism is a social practice. Different media of mass communication reach out to large number of people. Some among them are highly educated while others are illiterate, some are rich while others are poor, i.e. there are different kinds of people and all of them are influenced by the media. As people need food, shelter and health care for their physical survival, they need communication for their social welfare. Apart from the reasons discussed so far, there is another very important reason why ethics is needed in the field of media because media also deals with certain sensitive issues like sexual crime, violence, social and religious conflicts, communal tensions and riots, drug abuse, terrorism, political conflicts, social crisis, war and so on. So the main function of the media is sourcing, reporting and disseminating information which is aimed for the public. Journalists have to use the appropriate, proper and relevant language while reporting news, explaining facts or analyzing information due to avoid controversy.⁹

The media plays a vital role in disseminating information to the public. The market driven journalism, the media indulge in sensationalism to maximise profits and commercialism is said to be the motive for such behaviour. Ethics of journalism includes principles of ethics which are most widely known to the journalists as

their professional code of ethics.¹⁰ Some of the most important principles are honesty, truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness. Accuracy should be one of the important needs of any news report. The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time. Freedom of the press belongs to the people. It must be defended against encroachment or assault from any quarter or public. Journalists must be constantly alert to see that the public's business is conducted in public and they must be vigilant against all who would exploit the press for selfish purposes. Every effort must be made to assure that the news content is accurate, free from bias and the editorials, analytical articles and commentaries should be held to the same standards of accuracy with respect to facts as news reports. Significant errors of fact as well as errors of omission should be corrected promptly and prominently. Journalists should respect the rights of people involved in the news, observe the common standards of decency and stand accountable to the public for the fairness and accuracy of their news reports.¹¹

There are two main classical ethical theories which are frequently employed to determine correct media behaviour such as Kantian theory (deontology) and Consequential theory (teleology):

Kantian Theory: Kant's theory of ethics is regarded as deontology for several reasons. Deontology focuses on a person's duty as a means to determine appropriate action. According to Kant it was the intentions behind an action that rendered it ethical or unethical. He argued that the only right intention was the intention to act out of duty. The duty is that which can be said to be good in all situations. He believed that there was only one virtue which was good without qualification that is goodwill. Actions motivated by good will are done out of respect for moral law and out of duty. For Kant the consequences of an action cannot be used to determine that the person has the goodwill. Good consequences can arise by accident from an action that is motivated by a desire to cause harm and bad consequence can arise from an action that is well motivated. So he claims that a person has goodwill when he acts out of respect for the moral law. An action is considered to be morally good if it is done solely out of duty.¹² An action even if it is considered a duty and is right, is not regarded as morally good if it is done from self interest or from a direct impulse of sympathy or generosity. Here an action done from natural sympathy may be right and praiseworthy but it has no moral worth. So the action done solely out of duty has distinctively moral worth. For example, helping other is obviously good and praiseworthy and this action will be morally good if it is done out of a sense of duty and not out of sympathy.

The categorical imperative is the fundamental principle of ethics which determines the morality or immorality of actions including media activities. The three formulations of the principle of categorical imperative are as (i) act only on that maxim which you will to become a universal law (ii) always treat people as an end in themselves and not just a means (iii) act as if you were a lawmaker in the kingdom of ends. All these three formulations of the categorical imperative, collectively and distributively, have important bearing on media action and hence on media ethics. The most obvious impact issues from the first formulations. A person's action including media action must be based on that maxim which they can will as a universal law.¹³ Kant's categorical

imperative is a very important concept for the media. So media should act out of duty not from immediate inclination or self interest and it is a primary duty of journalists to provide accurate and impartial news.

Consequential Theory: Kantian model of media ethics is mainly concerned with the rightness and wrongness of media actions themselves but the consequential theory is primarily concerned with the purpose and consequences of such action according to this theory, actions themselves do not have any inherent value but can be appraised in hindsight by virtue of their consequences. Therefore all actions should be thoroughly considered in terms of their possible outcomes before being executed. The outcome of an action can be evaluated from two perspectives such as ethical egoism and ethical altruism. One of the most popular theories of consequentialist is Utilitarianism and the approach of this theory is applicable to the media as it considers the well being of society at large. Mill who developed the ideas of Bentham, argued that, an action should have positive consequences for as many people as possible.¹⁴ The consequentialist theories focus only on the outcome or end of an action. So one should invest enough time in considering all the possible outcomes of certain action to determine whether the overall good is greater than the negative consequence. The theory is certainly applied in decision making by the journalists.

Estimation: Violation of Ethical Principles by the Media

We know that the distinctive features of news writing are accuracy, correctness, impartiality, objectivity and public accountability. Yet these components of journalism have come under serious threats recently because Journalists who abuse the power of their professional role for selfish motives and unworthy purposes. The news organizations and the reporters and broadcasters overlook and sometimes disregard the code of ethics in the acquisition of newsworthy information and its subsequent dissemination to the public because there can be of variety of reasons like evoking sensationalism, increasing readership and viewership, pressure from proprietors, compulsion from powerful and useful news sources.¹⁵

Most journalistic code of ethics consists of the principles of limitation of harm. These involves the withholding of certain details from news reports like the name of minor children, crime victims or information not relevant to particular news reports, the release of which might harm someone's reputation or impede the function of the administration. The news is in the circulation in the internet too and the television channels and news papers use the technique of reconstruction of the crime scene and incident to highlight hype and interest of the audience and readers to sensationalize the news emerged from the need to remain relevant crucial in the public domain. The news regarding interest to the public should be carefully chosen and judiciously presented so that it does not intrude upon the privacy of subjects or harm their reputation.¹⁶ Mass media, being easily available and highly accessible, need to be vigilant and distinguish clearly between what and how much the common public needs to know.

The deviation from ethical principles by the media is more prominent in the example of the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai in 2008. The coverage of the 26/11 terror attacks by the television channels in India came under severe criticism for turning a blind eye to the safety of the hostages. While all the other attack points were

freed from terrorists by 28th morning, the Taj Hotel remained under control of the terrorists. The television coverage helped the terrorists by showing everything in their live coverage from the vantage point of the rescuers to the possible strategies and measures to be adopted by the National Security Guards and therefore the rescue process was delayed and hampered. The sensational live coverage of a rescue mission assisted viewership which perhaps forced the news channels to plan their telecast. The instances clearly show that the media violate ethical norms.

One more serious allegation raises against the media both press and television for conducting ‘Sting’ operation. The sting operation is a deceptive operation designed to catch a person committing a crime. A typical sting will have a law-enforcement officer or cooperative member of the public play a role as criminal partner or potential victim and go along with a suspect’s action to gather evidence of the suspect’s wrongdoing. The sting operation exposes corruption in the society as against traditional investigative reporting techniques found few takers. Though the sting operation exposes amazing informations that benefit the society because of its exposure of its truth, critics have arisen ethical questions regarding the use of the sting tactics. The sting operation can be used by the media to expose truth but it is attached with falsehood and bias and provides no scope to the victim to defend himself under the circumstances.

‘Tehelka’ is another important scandalous issue exposed in 2001. ‘Tehelka’ means sensation; a weekly newspaper exposed a video footage of top officials and politicians receiving bribes. The revelations created quite a stir regarding the ethical issues associated with the exposure. The Tehelka journalists were involved in false impersonation, paid bribes to the victims on false pretext and were guilty of other ethical contravention too. Except the Tehelka operation, several sting operations involving film personalities, cricket players in particular, politicians and government officials were undertaken the activities failed to have the desired effect. So it can be said that traditional investigative journalism cannot be replaced by sting operations and such operation may serve the cause for the time being. To build up its credibility and ensure its freedom under democratic system, the media will have to turn to investigative reporting.¹⁷ The view of new media has changed tremendously in terms of content, style and approach. The journalism has extended its boundaries by including the medium of broadcasting, telecasting and news media. Now in the age of internet, the journalism has lost the physical boundaries of transmission of news. The free flow of information and the competition among the owners of various media has shown careless haste in sole criteria of making news. Nowadays sensationalization of news has become the measure of success in the journalistic field.¹⁸ To compete with the visually powerful media, the print media also has lost all the holds and it had been imposing upon itself by self regulation.

Language is a tool of communication for journalist and use of language in news reports plays an important role in informing the public about an event. Though a journalist does not witness an event at time, he or she tries to construct it with the help of information given by a second party. News is a presentation of reality that happens in the environment and the language facilitates the projection of reality. In journalism, use of value free words is to be practiced to be very objective in reporting an event without any bias.¹⁹ Sometime the contents of newspapers are not fact about the world, but very general sense ideas thus the analysis of media can assess the ideological practices of journalists and their representation through language.

Journalism has become the industry in the modern days and commercialization of the press has been increasingly found in every aspect. Undoubtedly media outlets of this era are guided, instructed and sadly controlled by the markets; hence the sole purpose of journalism has shifted from service of society to profit making. The chief reason of this trend is commercialization of the press on account of the entry of businessman into the profession of journalism.²⁰

Gandhiji advocated peace as an important news value for journalists peace as a news value is increasingly becoming relevant in the 21st century. The might personality in the 20th century, Gandhiji showed to the world that nonviolence is a conscious attempt to detach oneself from violence inspite of having strength and ability the need of practicing non violence is very much relevant today.²¹ Another important news value is development always relevant in the country. Developmental reporting has not gained much currency among Indian newspapers. Hence vital issues such as primary education, population control, the state urban decay power crisis etc. do not much space in Indian media. Further reporting on rural development does not receive much importance in the press.²² Rural stories rarely get front page coverage unless they are disastrous event such as starvation death, flood famine or a policy pronouncement.

Nowaday the regional media is gaining popularity because of focus on development issue. Truth, objectivity and focus on developmental issues becoming a compulsion for the media organizations. More importantly government is also planning for the advertisement policy and the recent digitalization will certainly help in reviving the dependency on advertisement by the media organizations. Although the present day media which is largely market driven and tapped in the hands of corporate world and consumerism, needs to follow the basic ethical practices.²³ In a country like India which is plagued with problems like illiteracy, lack of health care facilities, growth of population, corruption and the apathy of government officials etc. the role of the press in development is desirable. It is the need of the hour to realize that media has very constructive and positive role to play and the media should be more objective, accountable and mass oriented.

Today many media outlets are run and governed by the politicians and this trend has become a major threat to media ethics and the sources viewed that more than one third of news channels and sixty percent of cable distribution system are owned by the politicians or political affiliated builders and they are influencing and funding several elections.²⁴ So the national and regional media are being controlled by the big company followed by their crony politicians and business group and they are also increasing their stakes in media. So the sole purpose of journalism has become profit making and journalism as service to society has been replaced by journalism aimed at profit and affluence for media promoters and media workers.²⁵ Many of the directors of media companies represent some of the biggest advertisers and the exercise an influence on media content. The Anil Ambani headed Reliance Capital has invested in broadcasting network and which operates many networks. Reliance industries acquired indirect control over the india's topmost media houses network 18 through a multi layered deal. Another major branded television network today is Aditya Birla Group which is in the process of selling its stake. They are not only broadcasting content of their interest through their channels but also able to control the broadcast of other channels.

Evidently the Indian media is known for its large reporting of political news, scandal and sensationalism. Political news is given a major place in all forms of media. If we analyse today's print media one can clearly find that political news ranked the maximum in the print media industry and regional newspapers. News stories on crime and moral problems also get significant interest on the front page. Stories on theft, robbery, cheating and law and order problems appear more regularly on the front page. It can be said that present day media, which seek to be popular by trying to be sensational, are practicing the cult of personality in the crudest possible form. During the period of independence, the press was an effective medium in the hands of nationalists as well as social reformers. They exposed social evils like casteism, child marriage, ban of remarriage of widows, social, legal and other inequalities for which women were subjected.

Global impact of News Media: Social networking sites, video sharing sites, twitter, blog etc. have evolved as a result of new media technologies. Millions of people around the globe, through social networking, are recently building online local regional and global communities to communicate their shared interests and activities, disseminate information, and interact through a variety of web-based tools. The use of new media and social networks as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Blog etc. have implications for society, culture, politics etc. those have encouraged researchers to investigate a variety of related issues such as social identity, misuse of cyberspace, social status and access to information. But there have been numerous incidents of misconduct of new media that have led to negative and harmful situations, such as political deception, libel and breach of privacy, cyber crime etc. now-a-days particularly in India, negative reporting gained much momentum and priority than positive one. Affection, inherent, human values, relationships, love, honesty and purity and all such intricate delicacies of human life are buried by the media for their own better circulation and benefit without upholding the eternal ethical values of our human life and society.

Challenges: In the present world, media is undoubtedly an important part of human lives. In the modern civilization, media is needed too much and without it, and without function of it, even the people of the remote area will become just useless. We are aware that the traditional mass media like radio, television etc. faces huge challenges when confronted with the potentialities of the new media because the interactive and social mode of operation, instant feedback, close proximity between sender and receiver, extreme flexibility and simplicity of medium and huge accessibility etc. give the new media great advantage over the traditional media.

I think that the media must have always a high moral ground in the dissemination of news. Journalists have to act independently not only for the sake of maintaining ethical standards but for enthusiastically guarding their freedom and their constitutional rights. Journalists should play everywhere a vital role in providing the public with knowledge and understanding. They must remain sensitive to issues such as fairness, accountability and accuracy. Reporters continuously need to ask themselves ethical questions throughout different stages of their investigations and be ready to justify their decisions to editors and the public.

Conclusion: it can be concluded that the presence of the powerful new media creates a challenge of greater proportion to the traditional mass media. The several advantages of the new media along with the advances in

communication and information technology give it a thrust which the traditional media cannot hope to compete. The journalistic code of ethics calling on accuracy of facts, minimizing harm to sources and subjects resolved to act independently and freely whatever the circumstances and determination to remain transparent. The high standard of Indian journalism in the past and the acceptability and availability of the mass media at present would ensure the existence of ethical principles in the Indian news media. Currently volumes of ethical values, rules, norms and their implication for the society are available as ready reckoners. Merely books, lectures in the university class rooms and seminars are not enough to reach the goal. It must be applicable and workable. Without following and adherence to the norms by all of us including the media, the true essence of ethics will never be achieved. All media personnel must take oath with good intention to follow the moral norms and then only its effect can be seen.

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