



NEWSLETTER

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Journalism Ethics

An inspiration for free expression and media literacy



The Challenges of Journalism in the Age of Social Media

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Today the art and craft of journalism are facing numerous challenges. Thanks to the ubiquity of social media and the manner in which smart-phones can become devices for content creation in the hands of ordinary citizens, news and rich-content (photos, videos, voice-clips and narrations) are generated – and consumed - at prodigious rates. No longer does one have to be an accredited reporter or a trained journalist to give eager consumers of information – around the world – a blow-by-blow account of whatever is happening in even the remotest part of the globe. Anyone who has a smart-phone is today's journalist-reporter.

This proliferation of content has created its own share of ethical issues. Television channels and even Web-based channels of content are always in a race to attract “eyeballs” and viewership. When the information being presented is identical, giving the content a “spin” or tweaking the narrative to present a “preferred angle” suddenly becomes common-place. Even citizen-reporters then start to present information to channels - willing to air their content – in ways that conforms to the preferred narratives of the channel.

This has given rise to the phenomenon of “fake news” or what is also termed, “Alt (erantate) news”. Journalists, reporters and content producers – all of whom are in a rush to guzzle and then deliver content - create terabytes of information that are based on biased, unverified,

false or twisted reporting that suit a particular narrative. Not only that, even political leaders, opinion makers, and Corporate honchos, all use social media to present their perspectives. Even they can present information that is not necessarily 100% truthful, and may incorporate their biases, and opinions – all of which can be mistaken for “facts”. This situation has created a wide credibility-gulf between those who report information (Channels, and even the print media) and the audiences they serve. Today people just do not trust “news sources” enough to believe what is being shared. Or they believe what is being shared so vigorously, that they are often provoked into action and violence.

Short, “doctored” or blatantly false video-clips posted on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter have been responsible for creating social unrest and law and order problems in parts of the world, including in India. Fanatical and driven militant organizations – such as Daesh (ISIS) - have in fact used social media far more effectively than even legitimate governments. Even before the law enforcement agencies are able to put down the provocative posts or fake-news and restore order, considerable damage is done, and creates enduring fault-lines in society. Bringing out the truth of any situation for the benefit of their audiences therefore, is now an ethical requirement, which the formal news media need to consciously uphold.

Principles of Journalism for Critical Thinking in Society

Truth and accuracy: Fact-based communications

Humanity: Avoid malice and do no harm

Accountability: Transparency and self-correction

Journalists associated with reputed media houses have the added responsibility towards society of providing information in a truthful, objective and a balanced manner whilst respecting the importance of confidentiality of issues related to National security. This is essential when social media and digital channels are overflowing with good content, liberally mixed with spurious and fake information as well.

In a country like India while the freedom of the formal media is constitutionally enshrined in the Constitution, the upholding of that freedom by journalists is dependent on several factors. For instance, the viewpoint and preferences of the media proprietor, the resources available for reporting an event or incident, and the perspectives of the reporter would all play a role in the manner in which a situation is reported. If the truth is willfully twisted, reputed journalists reduce themselves to the level of smart-phone carrying, unregulated “citizen journalists” whose only aim seems to be to shock and awe their audiences with provocative content.



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In liberal democracies, the Fourth Estate plays a crucial public role in ensuring the accountability of elected politicians, the probity of officials and the overall transparency of the systems of governance.



being pursued. Mass media are an essential pillar of free societies. In fact if the freedom and the integrity of the media disappear, so would the essential freedom of expression of all those who are adversely impacted by the misuse of authority.

Growing competition within the press and from the new digital media has introduced a drive towards one-upmanship, and the cutting of deals with powerful political elites. Higher level manipulation of news, analyses and of public matters – done so as to suit the financial and political interests of the channel/content providers is now becoming common. Prejudice and propaganda – and other biases - are camouflaged as professional journalism, and the giving of a newer “unbiased” perspective! The downgrading and devaluing of editorial functions as well as creeping corruption are deeply worrying tendencies. In the digital age, journalists need to have and demonstrate that they possess a moral and ethical backbone, and journalism needs to be fearless and unaffected by any external pressures. As Mohandas K Gandhi said, “A person who follows the path of dharma does not feel helpless.” (Cf. Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.56: P-183).

http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/9427/6/06_chapter%203.pdf

The high standards of Indian journalism coupled with self-regulation by content producers who rely on the widespread acceptability and availability of digital mass media alone would ensure the existence of ethical principles in Indian and global news media.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “The sole aim of journalism should be service. The press is a great power; but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges the whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled [unregulated] pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than from want of control. It can be profitable only when [control is] exercised from within”.

<http://presscouncil.nic.in/OldWebsite/speechpdf/Media%20Ethics%20at%20IIMC,%20Dhenkanal.pdf>

NEWS AND EVENTS

□ FRNV organized three workshops for teachers in June, 2017 in three different schools of Delhi. These workshops were conducted by Dr. Seema Pawar, Project Director – VBE. The objective of this workshop was to introduce FRNV's Values-Based Education System to the teachers and help them understand the background of the VBES and how and why it was developed.

The participants experienced active learning during the workshop sessions with learning materials (worksheets and activities) that can readily be implemented in their schools. About 100 teachers participated in these four workshops.



A group activity was also organized in which teachers were asked to select few lessons from the syllabus and were encouraged to identify values from each lesson and design activities/story/slogan/drawing to imbibe values in their teaching content. The School Principal was encouraged that the day should begin by introducing values in the morning assemblies.

From the epistemic position of FRNV, this was a rewarding activity for it facilitated our close involvement with the school and interaction with teachers. Our key prerogative is to help the schools to mold their courses and class structures in a way that the ethos of value based living can be upheld.



□ The CEO of FRNV, Ms. Anupama Jha, has moved on to other opportunities, after serving the Foundation for two years. "FRNV thanks her for her services and wishes her well for her future endeavours."

Upcoming Events

□ **FRNV's Kochi chapter of Kerala** is going to be inaugurated on **August 26, 2017** at 5:30 pm, at IMA House, behind Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium, Kochi.

This chapter will focus on many regional needs like:

1. Value-based Education
2. Solid Waste Management for Kochi
3. Effective Drainage system for Kochi
4. Police Reforms
5. Good Urban Governance

□ The **9th Annual General Meeting of the Foundation for Restoration of National Values [The Society]** will be held on Monday, the **28th of August 2017**, at 4.00 p.m. at the Registered Office of the Society at M-75, Greater Kailash Part I, New Delhi 110048.

Dear Readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on deep-rooted values that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shilpi@valuefoundation.in.