

Media Ethics – A Sensitive Social Responsibility

Prof. Dr. Khalid M. Iraqi

Abstract

A responsible media focuses on developing public trust and makes all efforts to maintain this confidence through professional integrity of journalists. What media shows and disseminates through its professional performance reflects the quality of media ethics and professional education acquired by the journalist community. The particular law and order situation in Pakistan during the past nearly one and half a decade has had a very deep influence on the life of the people of Pakistan. The role of media has been very active in penetrating this influence throughout the society. Considering the sensitivity of the terrorist activities during the past several years in Pakistan, it may be claimed with certainty that ethics has been a serious point lacking in the role of media. The life of a common citizen is affected by the media activity. This fact intensifies the significance of strict observance of ethics in the professional performance and responsibilities of media in Pakistan. Education can transform any sphere of

human life and human society. Likewise, education places a strong impression on media, suggest a balance between journalism and media industry, society in general as well as research activities for academic. The author will apply the qualitative method to explore into the issue and offer conclusion established on the basis of this method.

Key Words: Media ethics, Social responsibility, Education, Social values.

Introduction

As a matter of principle, journalism should be free to keep a society aware of the on-goings in all spheres of life. However, this freedom is conditional with certain responsibilities. In Pakistan during the past several years (as a repercussion of the 9/11 incident), brutal news with even more graphic pictures and videos have been broadcasted for entire population of the country to watch. This exercise may be supportive towards developing human compassion among those who are grown up and may have reasonable conception about human values, but more possibly it may have been harmful for young children whose minds are usually vulnerable to such influences. The media has turned into a dynamic source of change in the societies all over the world and hence it is impossible to rule out the implications of the impressions media activities place on the minds of the viewers, especially those who have no or less experience of life – the youth. Entertainment is no doubt an important ingredient of the media products and equally significant are news and similar sources of information and education for the viewers. In organizational behavior, ethics are important. This importance cannot be ignored in the case of media performance which is largely associated to media ethics education. Being a media professional with media ethics education is more vital. Since education of mass media or

mass communication is highly valuable in the media world, inclusion of media ethics in media education is essential to safeguard the social and moral values in the society. This paper is authored keeping the particular situation of Pakistan, a country engaged in years-long struggle to combat terrorism to defeat this curse from its society.

Basic Assumptions

- There is substantial need of media ethics education among the media professionals.
- Exercise of the media ethics education is found lacking in electronic media activity.
- Changing conditions require revision and/or improvement of media ethics education.

Research Method

This paper will attempt to review the literature relating to the subject, and based on the support of the views and principles mentioned in this literature, the qualitative method of research will be applied on this brief study.

Literature Review

Media has got a deep influence on our life in the present times. This influence has overwhelmed our society by different forms of

media including the internet, print, radio, television and film along with new modes of communication like video-conferencing. We can realize today that without the help of media it is very difficult to understand the social, economic and political issues of our society and the world societies around us. Media influences not only any particular segment of a society but its impact takes into its fold multifarious areas of a society including industries, products, audiences rather the social world when viewed in larger perspective (Croteau, 2014). Knowledge and skills other than media publishing and broadcasting are also significant. It's very important and should not be ignored because education is not solely meant to fulfill the market needs. The focus should be to strike a balance between journalism and media industry, society in general as well as research activities for academia (Wicklein, 1994, Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Phillips & Bentz, 1994, Hamlett, 1994). Ethics in media education are considered a serious concern in the developed world as well in rest of the world for several years. Scholars conduct appropriate researchers on this issue to resolve the consequences this issue brings forth. According to Daniel (1990), Smyth & Davies (1990) and Henningham (1994) credibility of media relies on the education of journalism because the subjects of media education are important for the journalism students in understanding the culture, law and ethics as well as the whole social system.

Ethics refers as to how one should act (Peck & Reel, 2013). This is a simple but a very important definition for ethics, and this definition may be equally good for media. The issue of media ethics has turned into a big issue although this issue, according to Henry Watterson, existed even in the nineteenth century (Peck & Reel, 2013). It is difficult to go by book in the observance of media ethics, however, it was suggested by Aristotle several centuries ago that extremes are to be avoided (Peck and Reel, 2013). There certainly appears difference about media ethics. The story of two young boys of England who were involved in stealing from stores and then in a brutal murder of a two-year boy reveals two different standards of media ethics in publicizing news about the two boys (Christian, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel & Woods Jr., 2012). The British media ethics exhibited a restricted reaction about the boys while the American media ethics focused on relatively open publicity of the boys. The British laws forbade media from publicizing names, residences and photographs of the two boys whereas the media outside Britain was not restricted by the British laws. Ethics are based on values which motivate human actions, however, values have different versions in different societies. From the above example of the case of the British boys it may be reasonable to say that both the English and the American laws about media have values, but they view values with different approach. Braun (1999) notes that various scholars have realized

the need for education and training of media ethics among students at college and higher levels of education.

Discussion

It is therefore essential to analyze the influence of media without being irrational about the colors and brightness that glazes eyes and even minds of common viewers. As for Pakistan, television is a strong medium of information and entertainment of people. Television therefore largely influences the minds of its viewers. A number of channels offer a variety of genres like general information, current affairs of a country, entertainment, education, health and several other areas of knowledge. Large businesses prosper tremendously by the use of the media which plays a big role in the success of the businesses by placing state-of-the-art advertisements and modes of publicity for the sale of their products. In this scenario, however, one feels a significant lack of consideration of ethics in the performance of media. This in the opinion of this author is directly linked with the want of media ethics education amongst the media personnel. Most recently there was a suicide blast at a shrine near Hub, in the province of Baluchistan, some fifty kilometers from Karachi in the evening of Saturday in the second week of November. Nearly 65 people lost their lives in this brutal incident and several others were injured. This news was widely covered and broadcast on television and social media. A few days after the incident, one of the media

channels succeeded in getting a video recorded by someone on a mobile phone. This video was displayed on television news several times in which immediately after the blast, painful screams of people could be heard. These screams were repeatedly played on the television. The author considers it a point of serious consideration as to what was the logic behind giving the viewers the opportunity to listen to those helpless screams. What positive message or productive aspect did this play of screams contain? Similarly, rape cases, especially of some known females are afforded repeated and focused coverage on television. One can without much effort smell a tone of interest or sensation instead of the worry, threat, warning or alertness supposed to be expressed in such news. Very recently, the murders of a female stage artist and another female political worker were given more than adequate coverage. Reporting of crimes is fine but when viewers feel that sensational incidents are highlighted like publicity of some product, there seems a notable lack of media ethics education. The author understands that these screams must have caused increased grief to the relatives of the victims. This media act certainly reflects a questionable facet of serious media ethics.

It is conveniently observable that media serves as a strong source of public opinion and setting the trends of a society through change supported by media activities. The cell phone has brought along with it a significant change in the society. This change is fast and

remarkably influencing relationships among people at all levels whether it is relationship between the members of a family, among friends or among work colleagues. These relationships since the increasing use of mobile phone and television have suffered notably, thereby creating gaps among different relationships. The older generation feels that their cultural values are also at risk in the wake of the media advancement. It is not only Pakistani society or any society of the developing world, but even the Americans spend a lot of their time on watching television and using other forms of media (Croteau, David. 2014).

Although the media organizations do have their codes of conduct for their professionals, yet keeping these codes in bookshelves does not ensure implementation of media ethics. The increasing media trends have made it essential to educate the media professionals with media ethics. The fact that there is a large scale media competition all over the world at present, the value of media ethic education appears more exigent. Lee and Padgett (2000) have also indicated their concern over the need of journalism ethics. According to these scholars, ethics education has been realized as a concern for students in the American system of higher education despite the fact that there has been controversy over this concern. In their research survey results they found that short-term mass media ethics study could not develop values considered essential

for ethical behavior. This in the opinion of this author clearly refers that media ethics education needs to be for adequate period of time instead of short-terms.

Conclusion

Present-day media is responsible for educating the whole community in a country. The education of ethics cannot be isolated from media education. Although money is largely linked with media is the sense of profit-making, i.e. using media as a business. Even in a business, ethics cannot be allowed to leave out. Media is responsible for developing awareness, imparting knowledge and providing education to the community besides the important feature of entertainment. However, lack of ethics is observable and therefore it is strongly proposed that media ethics education needs to be promoted adequately with a sense of loyalty toward community, and in the larger interest of the region and the whole world because networking takes only a few seconds to communicate a message from one part of the world to another. The public sector as well as private sectors institutions of mass media education need to ensure serious measures for promoting media ethics by designing suitable media education curricula. This is vital for the community and its respectable survival and, to be more specific, for the sake of humanity.

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