

# Lack Of Gatekeeper In Internet Media: Understanding Ethical Issues

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## **Abstract**

*New media refers to the digital content available on the Internet. Interestingly, it includes anonymous websites, online newspapers, blogs, video games, and social media. This anonymity limits the magnitude of transparency and accountability in its reportage.*

*While emerging research illuminates how today more and more people engage with new media, relatively little attention has been given to authenticity and ethical issues in it. In this research paper we are going to find out, does new media adheres to journalistic ethics and is authentic in its reportage in the absence of an editor or a gate-keeper. As new media is a wide medium including social networking sites, websites, news portals and others, we will also try to find out how can authenticity and ethics be brought back in it. The paper will concentrate on the growing eye-balls that new media attracts, the non-existence of an editor resulting in lack of authenticity, how lack of authenticity leads to a breakdown in journalistic ethics and the last part will conclude by finding logical answers to the lack of ethics and authenticity in new media. The above findings may imply to give a new direction how new media can be made to be authentic and ethical in its approach.*

*Keywords- new media, websites, ethics, authenticity .*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

When Ravish Kumar, a TV anchor, writer and journalist working with NDTV, said in a recent interaction at the launching ceremony of National Dastak, that he has stopped watching TV news and depends upon his mobile phone for news, many saw the writing on the wall clearly. New media is the forthcoming bull, howsoever one denies it. It is calibrated to take on television and newspaper in the next couple of decades as happened in western countries.

Something similar was put forward by Time magazine years ago when it declared its 2006 person of the year to be “You”. The magazine expressed an inevitable reality that “anybody with an Internet connection can be a reporter, political commentator, cultural critic, or media producer”. Focusing on new media’s rise in India, although Arnab Goswami, editor-in-chief, Times Now, won the one-on-one debate with Raghav Behl, ex-managing director, Network 18, recently when they locked horns on the topic of prominence of New Media over print and television, yet Times Internet became the first to launch a TV channel on Mobile with Times Now. This clearly speaks volumes about the significance of new media in today’s media scenario.

New media refers to the digital content available on the Internet. It includes websites, online newspapers, blogs, video games, and social media. Normally if one intends to publish any print media material, the person needs documented permission from the Registrar of Newspapers for India. Similarly, to downlink a news channel, the organization has to register

it with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. But for starting a new media network, for instance, blog, online website or reach large number of people through social networking, one needs to just anonymously register at a private online website. This raises grave question on transparency and accountability of reports that new media puts forward as there is no check on them.

### *Birth of a New Media*

The rise of new media has increased communication between people all over the world and the Internet. It has allowed people to express themselves through blogs, websites, videos, pictures, and other user-generated media.

New Media has been used by social movements to educate, organize, share cultural products of movements, communicate, coalition build, and more. The best example being the World Trade Organization's Ministerial Conference of 1999 protest activity, which was a landmark in the use of New Media as a tool for social change. The WTO protests used media to organize the original action, communicate with and educate participants as an alternative media source. This can well be an alternative to the 'capitalistic media' that normally run by big media conglomerates.

New media serves as an important tool for both institutions and nations to promote their interest and values. However, there are some communities and even nations who consider it as a cultural transformation that may erode their own nation's system of values and eventually compromise national security.

### *Significance of ethics in media*

Ethics has been given huge importance in media, as being complicit with unethical ideas and ways can result in hazardous consequences. In "Media, morality, and madness: The case against Sleaze TV", Jo Tavener writes, "Media, Morality, and Madness: The Case against Sleaze TV"; is an alternative way of understanding media effects by looking at the moral panics that swirl around certain forms of popular culture" While Jo stresses on the talk shows more and gives media ethics a sociological angle, Bengtsson, another author, throws light on values that are connected with real time media.

"Imagined user modes: Media morality in everyday life", by Stina Bengtsson of Södertörn University, puts forward, "the values, strategies and norms of the moral economy of media use in everyday life. It identifies different kinds of values connected with media texts and technologies." The importance of values and ethics in media is inevitable. This ethical crisis in new media doesn't limit itself to only reportage of current events but also surmounts any and every type of affairs in it.

For instance, Ayala Fader writes in "Non liberal Jewish Women's Audiocassette Lectures in Brooklyn: A Crisis of Faith and the Morality of Media", "I examine a crisis of faith among non liberal Jews in Brooklyn that was blamed on the Internet. The ensuing moral panic led many in the community to attend to affect as an indexical sign of gendered faith."

### *Ethical crisis in New Media*

Now as we have discussed media and the significance of morality in it, let's clearly find out does the new media follows or can follow the ethics laid down by registered journalistic bodies in India.

The "Code of Ethics of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference" codifies the following norms that a journalist should follow. Let's see does new media journalists follow it or not -

1. As the press is a primary instrument in the creation of public opinion, journalists should regard their calling as a trust and be eager to serve and guard their public interests.

**Analysis:** Although this is the very foundation on which new media journalists write, yet they put forward information that is sensational and erroneous. For instance, Muzaffarnagar riots were triggered by a wrong video posted on facebook which went viral ending in deaths of many Indians belonging to both the communities who fought with each other.

2. In the discharge of their duties, journalists should attach due value to fundamental, human and social rights and shall hold good faith and fair play in news reports and comments as essential professional obligations.

**Analysis:** Fair play is something that Facebook posts seldom follow. The best example is news posts of political parties, who twist and turn the same incident to put it forward in a manner that suits them. For example, the Dadri murder by a mob was given needed angle by spin masters from different political parties, like INC, BJP and AAP who fished in troubled waters on social networking sites.

As it is seen that new media through its blogs, social networking sites and apps, and websites disseminate news which are ethically wrong at many instances, if not all, it can be said that there is a dire need of some kind of gate-keeper to keep a tap on it.

#### *Power of Digital Media and need of a gate-keeper*

Freedom of the press and journalistic ethics is an important topic today in India — with the word 'press' encompassing the new media also. There should be a serious discussion on the responsibilities of the press, since the new media have become very prominent and very powerful today. It is pre-evident that its new media that helped Prime Minister Narendra Modi to connect with the youth of India to win the 16<sup>th</sup> general elections.

In India, freedom of the press has been treated as part of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. However, as mentioned in Article 19(2), reasonable restrictions can be placed on this right, in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence. Hence, freedom of the media is not an absolute freedom.

Internet media plays a big role in unifying the country in terms of news. We can get news from any part of the country, in any language, at any time. But this connecting factor has its side-effects. Today an erroneous viral internet message can cause riots in any part of the country. This is specially done by guerilla terrorist or miscreants who want to hit with an inciting sensational news on internet and then run into anonymity. Even it is seen that terrorist network like Al Qaida and ISIS are on new media to disseminate their terror ideas and recruit brainwashed militants into their group. Therefore, there is dire need of coming up with a mechanism by which any news post done by anybody has to first register him or her with a government office. If not done, it should be punishable offence under law of land.

#### *New Media: It's not all negative*

In India, the new media have played a tremendous role in providing information to the people about social and economic evils. It have informed the people about the tremendous poverty in the country, the suicide of farmers in various states, the so-called honour killings in many places by Khap panchayats, corruption, and so on. For this, the new media in India deserve kudos. Many a times there are some news that is not put forward by news network as they consider it to be not newsworthy. Here comes the role of new media.

There are a lot of advantages of new media, for instant we can tweet and check our status updates on facebook from our phones. We have the whole internet in the back of our pocket.

We no longer have to wait on the morning newspaper because we have the internet. We can create media ourselves with the Internet we can create our own blogs and post our views of global events or report a small incident that went unnoticed by national or local media.

New media, as far as I know, is an interactive, updated and innovative form of media compared to those of the traditional media which are print, radio and T.V.; Internet to be exact. It has more features, is faster, and for the most part, technologically reliant.

But is the new media better than the traditional media? We use new media mainly to access information anywhere and anytime. Example is, it is mostly used by the students nowadays who want to do a research without spending a single second in boring libraries filled with heavy and dusty books. Our second best friend next to Google, Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, is one example of the new media inclination.

## 2. CONCLUSION

New Media has been used by social movements to educate, organize, share cultural products of movements, communicate, and others. It reaches people anywhere and everywhere and is not bound by time, space or money. However, as it is said with power comes great responsibility, in this case, new media eschews it. We started with media researcher Stina Bengtsson identifying different kinds of values connected with media texts and cites its significance, while Ayala Fader cited media's wrong reportage being the cause of losing of faith. With ethics being so significant in journalism, we saw how new media journalists defy the "Code of Ethics of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference". However, with deft research we also found out how it is not new media only which makes mistakes but print and electronic also do. Focusing on India, the 16<sup>th</sup> general elections have put forward in clear terms of numbers what social engineering and new media can do. Nobody had thought that new media is the best way to connect with the city bred youth who, it is presumed, is seldom interested in serious news viewership. These many positives brought us to the 'responsibility' angle again.

The main purpose of journalism is to provide people with important news. In the past, journalism was done through television, radio and newspaper. Now, people turn to the internet to search for news. In the old days, publishing news required large investments and this alone made the source reliable. Now, internet is readily available to anyone with a computer and internet connection and this makes the source of news unreliable. You can't believe everything on the internet because the source of news may not be a professional journalist. Some of the questions that come to the mind of readers while reading new media is "Where did it come from?" or "Can I trust that it is original?" etc.

Internet-based news can also result in the loss of originality. People are constantly competing with the rest of the internet users, which may lead to plagiarism. Many websites post almost exact stories; some sites even replicate the newspaper online. This clearly shows that a loss of originality.

In fact, new media's strength has become its weaknesses. First, everyone wants to be the first to publish new information. This leads to erroneous reportage. Secondly, the web tends to be a place where opinion is preferred over careful and unbiased reporting. This resulted in the posting of some very hateful comments on the web, especially on facebook and twitter. Thirdly, internet-based news still don't provide the kind of expensive and in-depth journalism that mainstream media have done.

With all these concerns, how to tame the online dragon? We cannot let the government bell this cat or else it will be again working as the government mouthpiece. So an alternative can be digital media to keep tap on itself by creating a self organised group like Broadcast Editors' Association (BEA) or News Broadcasters Association (NBA). They can censor themselves and if any erroneous content is put on internet, they can prove it to be wrong by

putting the right content on all the digital media platforms of the group. Self-censorship is the only answer to this grave problem of online anonymous reportage.

### *Future of New Media*

What makes new media new? Lots of things, it is said. Speed – new media release and update content on a faster cycle. Co-creation – new media blur the lines between producers and audiences. Sharing – new media are social platforms of exchange and connection. Technology – new media are the spawn of the Web and, increasingly, of mobile.

In today's media world, the audience owns the active voice. Readers read, viewers watch, listeners listen. Media is all about getting its users interactive. And this is what new media does effectively. It uses technology to understand the need of its user without waiting for its user to direct. For instance, Google has just patented a technology that can detect if someone is watching an ad, and then make predictions about a person's emotional response to that ad. Samsung's Galaxy S IV uses eye scrolling technology to detect when a reader has reached the bottom of a screen in order to reveal more text. This is in addition to its eye pausing technology that stops video playback whenever a viewer looks away, and restarting it once a viewer looks back. This is amazing and can be considered to be magic a decade ago.

In the future, people will both read and be read. The future of new media speaks about a time when audience will no longer be the sole active agent. Content will share the active space.

Some of the other turnarounds of new media in future may be GPS will know where people are and thus the situations in which they are engaged with media. Biometric systems will know people's moods, alertness and activity levels. Information will be fed into content algorithms that actively update what people see, watch and hear. In short, in the future, content will "speak" in an active voice.

In short, the future of "new media" is of intelligent content which will lead to situation where each of us receives the best and most appropriate content for our immediate and future needs.

For instance, in "Looking to the future of new media in health marketing: deriving propositions based on traditional theories", Della LJ1, Eroglu D, Bernhardt JM, Edgerton E and Nall J say, "Market trend data show that the media marketplace continues to rapidly evolve. Recent research shows that substantial portions of the U.S. media population are "new media" users."

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