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## Paid news or fake news: Media ethics

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### Abstract

This paper focus on the paid or fake news, the fake news stories were generated with the help of using artificial intelligence tools such as Photoshop, websites that generate newspaper clippings and fake news creator app. Such types of fake news are the cases of deep fakes where a person's likeness is imposed on another person in a photo or video. They are widely used to mislead public. To hide their identity, fake websites are created in other countries; the articles are then spread using social media platforms. Media ethics promotes and defends values such as a universal respect for life and the rule of law and legality. Media Ethics defines and deals with ethical questions about how media should use texts and pictures provided by the citizens.

**Keywords:** Fake news, electronic media, news channel and paid news

### Introduction

Paid news can be defined as “Any news or analysis appearing in any media (Print & Electronic) for a price in cash or kind as consideration”. It is difficult to theorize the practice of ‘paid news’ in routine democratic discourse. As such, sociologists have been sceptical of media's objectivity or selective perceptions, but even by those standards putting a price tag on news coverage is the new low for India's thriving quality press. Ample literature has been written on how media is linked to the exercise of power and hegemony, how it helps in manufacturing consent and steering of public opinions, or how concerns of the marginalized citizens seldom make news.

Media is considered extremely essential to a democracy. A healthy democracy cannot exist without a free and responsible media. Conduct of free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debates and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself in order to make informed choices. The Commission considers media as its eyes and ears especially at the time of elections. It is through media that electoral malpractices or incidents of use of muscle power and money power by either political parties or candidates are highlighted and brought to its notice.

### Paid News

The Autonomous press council of India (PCI) established by the Union Government under a 1978 act has been demanding more powers to tackle what has come to be known as the “paid news syndrome” and its fresh proposals are under the government's consideration is good news indeed.



**Fig 1:** Paid News in Newspaper

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## Why is the Media Important?

It gets your message across to a wider audience. The various forms of media primarily television, newspapers and radio spread and disseminate information but now social media like WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook are very active in the society.



Fig 2: Types of Media

## Media Regulations

Mostly paid news published during the election time. The Election Commission does not regulate media; however it is the responsibility of Election Commission to enforce the provisions of the law or the Court's directions, which might have linkages with media or certain aspects of media functioning.

These laws are: Section 126A of the R. P. Act, 1951- It prohibits conduct of Exit poll and dissemination of their results during the hour fixed for commencement of polls in the first phase and half hour after the time fixed for close of poll for the last phase in all the states. No restrictions on Opinion Poll (Except last 48 hours before poll)

Section 126 (1) (b)- It prohibits displaying of any election related matter by means of cinematograph, on television or similar apparatus during the period of 48 hours ending with the hour fixed for conclusion of poll. Section 127A- The printing and publication of election pamphlets, posters, etc. is governed by its provisions, which makes it mandatory to bear on its face the names and addresses of the printer and the publisher.

Section 171 (h)- of the IPC prohibits incurring of expenditure on advertisement without the authority of the contesting candidate.

## Media Ethics

Media ethics is the subdivision of applied ethics dealing with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, print media and the internet. The field covers many varied and highly controversial topics, ranging from war journalism to Benetton ad campaigns (Wikipedia).

The core values of ethical journalism are more important than ever today, as we fight for quality and democracy in the media in the digital age. While new laws might lead to potential censorship, a commitment to ethics is essential to build public trust. The 'power' of the press to bring about social and political change or economic development is extremely limited. In capitalist societies, the press is

primarily like any other business or industry. It exists to raise advertising revenue and circulation with the aim of making profits. 'Public service' and 'public interest' are not the main concerns. This is not to suggest that the press does not make attempts to exercise its 'power' in favour of on political or economic ideology over another or of one group or class or caste over another. These attempts, it must be acknowledged, are sometimes successful and at other times disastrous failures.

## Digital Media Ethics

Digital media ethics deals with the distinct ethical problems, practices and norms of digital news media. Digital news media includes online journalism, blogging, digital photojournalism, citizen journalism and social media. It includes questions about how professional journalism should use this 'new media' to research and publish stories, as well as how to use text or images provided by citizens.



Fig 3: Digital Media Ethics

## Code of Ethics of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference

- 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.
- 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.
- Journalists should observe special restraint in reports and comments dealing with tensions, likely to lead, or leading to civil disorder.

## Five Core Principles of Media

1. Accountability
2. Fairness and Impartiality
3. Humanity
4. Independence
5. Truth and Accuracy

## Global Media Ethics

Global media ethics aims at developing a comprehensive set

of principles and standards for the practice of journalism in an age of global news media. New forms of communication are reshaping the practice of a once parochial craft serving a local, regional or national public. Today, news media use communication technology to gather text, video and images from around the world with unprecedented speed and varying degrees of editorial control. The same technology allows news media to disseminate this information to audiences scattered around the globe.

Despite these global trends, most codes of ethics contain standards for news organizations or associations in specific countries. International associations of journalists exist, and some have constructed declarations of principle. But no global code has been adopted by most major journalism associations and news organizations.

In addition to statements of principle, more work needs to be done on the equally important area of specific, practice guidelines for covering international events. An adequate global journalism ethics has yet to be constructed.

### **New Stage in Journalism Ethics**

Since the birth of modern journalism in the 17th century, journalism has gradually broadened the scope of the people that it claims to serve — from factions to specific social classes to the public of nations. The journalistic principle of “serving the public interest” has been understood, tacitly or explicitly, as serving one’s own public, social class or nation. The other principles of objectivity, impartiality and editorial independence were limited by this parochial understanding of who journalism serves. For example, “impartiality” meant being impartial in one’s coverage of rival groups within one’s society, but not necessarily being impartial to groups outside one’s national boundaries.

Global journalism ethics, then, can be seen as an extension of journalism ethics — to regard journalism’s “public” as the citizens of the world, and to interpret the ethical principles of objectivity, balance and independence in an international manner. Journalism ethics becomes more “cosmopolitan” in tone and perspective.

### **Components of Global Media Ethics**

The development of global journalism ethics has the following tasks.

#### **Conceptual tasks**

New philosophical foundations for a global ethics, which include:

- Global re-interpretation of the ethical role and aims of journalism
- Global re-interpretation of existing journalism principles and standards, such as objectivity, balance and independence
- Construction of new norms and “best practices” as guides for the practice of global journalism

#### **Research tasks**

More research into the state of journalism, amid globalization:

- Studies of news media in various regions of world
- Studies on the evolution and impact of globalization in news media, with a focus on ownership, technology and practice
- Studies on the ethical standards of new media in different countries
- Studies on news coverage of international problems and issues

### **Practical tasks**

Actions to implement and support global standards:

- Application of this global perspective to re-define the coverage of international events and issues
- Coalition-building among journalists and interested parties with the aim of writing a global code of ethics that has wide-spread acceptance
- Initiatives to defend and enhance free and responsible news media, especially in areas where problems are the greatest.

### **Ethical problems that plague Indian journalism**

1. Paid news
2. Opaque private treaties
3. Blatant blackmail
4. Widening legal regulatory gap
5. Flawed measurements of audience reach and readership

### **Fake News: Meaning and Concept**

Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) Defines “Fake news is information deliberately fabricated and published with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts” (EJN, 2020).

In another words fake news, or hoax news, refers to false information or propaganda published under the guise of being authentic news. Fake news websites and channels push their fake news content in an attempt to mislead consumers of the content and spread misinformation via social networks and word-of-mouth. According to PolitiFact: “Fake news is made-up stuff, masterfully manipulated to look like credible journalistic reports that are easily spread online to large audiences willing to believe the fictions and spread the word.” (Stroud, 2020)

Apart from these definitions the fake news may be further explained in form of disinformation and misinformation (Wardle, 2019).

- **Disinformation:** It is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country. It is been motivated by three factors like make money; to have political influence, either domestic or international; to cause trouble for the sake of it. The most impactful disinformation is that which has a kernel of truth to it, taking something that is true and mislabelling it, or sharing something as new when actually it’s a few years old story.
- **Misinformation:** The information is false, but it has no intention to harm anyone. The sharing of misinformation is based more on socio-psychological factors. Online people perform the activity as they wanted to be connected with their tribe. It does not matter to them whether they are from same political parties or activists working on climate change, or any other religious or ethnic group. Sometimes any disinformation may be picked and distributed among the people under the assumption that they are helping people. In case of misinformation any event that has an emotional appeal may be used by anti –national, anti-social elements and political force to capture narrative and inject misinformation in a way that will benefit them. (Ahuja, 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>.

The Misinformation and Disinformation may include fabricated content, manipulated content, imposter content, misleading content, false context and connection, satire and

parody (House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, 2018).

Short attention spans and a deluge of rapid-fire articles on social media form a recipe for fake news epidemics. The top ethical challenges journalists will face.

**How Fake News Breaks Your Brain**



**Fig 4:** Fake News challenges

**Identifying Fake News**

In the era of digitalization it is very difficult to identify the source of fake news. For precautionary measures to deal with the problem it is required to do the fact checking. The term “fact-checking” can mean two different things in journalism. Traditionally, fact-checkers were employed by newsrooms to proofread and verify factual claims made by reporters in their articles. This genre of fact-checking evaluates the solidity of the reporting, double-checks facts. With the emergence of digital media this trend has been changed to ex post fact -checking. It happens not before something is published but after a claim becomes of public relevance. This form of “ex post” fact-checking seeks to make politicians and other public figures accountable for the truthfulness of their statements.

According to duke reporter’s lab there are around 137 fact checking projects in 51 countries in December 2017 (UNESCO, 2018) [6]. Some of the facts checking projects that may help in identifying fake news are (St. Louis Community College Libraries, 2020):

- AP Fact Check, Associated Press
- Duke Reporter's Lab: Fact Checking News and Global Fact Checking Sites
- FactCheck.org
- Lead Stories
- Media Bias / Fact Check
- Media Smarts, Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy
- The News Literacy Project
- NPR Politics Fact Check

- PolitiFact
- Snopes
- The Washington Post's Fact Checker
- Retraction Watch
- SciCheck

Besides these facts checking sites it is also advisable that people should not be depend on one source for information. They must access multi sourcing that may help in identify fake news.

**Reality of Journalism**

Journalism is the discipline of gathering, writing and reporting news, and broadly it includes the process of editing and presenting the news articles. Journalism applies to various media, but is not limited to newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. While under pressure to be the first to publish its stories, each news media organization adheres to its own standards of accuracy, quality, and style - usually editing and proofreading its reports prior to publication. Many news organizations claim proud traditions of holding government officials and institutions accountable to the public, while media critics have raised questions on the accountability of the press. The word journalism is taken from the French journal which in turn comes from the Latindurnal or daily. The Acta Diurna, a handwritten bulletin, was put up daily in the Forum, the main public square in ancient Rome, and was the world's first newspaper.



Fig 5: Reality of Journalism



Fig 6: Media onwards

**Criticism of paid News**

Some groups have criticized paid news including Bloomberg, who claimed that paid news was rotting Indian democracy. The analytical Monthly review has also criticized Indian media problems to well-known problems in the political economy after the adoption of neo-liberal policies. The press council of India has led its own investigation report on the Phenomenon of paid news but later rejected their findings.

**Suggestions**

- The readers, viewers and listeners of news must learn some tricks to identify the authenticity of the news. They must check the source of information before sharing the information further.
- The individuals must be aware of social media posts that depict unnecessary amounts of sensational, inflammatory and divisive language to promote a story. They must thoroughly check whether a video/image/audio/document is actually legitimate or has been edited for malicious purposes.
- It is required that people should understand the reality of the news. Mostly paid news is promotion and marketing of product/company/organisation etc.
- State must create social monitoring cells.
- Police should take action against those spreading fake news, and it must get blocked under Information Technology Act.
- WhatsApp is famous platform where one click to spread information and knowledge, if information is fake then admin has right to delete such information

from WhatsApp group immediately.

- In India the provision of IT Act, 2000, have not been specifically enforced against service providers who are publishing and disseminating fake news, an impression has started emerging that anyone can publish and disseminate fake news without fear of any legal consequences. It is high time clarity must be made on this ground so service providers are more responsible.
- Print media should be check paid news before publishing.
- Mostly private electronic news channels support paid news so, people have to see Government’s Durdarshan News channel (DD News).

**Conclusion**

Fake news is a very current and rampant problem not only India but all countries have this type problem. Most of the fake news is in form of morphed/misrepresented/old videos and images. It is crucial for the public, governments and social media corporations to take responsibility and stringent measures. Social media sites are heavily responsible for acting as medium for fake news. Facebook and Twitter were the leading websites that should be held accountable for spreading Coronavirus fake news. Even WhatsApp messaging application was also majorly responsible so, admin should have right to delete fake news. There were several influential social media users who had played a key role in spreading misinformation. The Indian media consumers are fragmented and heterogeneous. The information perceived by them may have individual difference depending upon their socio-

economic and cultural values. People should watch Doordashan news because its news is authentic and real. Observing different definitions reviews and facts it can surely claim that paid news & fake news cannot stand on any ground they are just for gossip, entertainment & for any ill purpose. These paid news stuff cannot supply or provide any good care for reality accuracy & welfare in place of things which are taking us society & nation at the direction of dark side instead of developing path.

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