

Fake news and Fraudulent News-Manipulation: Media Ethics at Crossroads!

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ABSTRACT

We live in an age where a few cliques in our society have been caught in flagrant delicto passing off old videos, alien photographs, and non-existent data presenting one faction as killers and the others as patriots of the nation. Fake News and Fraudulent News have become a symptom of greater social ills. Modern Social Media are vulnerable to manipulation by slough of a few élites. All operating under varying motives but with similar techniques. No wonder media today are being leveraged to enable, breed polarisation by countless actors who can leverage those systems for personal, political, economic, and ideological gain. Sometimes, the goals are much more disturbing. In short, common people are being used. In this sense, the relevance of media ethics is the longer-term problem. But if we are not able to grapple with the immediate and alarming problem of news-manipulation through fake news the media sources may not live to earn the public trust back with greater inclusion, values, equity, transparency, ethical integrity and honesty.

This paper seeks to examine the serious ethical issues of fake news and fraudulent news – manipulation with a call to state how common populace is being manipulated and become manipulators' agent.

Keywords: *Social media, Media ethics, Fake news, Fraudulent news, News-manipulation, Polarisation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this post-truth age, Fake News and Fraudulent Mediation rule the roast. Media is among the prime factors influencing world affairs and the relations between states, peoples and cultures in the 'information age'. The mass media is influenced by many duplicitous forces, among them politics, the legal system, the market, and last but not the least, by the motivation of the journalists. Fake News and Fraudulent manipulation alter reality and polarises the national landscape into various divisions. Consequently, the ethics of the journalistic profession are responsible for a great part of the journalist's work, for her or his orientation towards or neglect of different

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themes or arguments in the process of news-making. It is a common transgression we hear these days that media houses taking money to plug for politicians, demanding equity from companies in return for positive coverage, allowing marketing honchos to decide what news is, pushing editors to the margins and reducing journalists to handymen. In quest to win circulation the universally accepted journalistic standards have been compromised. These mortal wounds scream out the name of our affliction – an insatiable appetite for profit and popularity. The question of trust in the news media is invoked rather easily, leading to a spurt in the number of surveys to quantify trust. Media itself cannot be ethical or unethical but the way politicians and media professionals use the media may be ethical or unethical. They should be guided by ethics while taking various decisions regarding activities. It is probably the essence of the journalistic profession that reporters deal with ambivalent situations where the outcome is uncertain, the values are mixed, and the sides are in conflict. Against this backdrop this paper seeks to address the basic question – what is Media Ethics today when the vested interest groups turn ‘facebook into Fakebook’, and further examines the moral identities and moral commitments of media in this multicultural digital media world. Therefore, the main aim of this essay is to stimulate debates on ethical aspects of fake news and fraudulent news-manipulation and to understand that ethical standards of media professionals should be maintained some common grounds that one should not be unaware of various colliding moral standards.

2. THE PROBLEM

Social media which began as a new way of socialising among friends, networking among business people and launching various social uplift movements have stooped to dangerous levels of organising violence and divisions among people. Media today is reduced to political sensation or morphs to orchestrate middle-class outrage. Investigation and expose, when it happens, is because someone had a score to settle. Instead of agenda-setters, journalists and a few political cliques have become handy-men, well-paid but increasingly adrift from the craft and ethics of their trade.

3. BACKGROUND

To start with, let us take one of the official Oscar entries *Peeply* (Hindi Film), which casts the Indian news media as a pack of bumbling, insensitive hearse-chasers. Or take Ram Gopal Varma’s *Rann* (2010), which had a media baron’s son enabling a politician and an industrialist to topple a prime minister. Or the Shahrukh Khan-Juhi Chawla starrer *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000), in which two rival media honchos acceded to the public hanging of an innocent man for profit. Or Maddhur Bhandarkar’s *Page Three* (2005), which critiqued the news media’s overwhelming obsession with vapid celebrities. Satirical, darkly humorous and occasionally over the top. Yet, singly, each film is an indictment of current trends in the news media; together they represent a growing tendency to identify the news media as the new bad guy on the block.

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In the modern world social media is becoming the new villain behind many flare-ups. Fake news swims in the same electronic currents as everyday exaggerations, hard-charging opinion and political hyperbole. This in many ways makes it seem normal, even when it is just crazy, made-up stories that develop under the radar before blowing up into viral memes. In this post-truth age, fake news rules from the United State to India and the challenges confronting journalists have grown in exponential proportion. In fact, all political leaders and business magnets, people of stature and education have repeated fake stories.

Donald Trump's nominee for national security adviser, retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, repeated the false claim that Florida Democratic senators voted to impose Islamic Sharia law in the Sunshine State. Flynn's son, who had a role on the transition team, repeated the Clinton "pizzagate" rumour. Unfortunately, not all dystopian stories are based on facts. In other words, fake news and pictures, shared in no time, alter reality leading to unimaginable consequences. Hatred and communal violence are spread at the touch of a button. Have things really come to this pass? Can the media with its feisty, noisy, and often glorious contributions to Indian democracy be thrown in the unholy company of Indian civilization? Does the business of providing news require its professionals to betray the trust of the gullible, exploit victims, deceive the public and work knowingly against the national interest? One would imagine that any self-respective news media professional would be appalled by such accusations. And yet, can they be ignored?

In media, ethics play a key role to establish credibility and win the heart of their audience. While media has much to be proud of, there is increasing public disenchantment, not just with its slant, shrillness, sermonizing and sensationalism, but with its core value, namely integrity. As a whole the trust in media is increasingly breaking down. Unethical media practices have brought many controversial issues followed by lethal consequences such as; bombing of World Trade Centre in America on September 11, bomb blast in Taj Mahal Hotel in India, reporting of war in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir. It is agreed upon that news is sacred, comment is free. However, even when news and comments are mixed up, it is possible for the alert consumer to separate the two. At any rate, even in the most advanced of democracies, the media does carry ideological bias, when is reflected not in the editorial pages, but in the news columns. This is a practice, however, is deplorable a free press can live with. It is reported that sections of the media are now for 'sale'. The system is getting fast institutionalized, with T.V. channels and newspapers approaching politicians, especially during elections, with a 'package' which, increasingly, is negotiable. It is an offer difficult to refuse. This clearly shows that media practices in the world are very unethical. Those media professionals, involved in unethical practices, need to know and implement the journalistic code of conduct, also a code of media ethics.

Fake and fraudulent news alters reality, stigmatises political opponents, targets activists, demonises minority groups and polarizes the national landscape into national and anti-nationals with vested interest.

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4. FAKE NEWS AND FRAUDULENT NEWS: THE ANALYSIS.

One of the major problems in mass media communication is that journalistic ethics is still to a large extent shaped by national characteristics rather than common approaches. Across India, there is a boding of searing pain, especially in its northern and eastern peripheries. The hurt and turmoil envelops families and communities in a shroud of despair, whether it is in the Northeast, Jammu and Kashmir or earlier in Punjab. It has its roots in a political definition articulated by regional non-state groups that posits 'mainland' India as the 'other'. The political challenge to the state, backed by armed revolt, has not been crushed despite deploying the army and paramilitary forces for over 50 years in the Northeast, and in Kashmir for over two decades. India truly has been at war with itself-locked with adversaries who have refused to blink or budge for the most part – but that appears to be changing. This is different from the groundswell of anger which has spread in central India as well as parts of Maharashtra, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. The Maoist campaign has grown from an acute frustration at the lack of delivery on promises, from bad government and governance, from the system's failure to provide basic health, education and livelihood opportunities 66 years after independence. The focus here is more on inequality and ineptitude of the state than on sovereignty. It should be clearly recognised that the politics of Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast have little or nothing to do with issues of under development that drive the Maoist agenda. The country's media misses and messes this up time after time because they don't have a memory of even contemporary history; forget what happened a century ago. It could be argued through that poor basic services and slothful, insensitive and corrupt administration have aggravated the political crisis both in the Northeast and Kashmir. This is often where the media fails to make the connection – insurgency and bad governance are part of the same coin, the same story – and often misses the point that lack of services exacerbates alienation. These are the kind of stories that must be leadership-driven, by editors of vision and perspective. Articles and discussions of basing on these issues should have taken place and been written over the years. But the media, especially television, with its desperation for high ratings (TRP) is totally inconsistent and uncommitted to following up such issues in a sustained manner. Instead, it gives the impression of being a bull in a china shop with noisy, celebrity anchors and breathless reporters. The Kanchi seers have been proved innocent of hatching a conspiracy to kill a detractor (Deccan Chronicle Nov. 28, 2013). The verdict of the sessions court in Puducherry in the sensational Sankararaman murder case vindicated the current heads of an ancient mutt who had been dragged into a strange trial. The prosecution of the case unravelled in almost peculiar fashion in court with witness after witness turning hostile and the family of the victim not able to identify the accused in court. Given such a scenario, it is curious that a particular police officer should have investigated the case in such a dogged manner. The intense media coverage made it worse. Social Media is the true indicator of the public's interest. Let us get the obvious out of the way. What Tarun Tejpal did to Tehelka's young lady staffer is condemnable in the strongest possible way. He himself had accepted his guilt openly. The ethical question the media should ask itself is why the Tejpal case had been given more prominence than that of Asaram Bapu. Asaram Bapu, as a Godman and spiritual guru, had the unquestioned devotion of lakhs of people. His disciples trusted him completely, bared their minds and lives to him and brought their sons and daughters to

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be blessed and uplifted spiritually. He abused this trust in the direst way. Yet, the media after the initial flurry of interest during his arrest drama has left him alone, with no attempt to investigate either his sexual history or his financial dealings. In India, the fake news has come with its own distinct customised flavour. Moradabad incident led to the communal riots. Since then India has seen repeated incidents of fake news which have serious impact on people and properties. In recent times, Pratik Sinha (pratik@truthofgujarat.com) and his associates have launched www.altnews.in to take on current political issues to strip fake identities and tracing meticulously with painstaking forensic precision the many whorls in the digital fingerprints behind Facebook posts, Tweets and TV reports that went viral on the internet and YouTube. According to Indian Currents, July 17-23, 2017 issue Los Angeles Times took notice when Pratik Sinha traced the people behind the targeting of Arundhati Roy, whose second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* had been just released to the discomfiture of many she condemned in the acidic prose that is her wont. Los Angeles Times sequenced the developments by stating that the pro-government websites in India circulated a story in May 2017 saying Arundhati Roy, the renowned Indian novelist, had criticized the Indian army's heavy-headed presence in Kashmir, the disputed territory claimed by both countries. India would never gain full control of Kashmir, Roy was quoted as saying, "even if its army deployment increases from 7 lakhs to 70 lakhs." Members equalling 700,000 to 7 million. "Interestingly, Indian media ran with the story. They called her, "anti-national" and one politician said, that she be tied to the hood of an army jeep, like a Kashmiri civilian who was used as a human shield by a young Army major. There was, however, one major problem: Roy did not make the comments about India controlling Kashmir. The original source of the report was a Pakistani Nationalist site called Times of Islamabad that said Roy spoke during a visit to Srinagar, the summer capital of India's Jammu and Kashmir state. Roy said she had not visited Srinagar and made no such comments. But by then she had already become the latest victim of India's swirling epidemic of fake news. Another busting fake news purportedly depicting JNU doctoral scholar Kanhaiya Kumar seeking freedom, or Azaadi, Kashmir. News X, said it was Kanhaiya's 'seditious' rant. Pratik Sinha's team found the stories banked on a doctored video of Kanhaiya's famous JNU campus speech called from freedom from want, caste domination and exploitation. It is stated that there are more than 20 crore social media users in India, mostly young. The list of fake news included Times Now stories of rare cards circulating in Kerala that offered cash rewards for converting Hindus to Islam. TV News anchor of that channel claimed the ISIS was behind all this and had set up a base in India from where it masterminded everything from the civil unrest in the Kashmir valley to the radicalising of youth in Kerala's Muslim majority districts. Sinha's Alt News found the report was based on a doctored image that had been circulating on propaganda websites and WhatsApp since 2010. In another case, Alt News in its web report said Tarun Sengupta, a prominent political leader who had posted a video on his Facebook timeline and had claimed that Muslim IPS officers were beating up a Hanuman Bhakt on Hanuman Jayanthi this year. The video was in fact many years old and has been available on YouTube for the longest time. Later Alt News found the video had nothing to do with Hanuman Jayanthi which was celebrated on April 11, 2017. This video has been available on the internet since September 2014. Any ordinary reader of the newspapers would hardly get anything useful for them in the daily news items.

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Social life in the big cities is described at great length with its parties. The rural areas only come into prominence when there is a riot or bomb blast. Most of the press is owned by wealthy men who have every reason not to want certain ideas to be expressed in the newspapers. Considering that almost all media houses depend on advertisers for survival, it has become inevitable that they espouse the worldview of the rich. What about the downtrodden, who's cause the media was traditionally enjoined upon to fight? In the making of public opinion, print media has always played a robust role, and more significantly in those times when electronic media was nowhere, here in the sight. Since the media and the society are intrinsically inextricably inter linked with each other, a healthy balance between the two pillars of society is imperative, lest the one should dictate the other for very untenable reasons. If too much domination of the media, both electronic and print, is undesirable and uncalled for, it is equally unethical if the media becomes the slave of the society and cotters to its transitory tastes rather than highlighting the real problems of the people. An increased interaction between both the media and the people can help enlarge their territories and thus keep at bay certain forces that are out of malign and make a fool of both. Our values are under tremendous scrutiny and stress, and time tested relations between individuals and institutions have come under close observation. Consumerism and ostentatious like styles have affected our physico-mental set-up. No pursuit and profession is free from compulsive control of commercialization of attitude and approach. Even the media has not remained unaffected by this virus of money power over moral power. Every time the social ethos and its harmonious canvas come as threat due to excessive zeal or greed, the effectiveness of the media making people aware of their rights and duties is reduced. If an obsessive craze for pelf and power is deplorable, commercialization of media lead to negation of its social objectives and obligations is equally fraught dangerous dimensions. In some cases, professionalism in journalism to sensationalism that results in improvement in packaging of news features, leading to superficial presentation. This change from social to commercialization has led to deterioration in public life. If at one end of the socio-political spectrum, the print media at the bridge between the people and the government, at the other should conduct itself as the watch-dog, without being judgmental in reporting. Having emerged as the strongest pillar of the democracy world over, media enjoys a unique place and privilege in society.

5. MEDIA ETHICS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Ethics is the basis for journalistic self-determination as much as it is the most effective defence against abuses in the rapidly developing sector. It is essential to understand the basic concept of ethics and differentiate this from other related terms and concepts. When Western scholars talk about ethics they begin with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Indians can easily go back to the Vedas. In the modern times one can look up to Vivekananda and Gandhi. The word moral comes from the Latin word mos (plural is mores), which means 'custom or way of life'. The term ethics is derived from the Greek word ethos which means 'custom' or 'character'. Thus the terms morals and ethics are essentially synonymous. However, morals and morality ordinarily refer to the conduct itself while ethics and ethical ordinarily suggest the study of moral conduct or the system or the code that is followed. In this way, Ethics attempts to determine what conduct is good or what is bad or what might be

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approved and what disapproved. In other words, ethics is a normative study of the principles underlying the desired types of human conduct. Ethics is concerned with the value of an activity or a thing. It is the science of what is morally right (Titus 1957:8-10). We can conclude that, Ethics means the principle of conduct governing an individual or a profession. Ethics has been understood and practiced in different ways at different times. According to Hindu perspectives, ethics is directly related to 'Dharma' the holy word which cannot be replaced by any other word in English because it includes all the guidelines for the human conduct or behaviour which leads to final destiny that is 'Moksha'. In the eastern society, ethical guidelines given by Dharma are relevant and working recipe to make everyone moral and happy. Ethics is an integral part of any type of professionals. Media professionals most of the times have to work with people living in the society of certain cultural background, so they need to apply media ethics to make their work balanced and moral. The growth of the media of mass communication is having a profound effect on manners and morals. These instruments have been used by powerful groups to serve their special interests or to influence the attitudes and thinking of masses of people. A few generations ago, the home, the religion and the school were the main institutions in establishing and reinforcing moral standards and social patterns. To some extent this is still true. For many persons, however, motion pictures, radio, television, newspapers, internet and mobile cellular phones are largely taking over these functions. This increases significance of media ethics. Media Ethics is a branch of philosophy seeking to help journalists and other media people determine how to behave in their profession. It 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. In its practical application, it is very much normative science of conduct, with conduct considered primarily self-determined, rational and voluntary (Christian Clifford 1998:15). According to Keller, media ethics are 'Principles of good conduct for media practitioners, bearing in mind the public role to the media in a given society, as well as the claims of individuals.' They also focus on 'how' to handle the information and present them. As media is thought to be influential and sensitive profession, focus is also given on the conduct of the professionals' (Keller 1957:116). Gordon and Kottross state: 'Media ethics concerns right and wrong, good and bad, better and worse actions taken by people working for the media themselves, of course, cannot be ethical or unethical, only their staff members can, when we deal with media ethics, we are really concerned with ethical standards of media workers what kinds of actions they take' A. Nirmala Mani 2007:57) Three decades (1890s, 1920s 1980s) and their overflow have been decisive in the formation of communication ethics as an academic enterprise. Ethical rationalism has served as the prevailing paradigm. Since the 1890s, communication ethics has presumed that rationality marks all legitimate claims about moral obligations. However, the first time a press critic used the word ethics was in July 1889. (Lilly. W.S:1989:503-512) Later four books on journalism appeared in the US: Nelson Crawford's Ethics of Journalism (1924), Leon Flint's The Conscience of the Newspaper: A Case Book in the Principles and Problems of Journalism (1925), William Gibbon's Newspaper Ethics: A Discussion of Good Practice for Journalists (1926) and Albert Henning's Ethics and Practices of Journalism (1932). These books dealt with topics like reporters and sources, free press, fair trial, deception, fairness, accuracy, sensationalism and protection of

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privacy. Thereafter many ethical issues have been identified and debated by media. In 1980, UNESCO published Mac Bride Commission Report in book form as *Many Voices. One World. Towards a Communication Order*. It was another milestone that became a marker for the rapid globalization of media technologies and raised issues of imbalance, diversity and human rights in media context. Discourse ethics of Jorgen Habermas (1929) dominates media ethics literature of the 1990s. He understands language to be an agent of culture and social organization. Discourses are symbolic forms through which we think, argue, persuade, display convictions and establish our identities. For Habermas moral consciousness must be nurtured under conditions of instrumental technocracy and institutional power that stifle autonomous action. John C. Merrill has postulated a new theoretical framework (Merril, John 2003:15) . It is basically categorization of ethical theories for application at professional and personal levels. Various theories from Aristotle to Habermas look at ethics as being applicable to everybody, at all times, and in any situation. And, others, more flexible and adaptive consider ethics as pertinent only in certain situations or contexts and are not universalizable. The first is more legalistic and universal, and the second one is more diversified and relativistic. Finally, one can conclude with Clifford G. Christians, 'The primal sacredness of life is a proto-norm that binds humans into a common oneness. And in our systematic reflection on this primordial generality, we recognise that it entails such basic ethical principles as human dignity, truth and non-violence.'(C.Clifford 1997:13-14) Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his autobiography, 'In the very first month of Indian Opinion, I realized that the sole aim of journalism should be service.' (M.K. Gandhi 1983:263). This is the significance and the essence of ethics for media.

6. CONCERNS OF MEDIA ETHICS

Some important concerns of media ethics are: news manipulation, truth and conflict with the law. It is stated that news can manipulate and be manipulated. Governments and corporations may attempt to manipulate news media, governments, for example by censorship, and corporations by share ownership. Truth may conflict with many other values. Revelation of military secrets and other sensitive government information may be contrary to the public interest, even if it is true. Journalistic ethics may conflict with the law over issues such as the protection acceptable to break the law in order to obtain news. For example, undercover reporters may be engaging in deception, trespass and similar torts and crimes with undercover journalism and investigative journalism. Ethics in journalism is a utopia, can never be applied in practice.

The crisis in the media today defies any logic. Unlike in the West, a cloud has just burst over us in India, raining advertising, circulation and subscription rupees. While technology hammers a daily nail into the coffin there, the sky is the lower limit here, with soaring literacy and aspirations. If we have lost our moral and ethical compass in such a happy setting, it is because of competition, yes, but also because need has given way to greed. Our paper tigers, instead of inspiring us on to the high road, are only too happy to invite us to bad morals. We should admit that the media in all countries are superficial, arrogant, propagandistic, irresponsible, and extremely negative and obviously in need of some kind of disciplined moral and quality control.

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By and large, the media are highly competitive, self-indulgent, profit-oriented, and largely devoid of any serious community responsibility for providing helpful and enlightening information. Sex and crime, reinforced by athletic events and entertainment figures, (such as Music Channel – MTV, HBO, ESPN), dominate the news. The modern media prompt the people to retreat into themselves, isolate them from community behind their walls and fences, and just let the rest of the world go by. But this may be changing. However, a more communal concern, a sense of democratic, citizen-involved journalism is evolving in India. The rhetoric of media ethics, unimpressive at the moment to be sure, has shifted away from freedom and individualism to a concern for social control and cooperation. Various voices in the recent past in India have spoken up generally endorsing some type of institutionalised community-determined ethics.

Although the heavy-handed government control in many countries discourages the development of alternate kinds of civic or communal normative ethics, global reality is beginning to insist that there be an end to individualistic ethics. For such an ethics has not worked. Uncontrolled ethics has not made the media more ethical. Personal ethics have not spread to the media institutions, and public respect for the media is at an all-time low.

There are many signs of a common ground between journalists. The following examples might serve as evidence for the thesis that once a debate on journalistic ethics has started, common factors rather than cultural ‘clashes’ are to be expected.

1. Objectivity: It is a norm that is central to Western journalism. It is also of growing concern to journalistic federations, and the growing field of media. ‘Objectivity’, however, is a norm that can contain many different approaches. While the hard core is surely the idea of balancing facts and opinions and avoid one-sidedness, different priorities might be given to the importance of social actors and their statements.
2. Sensationalism: It is a form of journalism that is equally resented around the world. In contrast to the concept of pure entertainment journalism, which is particularly popular in the USA, most European journalists and journalists in Eastern countries would certainly underscore the social responsibility of the media, whether they are private or state-owned.
3. Sensitivity: Sensitivity to socio-cultural values is not alien to both East and Western media. In the U.K. as well as in Germany, for example, grave violations of religious feelings by the media are regularly monitored and criticized by professional self-regulating bodies like the German Presserat (as in the case of the ‘Kruzifix-Urteil’). It must be debated, however, how the call for freedom of expression on the one hand and religious integrity on the other hand can be harmonized.
4. Be aware of Peoples’ right to true information: The media must realize that people and individuals have the right to acquire an objective picture of reality by means of accurate and comprehensive information as well as to express themselves freely through the various media of culture and communication.

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5. Media's commitment to objective reality: The main aim of the journalists is to serve the people's right to true and authentic information through an honest dedication to objective reality whereby facts are reported conscientiously in their proper context, pointing out their essential connections and without causing distortions, with due deployment of the creative capacity of the journalist, so that the public is provided with adequate material to facilitate the formation of an accurate and comprehensive picture of the world in which the origin, nature and essence of events, process and states of affairs are understood as objectively as possible.

6. The Social Responsibility of the Journalists: Any information in journalism is understood as social and not as a commodity, which means that the journalist shares responsibility for the information transmitted and is thus accountable not only to those controlling the media but ultimately to the public at large, including various social interests. The journalist's social responsibility requires that he or she will act under all circumstances in conformity with a personal ethical consciousness.

7. Respect for Privacy and Human Dignity: An integral part of the professional standards of the journalist is respect for the right of the individual to privacy and human dignity, in conformity with provisions of international and national law concerning protection of the rights and the reputation of others, prohibiting libel, calumny, slander and defamation.

8. Promote respect for universal values and diversity of cultures: A true journalist stands for the universal values of humanism, above all peace, democracy, human rights, social progress and national liberation, while respecting the distinctive character, value and dignity of each culture, as well as the right of each people freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems. Thus the journalist participates actively in the social transformation towards democratic betterment of society and peace and justice everywhere.

7. CONCLUSION

Christopher Hitchens once said that he became a journalist because he couldn't trust the newspapers anymore. It is a known factor that some of the most prominent, even respectable people in the media are deeply compromised by their proximity to powerful politicians and businessmen. Writers and journalists in most 'developed and developing' countries increasingly constitute a new elite, their distance from the defenceless or the underdog of the society is getting greater. Their membership of the privilege classes is the biggest and most serious change in journalism in recent years. This accounts for a range of intellectual and moral degradation—from the American media's cheerleading of the war in Iraq to the Indian media's disingenuousness on the Kashmir situation. Reflecting on his years as a reporter in China, the distinguished historian John Fairbank pointed out that every journalist is walking on a fault line – of unresolved and ambivalent historic situations—trying to represent it some way in words. It is probably the essence of the journalistic profession ...that reporters deal with ambivalent situations where the outcome is uncertain, the values are mixed, and the sides are in conflict'.

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There should be a political will to stop fake news. There should be a nodal agency to deal with fake news. There should be strict provisions for service providers on fake news issue. Dedicated courts should be established to deal with fake news cases. In India, fake news can have distinct impact of making political changes in the country because constantly feeding information to people which many not be accurate so as to condition their preferences and choices is very easy. Hence focus should be on cyber hygiene, cyber ethics and regulating fake news at the school level. The use of fake news can always be checked through the available tools but since most of the Indians do not use these additional tools on computers, they tend to fall prey to the rumour mongering. Media experts are warning that in a country like India, where social media is spreading fast in spite of the prevailing low literacy, is fraught with dangers. What is needed for the media is a blueprint for the media systems, a kind of controlling mechanism that will ensure both freedom and responsibility!

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