

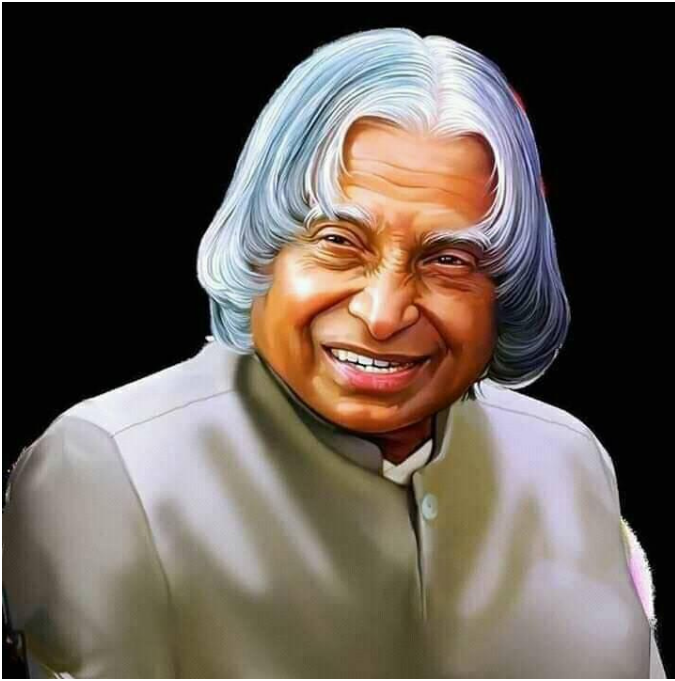
Media Integrity in Digital Era

Priyadharshni Rahul

Advocate, Supreme Court of India



***From The House Of Prime Point Foundation
Chennai***



**Look at the sky. We are not alone.
The whole universe is friendly to us
and conspires only to give the best
to those who dream and work.**

– DR A.P.J.ABDUL KALAM

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First published

September 2024

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ISBN

978-93-91803-78-0

Pages

147

Price:

Free distribution

Printer:

eBook

Publishers:

Prime Point Foundation
14 Vasan Street, T Nagar,
Chennai 600017

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Publisher's Note

Prime Point Foundation is proud to publish the book titled *Media Integrity in Digital Era*, authored by Priyadharshni Rahul, Trustee Secretary of the Prime Point Foundation and Chairman of the Sansad Ratna Awards Committee. Priyadharshni Rahul has been passionately involved in Media related cases as a practising advocate in the Supreme Court of India. As the Editor of India's oldest eMagazine, PreSense, she has meticulously researched the media ethics, law and accountability for over a year, preparing this book to benefit media professionals, students and the public.

Priyadharshni Rahul, a Political Science and Law graduate with a PG in psychology and pursuing a Doctorate in Psychology, has diligently pooled her expertise and learnings to give readers a wholesome understanding of the topic. Prime Point Foundation is pleased to offer this book in both digital and print formats.

We are also grateful to Brother B K Karuna ji, Chairman of the Media Wing of Brahmakumaris, one of the leading spiritual organisations of India, for the Foreword and for permitting us to release the book at Media Conference 2024 at Mount Abu.

We appreciate and congratulate Priyadharshni Rahul for undertaking the important task of writing a book on such a critical and often overlooked topic. We are confident that this book will raise awareness among media professionals and the public.

Prime Point Srinivasan
Founder and Chairman
Prime Point Foundation
September 27, 2024

Foreword



Supreme Father
God Shiva

PRAJAPITA BRAHMA KUMARIS ISHWARIYA VISHWA VIDYALAYA

Over 4000 Raja Yoga Godly Service and Meditation Centres for establishing world peace through global co-operation

Founded in 1937 By world Almighty Authority Incorporate Supreme Father

God Shiva Through The Medium of Prajapita Brahma



Respected K. Srinivasan ji,
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We are extremely happy to know that you are bringing out an E Book on MEDIA INTEGRITY IN DIGITAL ERA which is absolutely essential for serving as a general guideline for Media professionals and practitioners. This is indeed highly useful since Supreme Court Advocate Priyadarshini Rahul has taken a great initiative with your direction in presenting this E book with very valid cases which are quite valuable and useful to the practitioners specially and to everyone in general. We are grateful to you and her contribution.

You are quite aware, that the Media Wing of Brahma Kumaris is continuously over decades striving to support the Media, Public Relations and allied practitioners in ethics and values in their practice. We are grateful to you that this E book would be released at the ensuing National Media Conference at Brahma Kumaris Headquarters at Mount Abu to be held from 26th to 30th September where more than 1000 media and allied functionaries are actively participating. Indeed this would be of great benefit to the participants.

We take this opportunity to compliment both your kind self and sister Priyadarshini Rahul to support Brahma Kumaris with the hidden objective to bring about a Healthy and Happy Society through an ideal empowerment both professionally and Spiritually.

With Warm regards
BK Karuna



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Authors Profile

Priyadharshni Rahul (a) G. Priyadharshni is an Advocate practicing at the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. She is a graduate in political science and passionate about politics, governance and digital journalism. She has worked with Times group as a Manager and also with an NFP organization under Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. She has exhibited leadership skills right from her school days and received Presidents' Award for Scouts and Guides.



As a College student, she led the TN NCC Contingent at the Republic Day parade, Delhi in 2005 and received the Prime Ministers' Award for the same. She was deputed as the Youth Ambassador of India to United Kingdom by the Ministry of Defence, during her cadet days.

She is a known television debater, author, motivational speaker and youth orientor. She has conducted various programs to direct young energies towards constructivism and Nationalism. She is also the recipient of several awards, including 'Dr Abdul Kalam Award of Excellence for Nation Building' in 2020 and 'Visionary of the year Award' by Public Relations Council of India in 2021.

She is currently the Trustee Secretary of Prime Point Foundation, Chairman of Sansad Ratna Awards Committee, and Founder President of Next Gen Political Leaders. She is also the Editor of the eMagazine PreSense, the oldest surviving eZine in the world, which has been in existence for 18 years.

Preface

Calling media the fourth pillar of our constitution is a testament to its significant impact and the perceptions it shapes among the public. Media, in its various forms, such as podcasts, radio, television, social media, and digital platforms, underscores the need for stringent regulations and responsible reporting. In this digital era, where the definition of a journalist has become fluid, maintaining the integrity and passion of journalism hinges on ethical practices and moral principles in news reporting. Media reports influence people profoundly, often more than their cultural background, education, peer groups, and family norms. It can create opinions in minutes and has the power to manipulate individuals' thinking processes, shifting perspectives.

At this juncture, maintaining integrity in media practices is of the utmost importance. Navigating this vast digital expanse beyond government regulations and norms requires every media professional to uphold an impeccable devotion to this esteemed profession. They should realise the amount of trust they enjoy while sharing the facts and news that create the mood of this entire country.

This book aims to serve as a handbook for media professionals, students, enthusiasts, and the general public. With digital media penetration of over 33% in India, we must be cautious and informed about the opinions and news we share.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Prime Point Srinivasan Sir, whose boundless support has been instrumental in releasing this book under the banner of Prime Point Foundation. His

conviction and dedication to realising the dreams of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam is a commendable, persistent effort. I am very grateful to Shri Ramesh Sundaram, Editor in Chief of PreSense, for his support.

I also thank the Brahma Kumaris for agreeing to release the first copy at the International Media Conference 2024 at their headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan. I am deeply grateful to Rajayogi Brother BK Karuna ji, who has graciously shared the foreword for this book, adding immense value and the grace of God.

Priyadharshni Rahul
Advocate, Supreme Court of India
Editor, PreSense

Chapter 1: Foundations of Media Ethics

Introduction

Media ethics serves as the cornerstone for responsible journalism and reporting. The media, as the "Fourth Estate," wields considerable influence in shaping public opinion and holding powerful institutions accountable. However, with this power comes an obligation to operate ethically and responsibly. Ethical dilemmas in media arise from the conflict between professional duties and public interest, and between freedom of speech and protection of individual rights. This chapter will explore the foundational principles of media ethics, discuss ethical theories relevant to the media, and outline the legal implications of ethical violations in the Indian context, citing relevant case studies and judicial judgements.

1.1 Ethical Theories and Their Application to Media

Ethics, at its core, refers to a set of moral principles that guide human conduct. In media, ethical practices ensure that information is disseminated truthfully, fairly, and responsibly. Below are the key ethical theories applied in media:

- **Deontology:** This theory, popularised by Immanuel Kant, emphasises duties and rules. In media ethics, this would mean adhering to the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, and fairness, regardless of the consequences. For instance, revealing the identity of

a rape victim is unethical according to deontological principles, as it violates privacy, even if done with good intentions.

- **Utilitarianism:** Proposed by philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, this theory suggests that the right course of action is the one that results in the greatest good for the greatest number. In media, this could justify publishing controversial information if it benefits the larger public, even if it may harm a few individuals.
- **Virtue Ethics:** This focuses on the character of the moral agent, rather than specific actions. In media, a virtuous journalist would value honesty, integrity, and courage. Ethical journalism should not only abide by rules but be motivated by the desire to promote justice and truth.

Comparison of Ethical Theories in Media

Theory	Core Principle	Application in Media
Deontology	Duty and adherence to rules	Prioritises truth, accuracy, and fairness regardless of consequences
Utilitarianism	Maximising overall good	Balances public interest with potential harm to individuals

Theory	Core Principle	Application in Media
Virtue Ethics	Moral character of the agent	Focuses on the journalist's intention to promote justice and truth

1.2 The Role of Media in Society

The media serves as a watchdog, holding institutions accountable, informing the public, and fostering democratic debate. In India, with its diverse socio-political landscape, the media is both a mirror and a mobiliser. However, these functions come with ethical dilemmas, such as:

- **Truth vs. Sensationalism:** With the rise of 24-hour news cycles, the pressure to break news first often compromises accuracy.
- **Public Interest vs. Privacy:** Balancing the public's right to know with an individual's right to privacy, especially in high-profile cases involving celebrities or politicians.

Case Study 1: The Aarushi Talwar Murder Case

In the infamous Aarushi Talwar murder case (2008), media outlets violated basic ethical norms by publishing speculative and salacious details about the personal lives

of the victim and her family. The media's handling of the case demonstrated how sensationalism could overshadow accuracy and fairness, leading to public misinformation and damaging reputations irreparably. The coverage raised concerns about media ethics in reporting criminal investigations, emphasising the need for stricter regulatory oversight.

1.3 Ethical Standards in Indian Media

Indian media operates under a framework of ethical standards, often formalised through self-regulatory bodies like the **Press Council of India (PCI)**. The PCI has developed a **Norms of Journalistic Conduct**, which outlines basic ethical principles for Indian journalists. These principles include accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and respect for privacy.

Key Ethical Guidelines in Indian Journalism

Guideline	Description
Accuracy and Fairness	News should be fact-checked, accurate, and fair. Speculative journalism is discouraged.
Respect for Privacy	Journalists must respect individuals' privacy, especially in cases involving vulnerable individuals.

Guideline	Description
Avoidance of Sensationalism	Headlines and content should not sensationalise or exaggerate facts.
Right of Reply	Affected individuals should be given the opportunity to present their side of the story.

1.4 Legal Implications of Ethical Violations in India

Media ethics in India is closely tied to legal frameworks that govern the media. Ethical breaches can lead to serious legal consequences, ranging from defamation suits to contempt of court. Below, we outline key legal areas impacted by unethical media practices:

1.4.1 Defamation

Defamation is the publication of a false statement that injures a person's reputation. In India, defamation can be both a civil and a criminal offence under Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The media must navigate this carefully, especially in investigative reporting.

Case Study 2: Subramanian Swamy vs Union of India (2016)

In this case, the Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutionality of criminal defamation under Sections 499 and 500 of the IPC. The judgement affirmed that

freedom of speech is not absolute and must be balanced with the right to reputation, which is also protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution (Right to Life).

1.4.2 Right to Privacy

The media must balance public interest with an individual's right to privacy. The right to privacy was upheld as a fundamental right by the Supreme Court in the landmark **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)** case. The judgement has significant implications for media ethics, particularly in cases where personal information is disclosed without consent.

1.4.3 Contempt of Court

Media outlets can also face contempt of court charges if they publish materials that could prejudice an ongoing judicial proceeding. This is particularly relevant in high-profile cases, where excessive media coverage can influence public opinion and even judicial outcomes.

Case Study 3: Sahara India Real Estate vs Securities & Exchange Board of India (2012)

In this case, the Supreme Court reprimanded media outlets for speculative reporting that could have influenced the outcome of ongoing court proceedings. The case underlined the judiciary's role in restraining the media from engaging in prejudicial coverage.

1.5 Research Data on Ethical Violations in Indian Media

A study conducted by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in 2019 revealed that ethical violations in Indian media are on the rise, especially in the context of digital journalism. The study surveyed 500 media professionals and identified the following key issues:

- **Sensationalism:** 67% of respondents believed that sensationalism in news reporting had increased significantly over the last decade.
- **Paid News:** 43% admitted that the practice of "paid news" (where editorial content is influenced by monetary transactions) was widespread in the industry.
- **Fact-Checking:** 29% of respondents stated that there was insufficient emphasis on fact-checking, particularly in digital newsrooms, due to the pressure to publish quickly.

Ethical Violations Reported in Indian Media (2019)

Violation	Percentage of Media Professionals Reporting
Sensationalism	67%
Paid News	43%

Violation	Percentage of Media Professionals Reporting
Lack of Fact-Checking	29%

1.6 Judicial Oversight and Media Ethics

India's judiciary has played a pivotal role in defining the boundaries of ethical journalism through various landmark judgements. The Supreme Court and High Courts have frequently intervened when media ethics have been violated, thus shaping the media's obligations under the law.

Case Study 4: The Prabha Dutt vs Union of India (1982)

In this case, the Supreme Court deliberated on the right of a journalist to interview prisoners awaiting execution. The Court recognised the importance of press freedom but held that it must be balanced with security concerns and the rights of prisoners. The judgement highlighted the principle that media rights are not absolute and must be tempered by ethical and legal considerations.

Case Study 5: Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India (2020)

The media's role in reporting during crises came under scrutiny in the context of the lockdown in Jammu and Kashmir. The Supreme Court recognised the importance

of free press in a democracy but also upheld the need for restrictions in the interest of national security. This case reflected the delicate balance between press freedom, public interest, and national security concerns.

1.7 Conclusion

Media ethics forms the foundation of responsible journalism, ensuring that the powerful role of the media is exercised with integrity and accountability. The ethical frameworks discussed, such as deontology and utilitarianism, guide journalists in making moral decisions that balance public interest and individual rights. However, when these ethical principles are violated, the consequences can be significant, both morally and legally.

In India, the legal system provides mechanisms to hold media accountable, such as defamation suits, contempt of court charges, and the protection of privacy rights. The judiciary, through various landmark judgements, continues to shape and define the ethical boundaries for media professionals. As Indian media evolves, especially with the rise of digital platforms, maintaining ethical standards becomes ever more critical in protecting the public's trust and ensuring that the media fulfils its role as a pillar of democracy.

Chapter 2: Ethical Standards in Print Media

Introduction

Print media has historically been one of the most significant platforms for disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and acting as a watchdog for society. Despite the rise of digital and broadcast media, print journalism continues to play a vital role, especially in India, where newspapers remain a crucial source of news. However, with this influence comes the responsibility of adhering to ethical standards. Ethical journalism ensures that print media acts as a force for truth, fairness, and accountability.

This chapter delves into the ethical standards that govern print journalism in India, exploring real-life case studies, data, research, and judicial rulings from Indian courts. It examines the potential legal consequences when ethical guidelines are violated, considering laws such as defamation, privacy, and contempt of court.

2.1 Historical Evolution of Ethics in Print Media

The evolution of ethics in print journalism is deeply intertwined with the development of the press as a free institution. In India, the press has played a crucial role in the country's independence movement, with newspapers such as *The Hindu* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* shaping public consciousness. Post-independence, the press has continued to be a critical

instrument for democratic governance, yet the increasing commercialisation of news has often posed ethical dilemmas.

Key Milestones in the Evolution of Indian Print Media

- **Pre-Independence Era:** Newspapers were the primary vehicle for promoting the freedom struggle. Ethical journalism focused on nationalist goals, but many early Indian journalists walked a fine line between activism and ethics.
- **Post-Independence:** With the establishment of democracy, media ethics shifted towards principles such as objectivity, accuracy, and fairness, guided by institutions like the **Press Council of India (PCI)**, established in 1966 to uphold journalistic standards.

2.2 Ethical Principles in Print Media

The ethical principles guiding print media are largely aligned with universal journalistic values, but are also shaped by the socio-political landscape of India. The **Press Council of India's Norms of Journalistic Conduct** provide a formalised ethical code for Indian journalists, covering aspects such as accuracy, impartiality, respect for privacy, and editorial independence.

Core Ethical Principles of Print Media in India

Principle	Description
Accuracy and Objectivity	News must be truthful, accurate, and free from bias. Fact-checking is crucial before publication.
Fairness and Impartiality	Journalists should cover stories fairly, offering balanced perspectives.
Accountability	Errors should be acknowledged and corrected promptly.
Respect for Privacy	Individual privacy must be respected, particularly in sensitive matters like health or family.
Independence	Journalists must avoid conflicts of interest, including external influences such as advertisers or political parties.

2.3 Ethical Dilemmas in Indian Print Media

Ethical issues in Indian print media are influenced by various factors such as political pressure, economic interests, and the speed at which news is consumed. Some of the most common ethical challenges include:

2.3.1 Paid News

The practice of "paid news," where editorial space is sold to advertisers under the guise of genuine news, has become a critical issue in India. A **2009 report by the Press Council of India** revealed widespread paid news practices during elections, particularly among regional newspapers.

Case Study 1: The Paid News Scandal

In 2009, *The Hindu* conducted an internal investigation and revealed that several politicians had paid newspapers to publish favourable coverage during elections. This scandal highlighted the extent to which political parties could manipulate the media and erode journalistic integrity. It also raised concerns about the role of the Election Commission in monitoring such unethical practices.

2.3.2 Sensationalism and Yellow Journalism

Sensationalism in print media involves the over-dramatisation of news, often at the expense of accuracy or public welfare. Tabloid journalism and exaggerated headlines can sometimes distort facts, undermining the media's credibility.

Case Study 2: The Aarushi Talwar Case

The murder of 14-year-old Aarushi Talwar in 2008 saw widespread media speculation and sensational reporting by numerous print outlets. Newspapers published

speculative and salacious stories about the victim and her family, most of which were later proven false. The case illustrates the dangers of compromising accuracy and fairness in pursuit of sensational headlines.

2.3.3 Bias and Partisanship

Indian print media has also been accused of partisanship, where newspapers and journalists show overt bias towards particular political parties, religious groups, or economic classes. Such biases can lead to skewed reporting and misinformation.

2.4 Research Data on Ethical Violations in Print Media

A survey conducted by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in 2021 sought to understand the prevalence of ethical violations in Indian print media. The study gathered responses from 600 journalists across India and highlighted key concerns:

- **Paid News:** 54% of respondents admitted to witnessing paid news practices in their organisations.
- **Bias:** 45% of respondents acknowledged editorial pressure to align news stories with the publisher's political or business interests.
- **Sensationalism:** 38% of respondents indicated that sensational headlines are used frequently to drive newspaper sales.

Prevalence of Ethical Violations in Indian Print Media (CMS Survey, 2021)

Ethical Violation	Percentage of Journalists Reporting
Paid News	54%
Editorial Bias	45%
Sensationalism	38%
Lack of Fact-Checking	31%

2.5 Legal Implications of Ethical Violations in Print Media

While ethical violations can damage the credibility of print media, they also have significant legal consequences. Indian law provides a robust framework to ensure that ethical breaches, particularly those involving defamation, privacy, and contempt of court, are dealt with appropriately.

2.5.1 Defamation Law in India

Defamation is a key concern for print media, particularly when inaccurate or biased reporting damages the reputation of individuals or organisations. Under Indian

law, defamation can be both a civil and a criminal offence under **Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.

Case Study 3: Defamation Suit Against *The Times of India*

In 2018, a prominent businessman filed a defamation suit against *The Times of India* for publishing an allegedly defamatory article accusing him of financial improprieties. The court found that the newspaper had not substantiated its claims, leading to a hefty fine and a public apology. This case underlines the importance of rigorous fact-checking before publication.

2.5.2 Right to Privacy

The right to privacy, upheld as a fundamental right by the **Supreme Court of India in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)**, has significant implications for print media. Journalists must be cautious when reporting on personal matters, especially in cases involving public figures, medical information, or family issues.

Case Study 4: R. Rajagopal vs State of Tamil Nadu (1994)

In this landmark case, the Supreme Court ruled that the media cannot publish private information about an individual without their consent unless it serves the public interest. The case involved a journalist's attempt to publish the autobiography of a convicted prisoner without his approval, highlighting the limits of media freedom in relation to personal privacy.

2.5.3 Contempt of Court

Print media can be held in contempt of court if it publishes material that could prejudice an ongoing case or interfere with the judicial process. This includes speculative reporting that may sway public opinion during trials.

Case Study 5: Sahara India Real Estate Corp. vs Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) (2012)

In this case, the Supreme Court issued a gag order preventing the media from publishing speculative reports about the ongoing investigation. The Court held that such reporting could influence judicial proceedings and damage public perception of justice. This case exemplifies the balance that must be maintained between press freedom and the integrity of judicial processes.

2.6 Judicial Oversight of Ethical Violations in Print Media

The Indian judiciary has played a crucial role in safeguarding ethical standards in print media. The courts have frequently intervened when media outlets have crossed ethical lines, ensuring that journalistic freedom is balanced with accountability.

Case Study 6: The Zee News vs Navjot Singh Sidhu Case (2004)

In this case, the Supreme Court held that the media's duty to inform must not come at the cost of impartiality and fairness. A defamatory news story published by Zee News about cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu led to a high-profile defamation suit. The court ruled in favour of Sidhu, stressing that the media must uphold its ethical obligations and respect the truth.

2.7 Role of Self-Regulation in Upholding Media Ethics

The **Press Council of India (PCI)**, established under the Press Council Act of 1978, is tasked with maintaining standards of journalistic ethics in print media. Although the PCI has no punitive powers, it provides guidance and can issue warnings or reprimands for violations of ethical norms.

Case Study 7: PCI's Censure of *The Pioneer*

In 2015, the PCI issued a censure to *The Pioneer* for publishing an article that made unsubstantiated claims about a public figure's involvement in corruption. Although the PCI could not issue legal penalties, its censure acted as a significant moral reprimand, signalling the importance of ethical integrity in journalism. This case demonstrates how self-regulatory bodies like the PCI can influence media practices, even in the absence of direct legal consequences.

2.8 Challenges to Ethical Journalism in the Era of Digital Convergence

The digital transformation has blurred the lines between traditional print media and online platforms, leading to new ethical challenges. The need for rapid publishing, combined with the viral nature of online content, has increased the risks of misinformation and unethical reporting.

2.8.1 Impact of Digital Platforms on Print Media Ethics

While print media traditionally followed stringent editorial checks, the integration of digital platforms has led to a competitive pressure to publish stories faster, often compromising fact-checking and accuracy.

Case Study 8: The Cobrapost Sting Operation (2018)

Cobrapost, a digital investigative journalism platform, conducted a sting operation revealing that several major newspapers and media houses were willing to publish paid news and manipulate coverage in exchange for money. The operation highlighted how ethical lapses in print media were exacerbated by commercial pressures, especially in the context of online content.

Ethical Challenges in the Digital Era for Print Media

Challenge	Description
Speed over Accuracy	Increased pressure to publish news quickly has led to a decrease in rigorous fact-checking.
Clickbait Sensationalism	Headlines designed to attract clicks often sacrifice journalistic integrity for engagement.
Commercialisation	Advertising and sponsored content increasingly influence editorial decisions, compromising ethics.

2.9 The Role of Media Education in Promoting Ethical Journalism

A crucial component of upholding media ethics lies in education and training. Indian journalism schools and media institutions must ensure that ethical practices are embedded in the curriculum. Media literacy, fact-checking, and responsible reporting should be core aspects of journalism education.

Recommended Components of Ethical Journalism Education

Component	Description
Media Law and Ethics	Courses on media laws such as defamation, privacy, and freedom of the press.
Fact-Checking and Verification	Training on verifying information before publication.
Digital Media Literacy	Education on the ethical use of digital platforms and the risks associated with misinformation.

2.10 Conclusion

Ethical standards in print media are not just an abstract concept; they are the foundation of a trustworthy press that informs the public while respecting individual rights and societal responsibilities. In India, the tension between commercial pressures, political interests, and the need for rapid news dissemination has often tested these ethical boundaries. However, the legal framework, supported by institutions such as the Press Council of India and the judiciary, provides mechanisms to ensure accountability.

This chapter has explored how ethical principles—such as accuracy, impartiality, and respect for privacy—are vital to the functioning of print media. Through case studies and real-world data, we have seen how ethical violations can lead to legal consequences, damaging not only individuals and institutions but also the media’s credibility. Moving forward, the challenge for Indian print media will be to uphold these standards, particularly in the face of digital transformation and the changing nature of news consumption.

Chapter 3: Ethics in Broadcast Media

Introduction

Broadcast media, encompassing television and radio, is one of the most powerful mediums of mass communication in India. With its wide reach and influence, broadcast media has the ability to shape public opinion, inform citizens, and even influence political outcomes. However, this power comes with a significant ethical responsibility. Ethical lapses in broadcast journalism can have far-reaching consequences, particularly in a country as diverse and politically sensitive as India.

This chapter explores the ethical standards that govern broadcast media in India, focusing on the challenges and dilemmas that professionals face in adhering to these standards. We will discuss various case studies, judicial rulings from Indian courts, research data, and the legal framework that governs the ethical conduct of broadcast journalism.

3.1 Evolution of Broadcast Media in India

Broadcast media in India has evolved from being a state-controlled entity to a more liberalised, private-sector-driven industry. Until the 1990s, **Doordarshan** and **All India Radio (AIR)**, both government-controlled, dominated the broadcast landscape. These platforms

followed strict guidelines, and content was largely filtered through a government lens.

The liberalisation of the media sector in the early 1990s saw the advent of private television channels and radio stations, leading to an explosion in content variety but also raising concerns about ethical standards. As competition grew, so did the temptation to sensationalise news, promote biased views, or prioritise commercial interests over public welfare.

3.2 Core Ethical Principles in Broadcast Media

The ethical principles that guide broadcast media are designed to ensure that journalists and media houses operate with integrity, accuracy, and fairness. Some of the key ethical standards include:

3.2.1 Accuracy and Fairness

Accuracy is the cornerstone of journalism, and broadcast media is no exception. Broadcasting misinformation, whether intentionally or through negligence, can lead to public harm. Fairness ensures that reporting is impartial and free from bias.

3.2.2 Objectivity and Impartiality

Broadcast media, particularly news channels, must maintain objectivity. This means reporting facts without injecting personal or organisational bias. Impartiality is especially crucial during elections or politically sensitive times when media can sway public opinion.

3.2.3 Privacy and Sensitivity

Broadcast media must respect the privacy of individuals, especially in sensitive situations such as crimes, accidents, and family disputes. In a highly connected world, one wrong broadcast can destroy an individual’s reputation, often beyond repair.

3.2.4 Avoidance of Sensationalism

Sensationalism is the exaggeration or dramatization of news stories to attract viewers. While it may boost ratings, it can also mislead the public and cause unnecessary panic or unrest. Ethical broadcast journalism avoids this at all costs.

Core Ethical Principles in Broadcast Journalism

Ethical Principle	Description
Accuracy	Ensuring all facts are correct before broadcast.
Fairness	Providing balanced viewpoints and allowing subjects to present their side of the story.
Objectivity and Impartiality	Reporting facts without bias, especially in political and controversial issues.

Ethical Principle	Description
Privacy	Respecting personal boundaries and not broadcasting sensitive private information.
Avoidance of Sensationalism	Avoiding exaggerated or dramatic news presentations to attract viewership at the cost of truth.

3.3 Ethical Dilemmas in Indian Broadcast Media

With the advent of 24-hour news channels, Indian broadcast media faces significant ethical dilemmas. News channels, in particular, are under constant pressure to break news first, often at the expense of accuracy and fairness.

3.3.1 Sensationalism and TRP (Television Rating Points) War

The competition for TRPs has led to a decline in journalistic standards. Many news channels resort to sensationalism, over-hyping stories, and even distorting facts to grab the attention of viewers. This has resulted in ethical violations, particularly during high-profile cases.

Case Study 1: The Sushant Singh Rajput Case (2020)

The death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput saw widespread media coverage, with numerous television channels airing sensationalised content. Many channels speculated about the reasons behind his death, with some accusing his girlfriend, Rhea Chakraborty, of being involved in his death without substantive evidence. This led to a witch-hunt, infringing on her privacy and reputation. The unethical reporting raised significant concerns about the role of broadcast media in such sensitive cases.

3.3.2 Political Bias and Propaganda

Broadcast media, particularly news channels, have often been accused of political bias, favouring one party or ideology over others. This undermines the role of the media as a neutral platform for debate and discussion.

Case Study 2: The Election Coverage Bias

During the 2019 Indian general elections, several television channels were accused of exhibiting a clear political bias in their coverage, particularly towards the ruling party. Such bias violates the ethical principles of fairness and impartiality, raising questions about the independence of broadcast journalism in India.

3.3.3 Trial by Media

In recent years, the practice of "trial by media" has become a common occurrence in India. Broadcast media often delivers judgments in high-profile cases before courts have a chance to do so. This not only undermines the judicial process but can also lead to reputational damage for individuals involved.

Case Study 3: Aarushi Talwar and Hemraj Murder Case (2008)

In the Aarushi Talwar murder case, the media portrayed the parents, Rajesh and Nupur Talwar, as the prime suspects, with many channels broadcasting speculative content. This created a public perception of guilt, even though the courts had not yet ruled on the case. When the Talwars were acquitted by the Allahabad High Court in 2017, it exposed the media's role in creating a false narrative.

3.4 Legal Framework Governing Broadcast Media in India

Broadcast media in India is regulated by various legal frameworks that seek to ensure ethical standards are upheld. These laws cover defamation, privacy, contempt of court, and the broader responsibilities of broadcasters.

3.4.1 The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995

This act governs cable television broadcasting in India. It mandates that broadcasters adhere to a prescribed code of conduct and prohibits content that is obscene, defamatory, or injurious to public morality. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has the power to suspend or revoke licenses if these guidelines are violated.

3.4.2 The Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC)

The BCCC, established by the Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF), is a self-regulatory body that addresses complaints related to content aired on television channels. While it provides a mechanism for redressing grievances, it lacks the authority to impose stringent penalties, which limits its effectiveness.

3.5 Judicial Interventions in Ethical Violations of Broadcast Media

Indian courts have played a significant role in shaping the ethical boundaries of broadcast media. Several landmark judgments from the Supreme Court and High Courts have provided guidance on how media should operate in a responsible and ethical manner.

3.5.1 Right to Privacy vs. Public Interest

The Supreme Court's judgement in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)** affirmed the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. This judgement has critical implications for broadcast media, especially when reporting on personal matters.

Case Study 4: The Right to Privacy – R. Rajagopal vs State of Tamil Nadu (1994)

In the *R. Rajagopal* case, the Supreme Court ruled that the media cannot publish personal details about an individual without their consent unless it is in the public interest. This case involved the publication of a convict's autobiography, where the media was accused of violating his privacy. The court upheld the convict's right to privacy, laying down important precedents for future cases.

3.5.2 Contempt of Court

Broadcast media must be careful not to influence ongoing judicial proceedings. The law of contempt of court ensures that media outlets do not publish content that could prejudice trials.

Case Study 5: Sahara India Real Estate Corporation vs Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) (2012)

In this case, the Supreme Court issued a restraining order preventing media houses from publishing

speculative reports about the ongoing SEBI investigation. The Court found that such speculative reporting could adversely impact the judicial process. This judgement reinforced the importance of maintaining objectivity and restraint in reporting on ongoing legal matters.

3.5.3 Defamation

Defamation laws in India, under Sections 499 and 500 of the IPC, apply equally to broadcast media. If a broadcast is found to damage the reputation of an individual or organisation, the affected party can seek both civil and criminal remedies.

Case Study 6: Defamation Suit Against Zee News

In 2016, *Zee News* faced a defamation suit filed by a prominent business figure who alleged that the channel had aired false and defamatory content about him. The court ruled in favour of the plaintiff, leading to damages and a public apology from the channel. This case illustrates the potential legal repercussions of unethical reporting.

3.6 Research Data on Ethical Violations in Indian Broadcast Media

A study conducted by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in 2020 revealed the growing public concern regarding unethical practices in Indian broadcast journalism. The study surveyed 700 media professionals

and 1,000 consumers, highlighting key issues such as sensationalism, political bias, and invasion of privacy.

Survey on Public Perception of Ethical Violations in Indian Broadcast Media (CMS Survey, 2020)

Ethical Violation	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Concern
Sensationalism in News	65%
Political Bias	58%
Invasion of Privacy	47%
Trial by Media	43%
Misinformation/Fake News	39%

The survey indicated that many media professionals and the public were concerned about the decline in ethical standards in broadcast media. Sensationalism and political bias were identified as the most common ethical violations, with the public expressing increasing dissatisfaction with the lack of balanced and accurate reporting.

3.7 The Impact of Ethical Violations on Public Trust

The rise in ethical violations has led to a notable decline in public trust in broadcast media. In a country as diverse

and politically vibrant as India, the role of broadcast media as a reliable source of information is critical. However, continuous ethical breaches, including the promotion of partisan views, invasion of privacy, and the broadcast of sensationalist content, have eroded this trust.

Research Data on Public Trust in Broadcast Media

A **Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2021)** found that public trust in Indian news media had dropped significantly, with only **38%** of respondents expressing confidence in television news as a reliable source of information. This compares unfavourably to earlier years when trust in television news was much higher.

Decline in Public Trust in Broadcast Media (Reuters, 2021)

Year	Percentage of Trust in Television News
2015	55%
2018	44%
2021	38%

The downward trend in public trust reflects the growing dissatisfaction with the ethical lapses seen in Indian

broadcast journalism. If this trend continues, it could significantly harm the credibility of the industry.

3.8 The Role of Self-Regulation and Accountability

While Indian broadcast media is regulated to some extent by the government, self-regulation plays a critical role in maintaining ethical standards. Organisations such as the **News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA)** and the **Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC)** provide mechanisms for the public to report ethical violations. However, the effectiveness of these bodies has been questioned, particularly regarding their ability to impose meaningful penalties on violators.

3.8.1 News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA)

The NBSA, set up by the **News Broadcasters Association (NBA)**, is a self-regulatory body responsible for addressing ethical complaints against news channels. While it can issue fines and recommend corrective actions, it lacks the statutory powers needed to enforce these measures stringently.

Case Study 7: NBSA Censure of TV Channels for Sensational Coverage

In 2018, the NBSA censured several news channels for their sensationalist coverage of the Gauri Lankesh murder case, where unverified accusations were aired without sufficient evidence. While the NBSA's censure highlighted the need for restraint in coverage, critics

pointed out that stronger penalties would be required to prevent future violations.

3.8.2 The Need for Stricter Regulation

Given the shortcomings of self-regulatory bodies, many media experts have called for more stringent government regulations to hold broadcasters accountable. However, such moves must balance the need for ethical accountability with the protection of free speech and press freedom.

3.9 Media Literacy and Ethical Awareness in Broadcast Journalism

Education plays a key role in promoting ethical standards in broadcast media. Journalism schools in India must incorporate robust courses on media law, ethics, and responsible reporting practices. By instilling a strong ethical foundation in future media professionals, the industry can begin to rebuild its credibility.

Components of Ethical Education for Broadcast Journalists

Component	Description
Media Law and Ethics	Courses covering defamation, privacy rights, and regulations in broadcasting.

Component	Description
Fact-Checking and Verification	Training journalists to verify information before airing it.
Objectivity and Fairness	Ensuring that journalists understand the importance of impartial reporting.
Digital and Broadcast Integration	Training journalists on the ethical use of digital media alongside traditional platforms.

3.10 Conclusion

Broadcast media in India wields enormous influence, and with that influence comes a significant ethical responsibility. While the media’s role as the "fourth estate" remains vital to democracy, its credibility has been increasingly compromised by unethical practices such as sensationalism, political bias, and trial by media. The case studies discussed in this chapter highlight the dangerous consequences of such violations, not only for individuals but also for public trust in the media.

India’s legal framework, which includes defamation laws, privacy protections, and contempt of court regulations, provides a solid foundation for addressing ethical breaches in broadcast journalism. However, the challenge lies in the effective enforcement of these laws

and the role of self-regulation within the industry. The judiciary has stepped in to correct some of the most glaring ethical lapses, but more robust oversight may be needed to ensure that broadcasters adhere to their ethical obligations.

The future of broadcast journalism in India hinges on a commitment to ethical integrity. This requires stronger regulatory mechanisms, greater accountability for violators, and a renewed focus on media education. By upholding ethical standards, Indian broadcast media can restore public trust and continue to serve as a force for truth and accountability in the democratic process.

Chapter 4: Ethical Challenges in Digital Journalism

Introduction

Digital journalism has revolutionised the way news is created, consumed, and distributed. With the advent of online platforms, blogs, social media, and instant news updates, the role of journalists has expanded beyond traditional print and broadcast media. While digital journalism brings unparalleled speed and accessibility, it also presents significant ethical challenges, including the rapid spread of misinformation, privacy violations, and pressures to prioritise engagement over accuracy.

In this chapter, we explore the ethical challenges unique to digital journalism in India, with a focus on case studies, research data, and legal implications. We will also examine judicial rulings by Indian courts that shape the ethical landscape for digital media professionals. For students and media professionals alike, understanding these challenges is crucial to maintaining ethical integrity in a fast-paced digital environment.

4.1 The Rise of Digital Journalism in India

India's digital landscape has experienced exponential growth in recent years. With more than 700 million internet users, the country ranks among the world's largest digital markets. The proliferation of smartphones and affordable data plans has allowed millions of people

to access news on digital platforms. Traditional media outlets have transitioned to online platforms, while entirely digital-native news organisations have emerged.

Key Milestones in Indian Digital Journalism

- **2000s:** Early online versions of traditional newspapers (e.g., *The Times of India*, *The Hindu*).
- **2010s:** Rise of digital-native platforms like *The Wire*, *Scroll*, *Quint*, *NewsLaundry*, and *Alt News*.
- **2020:** Shift towards digital-only consumption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as physical newspapers faced distribution challenges.

The shift to digital has presented new ethical dilemmas, such as the balance between speed and accuracy, the pressures of clickbait, and the responsible use of user-generated content.

4.2 Ethical Principles in Digital Journalism

Digital journalism is governed by the same core ethical principles as traditional journalism but with additional challenges posed by the speed, interactivity, and decentralisation of online platforms. Some key ethical principles for digital journalism include:

4.2.1 Accuracy and Verification

With the ease of publishing online, ensuring the accuracy of news becomes crucial. Digital platforms often prioritise speed over thorough fact-checking, which can result in the spread of misinformation.

4.2.2 Accountability and Transparency

In digital journalism, accountability is essential. Journalists and media platforms should be transparent about their sources, the methodology behind their reporting, and any potential conflicts of interest. Corrections and clarifications should be made quickly and prominently.

4.2.3 Privacy and Consent

In the digital age, personal information can easily be disseminated without consent. Journalists must ensure that they respect the privacy of individuals, especially when dealing with vulnerable groups or sensitive information.

4.2.4 Avoidance of Clickbait and Sensationalism

The competitive nature of digital journalism can lead to sensationalism or clickbait headlines designed to attract readers. While this may increase traffic, it undermines the ethical obligation to provide truthful and meaningful information.

Ethical Principles for Digital Journalism

Principle	Description
Accuracy	Ensuring information is verified before publishing.

Principle	Description
Accountability and Transparency	Journalists must disclose their methods, sources, and correct mistakes publicly and promptly.
Privacy and Consent	Respecting the privacy of individuals and ensuring consent, especially in sensitive cases.
Avoidance of Sensationalism	Reporting should not be exaggerated or intended solely to attract views.

4.3 Ethical Dilemmas in Indian Digital Journalism

India’s digital journalism space faces unique ethical challenges. While traditional media has its own set of issues, the rapid pace, ease of publication, and highly interactive nature of digital platforms introduce new problems for journalists.

4.3.1 Misinformation and Fake News

Misinformation is one of the biggest challenges in digital journalism. In the race to be first, journalists and media organisations sometimes bypass thorough fact-checking, leading to the dissemination of false or misleading information. Social media amplifies these inaccuracies, often leading to real-world consequences.

Case Study 1: The JNU Sedition Row (2016)

In 2016, several news outlets and digital platforms published doctored videos purportedly showing students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) shouting anti-national slogans. These videos quickly spread across digital platforms, inflaming public sentiment. Later investigations revealed that the videos were edited to present a misleading narrative. The ethical lapse in verifying these videos before publication contributed to the vilification of individuals involved and exacerbated political tensions.

4.3.2 The Pressure to Monetise Clicks and Engagement

Digital journalism often depends on advertising revenue, which is tied to web traffic. This pressure leads to the creation of clickbait articles designed to generate views rather than deliver substantive content. Ethical journalism, however, must prioritise meaningful content over monetisation.

4.3.3 User-Generated Content and Verification Challenges

The rise of social media has introduced user-generated content (UGC) as a critical source for digital journalism. While UGC can provide valuable eyewitness accounts, verifying the authenticity of such content is challenging. Ethical journalism demands that digital media verify UGC before publishing or linking to it, as failure to do so can result in the spread of misinformation.

4.4 Research Data on Ethical Challenges in Indian Digital Journalism

A study conducted by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in 2021 revealed the extent of ethical challenges faced by digital journalists in India. The study surveyed 500 digital journalists and found that:

- **65%** of respondents admitted to facing pressure to publish stories quickly, often compromising accuracy.
- **48%** stated that the demand for high engagement led to the use of sensationalist headlines or clickbait.
- **35%** reported challenges in verifying user-generated content.
- **23%** acknowledged that commercial interests sometimes influenced editorial decisions.

Ethical Challenges Faced by Indian Digital Journalists (CMS Survey, 2021)

Ethical Challenge	Percentage of Respondents Reporting
Pressure to publish stories quickly	65%
Sensationalist headlines/clickbait	48%

Ethical Challenge	Percentage of Respondents Reporting
Difficulty in verifying user-generated content	35%
Commercial interests influencing content	23%

4.5 Legal Framework Governing Digital Journalism in India

Digital journalism, like traditional journalism, is subject to various legal frameworks that govern defamation, privacy, intellectual property, and content regulation. However, the decentralised and borderless nature of the internet presents unique legal challenges.

4.5.1 Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act)

The **Information Technology Act, 2000** is the primary legislation governing digital content in India. The Act provides for legal recognition of electronic documents and outlines various offences related to digital content, such as publishing obscene material, cyber defamation, and identity theft. Amendments to the Act in 2008 introduced penalties for the dissemination of sexually explicit content or content that could incite violence.

4.5.2 Defamation Laws

Digital journalists are subject to the same defamation laws as their counterparts in print and broadcast media. Under **Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**, defamation is both a civil and a criminal offence. Defamation cases involving digital journalists have risen in recent years, particularly as social media amplifies potentially defamatory content.

Case Study 2: Defamation Case Against *The Wire*

In 2017, digital news platform *The Wire* was sued for defamation by businessman Jay Shah, the son of then BJP president Amit Shah. *The Wire* had published an article alleging a sharp increase in the revenue of Jay Shah's company following the BJP's rise to power. The case sparked a debate on the freedom of digital media, journalistic ethics, and the limits of defamation laws. Though *The Wire* stood by its report, the case highlighted the legal risks associated with investigative reporting in the digital space.

4.5.3 Copyright and Intellectual Property

Digital journalism must also navigate copyright laws, especially when using third-party content, images, or videos. The **Copyright Act, 1957** protects the intellectual property rights of creators, and violations can lead to legal action.

4.5.4 Intermediary Guidelines (2021)

The **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** introduced new regulations for social media platforms, digital news outlets, and streaming services. These rules require digital news platforms to adhere to a code of ethics and establish grievance redressal mechanisms. The guidelines mandate that digital news portals register with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, bringing digital journalism closer to regulatory oversight.

Key Legal Provisions Governing Digital Journalism in India

Law/Regulation	Description
Information Technology Act, 2000	Governs digital content and prescribes penalties for offences such as publishing obscene material or cyber defamation.
Indian Penal Code (Sections 499 and 500)	Provides for civil and criminal liability for defamation, including online defamation.
Copyright Act, 1957	Protects the intellectual property rights of creators, relevant for digital content sharing.

Law/Regulation	Description
Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines), 2021	Introduces ethical guidelines and regulatory oversight for digital news platforms.

4.6 Judicial Interventions on Ethical Violations in Digital Journalism

The Indian judiciary has increasingly intervened in cases involving ethical violations in digital journalism. The Supreme Court and High Courts have issued key judgements that address issues such as defamation, privacy, and content regulation in the digital space. These rulings have set important precedents for digital journalists and have shaped the ethical and legal landscape.

4.6.1 Right to Privacy

The **Right to Privacy**, affirmed by the Supreme Court in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)**, is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. This judgement has significant implications for digital journalism, particularly when reporting on personal information without consent. Journalists in the digital sphere must now navigate the fine line between public interest and privacy invasion.

Case Study 3: Privacy Violation in Digital Media

In a 2020 case, a digital news outlet published personal details of a high-profile celebrity's family dispute, including sensitive financial information and private conversations. The individual sued the outlet for invasion of privacy, citing the *Puttaswamy* judgement. The Delhi High Court ruled in favour of the plaintiff, ordering the removal of the article and imposing a fine on the outlet. This case highlights how digital platforms can be held accountable for privacy violations, especially in the post-*Puttaswamy* era.

4.6.2 Contempt of Court

The issue of "trial by media" has come under scrutiny in the digital age, where platforms often publish speculative or prejudicial content about ongoing legal cases. Courts have intervened to maintain the integrity of the judicial process and prevent media platforms from influencing public opinion before a verdict is reached.

Case Study 4: Arnab Goswami and Republic TV

In 2020, the Supreme Court issued a warning to Republic TV, a prominent news channel with a significant digital presence, for airing content that was deemed prejudicial to an ongoing case. The Court emphasised the importance of not conducting media trials that could interfere with the administration of justice. This ruling underscores the need for digital platforms to exercise restraint and avoid publishing content that may be viewed as contempt of court.

4.6.3 Defamation in the Digital Space

Digital journalists are increasingly facing defamation suits, as the spread of news through online platforms can reach a wider audience more rapidly than traditional media. The ease of sharing content has raised concerns over the unchecked dissemination of defamatory material.

Case Study 5: Rajdeep Sardesai's Defamation Case (2021)

In 2021, senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai was sued for defamation by a political leader for allegedly spreading misinformation via Twitter, a prominent digital platform. Sardesai had tweeted about the involvement of the leader in a protest-related violence case, which was later found to be inaccurate. The High Court ruled that even tweets, considered as part of digital journalism, could be held to defamation standards if they damage an individual's reputation.

4.7 Misinformation and Fake News in Digital Journalism

The rise of digital journalism has coincided with the proliferation of fake news and misinformation. Digital platforms often lack the editorial oversight traditionally associated with print and broadcast media, leading to the unchecked spread of false information. This has had significant societal impacts, ranging from misinformation

during elections to false health information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case Study 6: COVID-19 Misinformation (2020-2021)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms in India were flooded with misinformation about the virus, vaccines, and treatments. In April 2020, the Supreme Court directed media outlets to verify facts with official sources before publishing COVID-19-related content. The ruling came after a surge in misinformation that caused widespread panic. The Court’s intervention highlighted the responsibility of digital journalists to ensure accuracy, particularly during crises.

Common Misinformation Themes in Digital Journalism (2020 CMS Report)

Misinformation Theme	Percentage of Misinformation Instances
Health (COVID-19 treatments, vaccines)	38%
Political (fake election news)	25%
Social unrest (communal tensions)	20%

Misinformation Theme	Percentage of Misinformation Instances
Economic (financial scams, unemployment)	17%

4.8 Ethical Reporting on Social Media

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become integral to digital journalism. However, the use of these platforms raises ethical concerns, especially when journalists share unverified information or engage in personal opinions that may conflict with their professional roles.

4.8.1 Verification of Social Media Content

Journalists frequently source news from social media, especially during breaking news events. However, the ease of sharing unverified information on these platforms means that journalists must be cautious about using such content without verification. Failure to do so can lead to the spread of false or misleading information.

Case Study 7: False Reporting on Farmers' Protests (2021)

During the 2021 farmers' protests in India, several digital news outlets shared images and videos from social media that purportedly showed violent clashes

between protestors and the police. Upon investigation, it was revealed that many of these images were either from previous unrelated protests or were doctored. The incident highlighted the ethical importance of verifying user-generated content before it is broadcast on digital platforms.

4.8.2 The Role of Algorithms in Shaping Content

Social media platforms use algorithms to prioritise content that generates high engagement, often at the expense of accuracy or quality. This leads to a preference for sensationalist or controversial content, contributing to the ethical decline in journalism.

Impact of Social Media Algorithms on Digital Journalism

Impact	Description
Amplification of sensationalism	Algorithms prioritise content that sparks outrage or engagement over factual reporting.
Decline in fact-checking	Speed of dissemination often bypasses editorial checks for accuracy.
Echo chambers and bias	Algorithms reinforce existing user biases by showing content that aligns with their views.

4.9 Media Literacy and Ethical Journalism in the Digital Age

Media literacy is essential in promoting ethical journalism as the digital landscape continues to evolve. Journalists must be trained to navigate the ethical challenges unique to digital platforms, including verifying online sources, avoiding clickbait, and understanding the legal implications of digital content.

Recommendations for Media Literacy Programmes in India

- 1. Fact-Checking and Verification Training:** Journalists should receive training in digital verification tools and fact-checking processes, especially for user-generated content.
- 2. Ethical Use of Social Media:** Journalists must be educated on the ethical use of social media, understanding how their personal opinions can impact their professional credibility.
- 3. Understanding Digital Law:** Journalists should be trained in the legal frameworks that govern digital journalism, including defamation laws, privacy rights, and intellectual property protections.

4.10 Conclusion

Digital journalism has transformed the media landscape in India, providing unparalleled access to information and new opportunities for storytelling. However, it has also introduced significant ethical challenges, including

misinformation, the pressures of monetisation, and the need for constant verification in an age of user-generated content.

The legal framework governing digital journalism, from the Information Technology Act to defamation and privacy laws, provides a robust foundation for ensuring accountability. Judicial interventions, such as the *Puttaswamy* ruling on privacy and the Supreme Court's warnings against media trials, have reinforced the need for ethical standards in digital reporting.

For journalists and media professionals, maintaining ethical integrity in digital journalism requires a commitment to accuracy, transparency, and accountability. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, so too must the ethical frameworks that guide this powerful medium.

Chapter 5: Social Media Ethics and Influencer Responsibility

Introduction

Social media has transformed the way information is disseminated, shared, and consumed. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have empowered individuals to become broadcasters in their own right, giving rise to influencers—people with the power to affect public opinion through their vast followings. While social media democratizes communication and allows for more voices to be heard, it also presents significant ethical challenges, particularly regarding misinformation, privacy violations, and the responsibilities of influencers.

In this chapter, we explore the ethical challenges in social media and the evolving responsibilities of influencers, with particular reference to the Indian context. We will review case studies, data, and research findings, alongside relevant legal frameworks and judicial rulings from Indian High Courts and the Supreme Court. By understanding these ethical concerns, students and media professionals can navigate the complexities of social media while upholding ethical principles.

5.1 The Growth of Social Media in India

India is one of the largest social media markets in the world, with over 500 million active social media users as

of 2023. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram dominate, while Twitter is a key platform for political discourse and journalism. The widespread use of smartphones and affordable data plans has further fuelled this growth.

Social Media Penetration in India (2023)

Platform	Active Users
WhatsApp	487 million
Facebook	410 million
Instagram	230 million
YouTube	350 million
Twitter	23 million

(Source: *Statista*, 2023)

Social media's influence extends to all sectors of society, from politics and journalism to business and entertainment. However, with this rapid growth come numerous ethical challenges, particularly concerning the role of influencers, the spread of misinformation, and privacy concerns.

5.2 Ethical Challenges in Social Media

Social media platforms operate in a largely unregulated space, leading to a host of ethical issues. These include the spread of fake news, the erosion of privacy, the rise

of hate speech, and the amplification of polarising content through algorithms designed to maximise engagement.

5.2.1 Misinformation and Fake News

One of the most significant challenges is the rapid spread of misinformation. Unlike traditional media, where information goes through editorial checks, social media allows for instantaneous sharing of unverified content. In India, misinformation has had real-world consequences, particularly during elections, communal conflicts, and public health crises.

Case Study 1: COVID-19 Misinformation on WhatsApp (2020)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation about the virus, its treatment, and vaccination spread widely on platforms like WhatsApp. False cures and rumours about the vaccine being harmful were shared, causing panic and vaccine hesitancy in many regions. A study by **BBC India** in 2020 found that **55%** of WhatsApp users had encountered false information about COVID-19. The government had to issue multiple advisories, and WhatsApp eventually limited message forwarding to curb the spread of fake news.

5.2.2 Hate Speech and Polarisation

Social media can exacerbate social tensions by providing a platform for hate speech, often targeted at vulnerable communities. Algorithmic amplification ensures that

controversial and sensational content gets more visibility, leading to a cycle of outrage and polarisation.

Case Study 2: Delhi Riots (2020)

During the 2020 Delhi riots, social media platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, were used to spread inflammatory content that further deepened communal divisions. Posts with false narratives about the violence were widely shared, leading to confusion and escalating tensions. The Delhi High Court later emphasised the need for social media platforms to be more proactive in addressing hate speech and misinformation during crises.

5.2.3 Privacy Concerns

The rise of social media has also raised significant concerns about privacy. Social media companies often collect vast amounts of personal data, which can be misused or leaked. In India, the **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019** is yet to be fully implemented, leaving many privacy concerns unresolved.

Case Study 3: Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Scandal (2018)

While not specific to India, the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal had global implications, including in India. The data of millions of users was harvested without consent to influence electoral outcomes, raising questions about how much personal data social media companies should be allowed to collect and use.

5.3 The Rise of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers have become central to online discourse in India. From political commentators to lifestyle and entertainment influencers, these individuals often wield significant power over their followers' opinions and actions. However, the rise of influencers also presents ethical challenges, especially concerning the promotion of products, transparency, and accountability.

5.3.1 Ethical Responsibilities of Influencers

Influencers often partner with brands to promote products and services. While this is a legitimate business model, ethical issues arise when influencers do not disclose paid promotions or promote harmful products. For example, promoting unverified health supplements or fast fashion brands known for unethical labour practices raises concerns about transparency and accountability.

5.3.2 Disclosure of Sponsored Content

Indian law requires influencers to disclose sponsored content under the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**, which mandates that consumers be informed if content is part of a paid promotion. The **Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)** has also introduced guidelines for influencers, requiring them to use clear labels such as "#ad" or "#sponsored" in their posts. However,

enforcement remains weak, and many influencers still fail to adhere to these guidelines.

Case Study 4: Beauty Influencers and Sponsored Content

In 2021, several beauty influencers were called out for failing to disclose their paid partnerships with skincare brands. Followers who purchased products based on these recommendations experienced adverse effects, leading to public outrage. The ASCI issued warnings to several influencers, reminding them of their ethical and legal responsibilities to disclose paid content.

5.4 Legal Framework Governing Social Media in India

India's legal framework for regulating social media is still evolving. The government has introduced several laws and guidelines aimed at curbing unethical practices on social media, but implementation remains a challenge.

5.4.1 Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

The **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** introduced a set of regulations for social media platforms and digital media outlets. These rules require social media platforms to appoint grievance officers, address user complaints, and remove unlawful content within a specified timeframe. The rules also hold

platforms accountable for not acting against hate speech, misinformation, or unlawful content.

Key Provisions of IT Rules (2021)

Provision	Description
Appointment of grievance officer	Social media platforms must appoint an officer to address user complaints.
Removal of unlawful content	Platforms must remove content flagged as unlawful within 36 hours.
Traceability of origin	Platforms must enable the identification of the first originator of unlawful content.
Code of Ethics for digital news	Digital media platforms must follow a code of ethics similar to traditional media.

5.4.2 Defamation Laws on Social Media

Social media users, including influencers, are subject to India's defamation laws under **Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**. Posting defamatory content on social media platforms can lead to both civil

and criminal proceedings. Several high-profile cases have tested these laws in the digital age.

Case Study 5: Defamation Suit Against Twitter User

In 2019, a prominent businessman filed a defamation case against a Twitter user for making false claims about his company. The Delhi High Court ruled in favour of the businessman, ordering the user to delete the defamatory tweets and pay damages. This case reaffirmed that social media users are accountable under defamation laws, and influencers must be especially careful about the content they share.

5.4.3 The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019

The **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019** is India's proposed legislation for regulating the collection and processing of personal data by companies, including social media platforms. The bill seeks to address concerns related to user privacy and data security by establishing guidelines for data collection, storage, and consent.

Judicial Rulings on Social Media Regulation

The Indian judiciary has played a crucial role in shaping the regulatory framework for social media. Several landmark judgements have set important precedents for the ethical use of these platforms.

Case Study 6: Shreya Singhal vs Union of India (2015)

In this landmark case, the Supreme Court struck down **Section 66A of the IT Act**, which criminalised "offensive" online content. The Court ruled that the section was too vague and violated the right to freedom of speech and expression. However, the ruling also emphasised the need for responsible use of social media, reaffirming that free speech does not protect defamatory or harmful content.

5.5 Research Data on Social Media Ethics in India

Several studies have highlighted the ethical challenges faced by social media users, influencers, and platforms in India. A 2021 study by the **Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)** surveyed 1,200 social media users and revealed the following insights:

- **67%** of respondents reported encountering misinformation regularly on social media.
- **52%** expressed concern about the lack of transparency in influencer.

6.0 Conclusion:

As India continues its rapid digital transformation, the ethical landscape surrounding social media use and influencer responsibility is becoming increasingly complex. Social media platforms have democratised communication, allowing people from all walks of life to

share their views, organise movements, and influence public opinion. However, this freedom comes with significant ethical and legal responsibilities, both for individual users and influencers.

The rise of **fake news**, **hate speech**, and **cyberbullying** on social media has forced the Indian government to introduce new regulations, such as the **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, which place greater accountability on social media platforms. Influencers, too, must navigate an ethical minefield as they are increasingly held responsible for the content they promote, especially in light of regulations from bodies like the **Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)**.

However, the tension between **free speech** and **preventing harm** remains a significant challenge in India. As seen in cases like the **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India** ruling, India's legal system has upheld the right to free speech, but with reasonable restrictions that balance public order and individual freedoms. Social media platforms must find a way to foster open expression while mitigating the spread of harmful content.

Moving forward, the government, social media platforms, influencers, and users need to collaborate to establish a code of ethics that respects free speech while protecting vulnerable individuals and communities. Influencers must recognise the power they wield and act responsibly, ensuring transparency in their promotions

and understanding the impact of their content on their followers.

Chapter 6: Investigative Journalism – Ethics and Boundaries

Introduction

Investigative journalism is often regarded as the backbone of democratic societies, holding power accountable, exposing corruption, and revealing hidden truths that the public needs to know. However, the very nature of investigative reporting, which often requires going beyond traditional journalistic practices, can lead to ethical dilemmas and legal challenges. Investigative journalists must balance the public's right to know with ethical obligations, such as respecting privacy, avoiding harm, and ensuring accuracy.

In India, investigative journalism has played a crucial role in exposing major scandals, from political corruption to corporate fraud. However, the ethics of investigative journalism are frequently contested, particularly in a country where political, legal, and social systems are complex and interwoven. This chapter explores the ethical boundaries of investigative journalism, including legal implications, case studies, and judicial rulings from Indian courts.

6.1 The Role of Investigative Journalism in India

Investigative journalism in India has historically played a significant role in exposing corruption, human rights abuses, and other forms of injustice. Due to rigorous

investigative work, landmark cases such as the Bofors scandal, the 2G spectrum case, and the Vyapam scam were uncovered. Investigative journalists are often viewed as watchdogs, ensuring that both government and private entities remain accountable to the public.

Major Indian Investigative Journalism Cases

Case	Year	Key Revelations
Bofors Scandal	1980s	Exposed corruption in an arms deal involving Indian politicians and Swedish firms.
2G Spectrum Scam	2008	Uncovered the illegal allocation of telecom licenses, causing massive public loss.
Vyapam Scam	2013	Revealed a massive recruitment and admission scam in Madhya Pradesh.
Panama Papers Leak	2016	Exposed offshore financial dealings of wealthy Indians.

These investigations, among others, have had far-reaching consequences, leading to political resignations, judicial inquiries, and changes in legislation. Yet, these investigations also raise ethical questions about the

methods used to obtain information and the impact of such reports on individuals' rights.

6.2 Ethical Principles in Investigative Journalism

The ethical principles that guide investigative journalism are grounded in the core values of journalism: accuracy, fairness, accountability, and public interest. However, investigative journalists often encounter situations where these principles are in tension with one another.

6.2.1 Accuracy and Fact-Checking

Investigative journalism requires thorough verification of facts, as any inaccuracies can undermine the entire investigation. However, given the complex and often covert nature of investigations, ensuring complete accuracy is challenging. Journalists must cross-check multiple sources, verify documents, and ensure that their findings are supported by solid evidence.

6.2.2 Respect for Privacy

One of the most contentious ethical dilemmas in investigative journalism is the balance between public interest and the right to privacy. Journalists may have access to private information, such as personal emails or financial records, which could expose wrongdoing. The ethical challenge lies in determining when such information should be disclosed for the greater good.

6.2.3 Avoiding Harm

Journalists must consider the potential harm their reporting may cause to individuals, communities, or institutions. This includes not only physical harm but also reputational and emotional harm. Investigative stories that involve whistleblowers or victims of abuse, for instance, must be handled with extreme care to avoid re-victimisation.

6.2.4 Public Interest

Public interest is often cited as the justification for investigative journalism, particularly when it involves exposing corruption or criminal behaviour. However, determining what constitutes public interest can be subjective. Journalists must ensure that their investigations serve a genuine public need rather than merely sensationalising private affairs.

Key Ethical Principles in Investigative Journalism

Principle	Description
Accuracy	Ensuring all facts are thoroughly checked and corroborated.
Privacy	Respecting individuals' privacy unless public interest dictates disclosure.

Principle	Description
Avoidance of Harm	Minimising harm to individuals and communities affected by the investigation.
Public Interest	Ensuring the investigation serves a legitimate public purpose.

6.3 Ethical Dilemmas in Indian Investigative Journalism

In India, investigative journalists often operate in challenging environments where political pressures, corporate interests, and societal expectations collide. Below are some common ethical dilemmas they face:

6.3.1 Use of Covert Methods

In many investigations, journalists resort to covert methods such as undercover reporting or the use of hidden cameras. While these methods can be effective in exposing corruption or criminal activities, they raise serious ethical concerns, particularly regarding deception and entrapment.

Case Study 1: Tehelka’s Operation West End (2001)

Tehelka, an investigative journalism portal, conducted a sting operation that exposed corruption in India’s defence procurement system. Using hidden cameras, Tehelka’s journalists posed as arms dealers and recorded

senior defence officials accepting bribes. While the investigation exposed serious wrongdoing, it also led to a debate on the ethics of sting operations and whether such covert methods constituted entrapment.

6.3.2 Exposing Sensitive Information

Investigative journalists often face the dilemma of whether to expose sensitive information that could endanger national security or lead to violence. In India, with its communal and political sensitivities, this is a particularly pressing issue.

Case Study 2: Radia Tapes Controversy (2010)

In the **Radia Tapes** case, a series of leaked conversations between corporate lobbyist Niira Radia and several prominent politicians, journalists, and business leaders revealed attempts to influence government policy. While the revelations led to widespread public outrage and calls for greater transparency, the release of the tapes also raised questions about privacy and the ethics of publishing confidential conversations that had been secretly recorded by government agencies.

6.4 Legal Implications of Investigative Journalism in India

Investigative journalism in India is subject to a complex web of legal regulations, covering areas such as defamation, privacy, national security, and intellectual property. Journalists must be aware of the legal risks

involved in their work, as ethical violations can lead to legal consequences, including lawsuits and criminal charges.

6.4.1 Defamation Laws

Indian journalists must navigate strict defamation laws under **Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**. Defamation can be both a civil and a criminal offence, and investigative journalists are frequently sued for defamation by the subjects of their investigations. While truth is a defence against defamation, journalists must ensure they have solid evidence to back their claims.

Case Study 3: Defamation Case Against *The Hindu*

In 1998, *The Hindu* published a series of investigative reports accusing Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa of corruption. In response, Jayalalithaa filed defamation cases against the newspaper and its editors. The court ruled that while public figures are subject to greater scrutiny, journalists must ensure that their claims are backed by verified facts to avoid defamation lawsuits. This case highlighted the fine line between legitimate investigative reporting and defamatory content.

6.4.2 Right to Privacy

The **Right to Privacy** was upheld as a fundamental right by the Supreme Court in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)**. This judgement has significant implications for investigative journalists, particularly when dealing with sensitive

personal information. While the public's right to know is important, journalists must ensure that they do not infringe upon individuals' privacy without a compelling public interest.

6.4.3 Contempt of Court

Investigative journalists must be careful not to publish material that could prejudice ongoing judicial proceedings. Under **contempt of court** laws, journalists can be penalised for publishing information that may interfere with the administration of justice.

Case Study 4: Sahara India vs SEBI (2012)

In this case, the Supreme Court of India issued a gag order against media outlets, preventing them from publishing speculative reports about an ongoing case involving Sahara India and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). The Court ruled that such reports could influence judicial proceedings and violate contempt of court laws. This case serves as a reminder for investigative journalists to exercise caution when reporting on cases that are sub judice.

6.5 Whistleblowers and the Role of Investigative Journalists

Whistleblowers often play a crucial role in investigative journalism, providing journalists with insider information about corruption, fraud, or other wrongdoing. However, protecting the identity of whistleblowers and ensuring

their safety is one of the greatest ethical and legal challenges faced by journalists.

6.5.1 Ethical Responsibility to Whistleblowers

Journalists have an ethical responsibility to protect their sources, particularly whistleblowers who may face retaliation for exposing wrongdoing. However, this responsibility must be balanced against the need for transparency and accountability. Journalists must carefully assess whether the whistleblower's identity can be kept confidential while still maintaining the credibility of the investigation.

6.5.2 Legal Protections for Whistleblowers

In India, the **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014** provides legal protection to individuals who expose corruption in government institutions. However, the Act has been criticised for being insufficiently robust in protecting whistleblowers from retaliation. Investigative journalists often find themselves in legal battles to protect their sources.

Case Study 5: Whistleblower in the Adarsh Housing Scam (2010)

The Adarsh Housing Society scam, which involved the illegal allocation of apartments meant for war widows and veterans to politicians, bureaucrats, and military officers, was exposed partly due to the efforts of a whistleblower. The journalist working on the story had to navigate the ethical responsibility of protecting the whistleblower's identity while ensuring the

investigation's findings were credible. The resulting scandal led to resignations and criminal investigations, highlighting the crucial role of whistleblowers in investigative journalism.

6.6 Judicial Rulings on Investigative Journalism

Indian courts have been instrumental in defining the ethical boundaries for investigative journalism. Several landmark rulings have clarified the extent to which journalists can go in the pursuit of truth, balancing the right to free speech with concerns of privacy, defamation, and national security.

6.6.1 Defamation and the Right to Free Speech

In **Subramanian Swamy vs Union of India (2016)**, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of criminal defamation under **Sections 499 and 500 of the IPC**, ruling that the right to free speech under Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution is not absolute. The Court emphasised that free speech must be balanced with the right to reputation, particularly in cases involving investigative journalism.

This ruling has significant implications for investigative journalists, who must ensure that their stories are factually accurate and not defamatory, even when exposing corruption or criminal behaviour.

6.6.2 The Right to Privacy

The **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)** ruling, which recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right, has profound implications for investigative journalism. While the public's right to know is critical, the Court emphasised that privacy should not be violated without a compelling reason. Journalists are now required to balance their investigations with the individual's right to privacy, particularly when dealing with personal or sensitive information.

6.6.3 Trial by Media and the Contempt of Court

In **Sahara India Real Estate Corporation vs SEBI (2012)**, the Supreme Court reiterated that media, including investigative journalists, must not publish content that could prejudice ongoing judicial proceedings. The ruling has influenced how journalists cover legal cases, particularly high-profile ones, ensuring that media trials do not interfere with the administration of justice.

Key Judicial Rulings Impacting Investigative Journalism in India

Case	Year	Key Legal Principles
Subramanian Swamy vs Union of India	2016	Upheld the constitutionality of criminal defamation,

Case	Year	Key Legal Principles
		balancing free speech with the right to reputation.
Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India	2017	Recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right, limiting journalists' ability to disclose personal data.
Sahara India vs SEBI	2012	Reiterated that investigative journalists must not interfere with judicial proceedings (contempt of court).

6.7 Challenges Faced by Investigative Journalists in India

Investigative journalists in India face numerous challenges, from legal threats to physical dangers. These challenges often make it difficult for journalists to pursue important stories, particularly those involving powerful political or corporate figures.

6.7.1 Political and Corporate Pressure

Investigative journalism often involves exposing individuals or organisations in positions of power. Journalists investigating political corruption or corporate misconduct are frequently subjected to intimidation,

threats, and legal harassment. Many reporters face defamation suits, sedition charges, and even violence as a result of their work.

6.7.2 Legal Threats and Censorship

Investigative journalists frequently face legal challenges in the form of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), designed to silence critical reporting. These lawsuits, which are often baseless but costly to defend against, are used by powerful entities to intimidate journalists.

Case Study 6: The Cobrapost Sting Operation (2018)

In 2018, Cobrapost, an investigative journalism platform, conducted a sting operation that exposed how major media houses were willing to accept money to promote specific political narratives in their reporting. Several media organisations attempted to file defamation suits against Cobrapost, but the platform stood by its investigation. This case underscores the legal risks faced by investigative journalists who expose corruption within the media itself.

6.7.3 Safety and Security of Journalists

Investigative journalism can be a dangerous profession in India, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights abuses, and criminal networks. According to the **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**, India is among the most dangerous countries for journalists, with several reporters being

attacked or killed in recent years for their investigative work.

Case Study 7: Gauri Lankesh Murder (2017)

Gauri Lankesh, an investigative journalist and outspoken critic of right-wing extremism, was murdered outside her home in Bangalore in 2017. Her murder sent shockwaves through India's media community, highlighting the risks faced by investigative journalists who challenge powerful interests. Lankesh's murder remains a stark reminder of the dangers associated with investigative journalism in India.

6.8 The Future of Investigative Journalism in India

Despite the numerous challenges, investigative journalism remains a crucial part of India's democratic fabric. As technology evolves, new tools such as data journalism, open-source investigations, and artificial intelligence (AI) are being used to enhance investigative reporting. However, the core ethical and legal challenges remain the same—accuracy, accountability, and balancing the public interest with the rights of individuals.

6.8.1 The Role of Technology in Investigative Journalism

Technological advancements, particularly in data journalism, are transforming the way investigative reporters gather and analyse information. Tools such as **data mining** and **social media analysis** allow

journalists to uncover patterns of corruption or criminal behaviour that were previously difficult to detect. However, these tools also raise new ethical concerns, particularly regarding privacy and data security.

6.8.2 The Need for Stronger Legal Protections

For investigative journalism to thrive in India, there is a need for stronger legal protections for journalists, particularly when they expose corruption or abuse of power. Reforms in defamation laws, greater protection for whistleblowers, and the prevention of frivolous lawsuits are critical to safeguarding the future of investigative journalism.

6.9 Conclusion

Investigative journalism plays an indispensable role in India's democracy, exposing corruption, abuse, and injustice. However, it is fraught with ethical and legal challenges that journalists must carefully navigate. From balancing the public's right to know with the right to privacy, to ensuring accuracy while working under immense pressure, investigative journalists must adhere to strict ethical standards while also understanding the legal risks involved.

In a country like India, where power dynamics are complex and the stakes are high, investigative journalism serves as a crucial check on both public and private institutions. To ensure its continued relevance, journalists must be supported by stronger legal protections and an ethical framework that balances the

competing demands of truth, accountability, and fairness.

Chapter 7: Advertising, Sponsorship, and Ethics in Media

Introduction

Advertising and sponsorship are essential revenue streams for media outlets, enabling them to sustain their operations. However, they also present ethical challenges, particularly in terms of editorial independence, truth in advertising, and the potential conflicts of interest that arise when the boundary between advertising and editorial content becomes blurred. Media professionals must navigate these challenges while maintaining ethical integrity and ensuring that public trust in journalism is not compromised.

This chapter explores the ethical principles related to advertising and sponsorship in the media, focusing on case studies from India, relevant legal frameworks, and judicial rulings. We will examine the relationship between advertising and editorial content, the regulatory framework governing advertising practices, and the ethical dilemmas that arise in the context of sponsored content.

7.1 The Role of Advertising and Sponsorship in Media

Advertising has long been a cornerstone of media revenue. In the digital age, sponsorships and branded

content have emerged as additional revenue streams, blurring the lines between journalism and advertising. Traditional advertisements, sponsorships, and native advertising are now common across print, broadcast, and digital platforms.

Table 1: Types of Advertising and Sponsorship in Media

Type of Advertising	Description
Traditional Ads	Paid advertisements in newspapers, TV, radio, and websites.
Sponsored Content	Branded content that blends seamlessly with editorial content, often without explicit disclosure.
Native Advertising	Ads designed to look like regular content, making them less distinguishable from editorial content.
Product Placements	Subtle advertising within TV shows, films, or news segments, where products are visibly featured.

As media organisations increasingly rely on advertising revenue, the challenge is to ensure that editorial

independence is maintained and that readers, viewers, and listeners are not misled.

7.2 Ethical Principles in Advertising and Sponsorship

The relationship between advertising and editorial content must be carefully managed to prevent conflicts of interest and maintain public trust. Several key ethical principles govern advertising and sponsorship in the media.

7.2.1 Transparency

Transparency is crucial to maintaining audience trust. Media outlets must clearly distinguish between editorial content and advertisements, ensuring that audiences are aware when content is sponsored or paid for by advertisers.

7.2.2 Truthfulness in Advertising

Advertising content must be truthful, avoiding misleading or exaggerated claims. False advertising not only violates ethical standards but also legal regulations. Advertisements that promise outcomes or benefits that are unverified or exaggerated are both unethical and illegal.

7.2.3 Editorial Independence

Editorial content should remain independent of advertiser influence. When advertisers influence editorial decisions, it undermines the integrity of the media

organisation and can lead to biased reporting. The separation of editorial and advertising departments is key to maintaining this independence.

7.2.4 Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest

Media professionals must avoid conflicts of interest where their reporting could be influenced by their relationships with advertisers or sponsors. Ethical dilemmas arise when media outlets compromise their editorial integrity to maintain lucrative advertising deals.

Ethical Principles in Advertising and Sponsorship

Ethical Principle	Description
Transparency	Audiences must be informed when content is sponsored or paid for by advertisers.
Truthfulness in Advertising	Advertisements should not mislead or deceive consumers.
Editorial Independence	Editorial content should remain independent of advertiser influence.
Avoidance of Conflicts	Journalists and media organisations should avoid conflicts of interest.

7.3 Ethical Dilemmas in Advertising and Sponsorship in Indian Media

In India, the growing influence of advertisers on editorial content has raised significant ethical concerns. Media houses, particularly in print and digital platforms, often rely heavily on advertising revenue, leading to potential conflicts of interest.

7.3.1 Paid News

The phenomenon of "paid news" is one of the most prominent ethical challenges in Indian media. Paid news refers to the practice of publishing articles, news reports, or interviews that are essentially advertisements, without disclosing that they have been paid for by the advertiser.

Case Study 1: Paid News During the 2009 Indian Elections

During the 2009 Indian general elections, several major newspapers and television channels were accused of accepting money to publish favourable news coverage of political candidates. This practice came to light when the **Press Council of India (PCI)** conducted an investigation and found that numerous politicians had paid for positive media coverage without any disclosure to the public. The PCI's report raised concerns about the blurring of lines between journalism and political advertising, leading to calls for stricter regulation of paid news.

7.3.2 Influence of Corporate Sponsorship on Editorial Content

Corporate sponsorship can also influence editorial decisions, particularly when media outlets depend on large corporations for revenue. In some cases, media houses may avoid reporting on negative stories related to their advertisers, compromising journalistic integrity.

Case Study 2: Corporate Influence on Indian News Channels

Several Indian news channels have been accused of altering or suppressing stories to avoid offending major advertisers. In 2019, a report published by **The Caravan** magazine revealed that a leading Indian television network had been suppressing negative stories about a major business conglomerate that was one of its largest advertisers. This case highlighted the risks of compromising editorial independence in the face of corporate pressure.

7.4 Regulatory Framework Governing Advertising in India

India has a robust legal framework governing advertising practices, aimed at ensuring that advertisements are truthful and non-deceptive. The primary regulatory body overseeing advertising in India is the **Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)**, which issues guidelines to ensure that advertising is ethical and does not mislead consumers.

7.4.1 The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)

The **ASCI** is a self-regulatory organisation that monitors advertising practices across media platforms in India. It provides guidelines on what constitutes ethical advertising and can issue warnings, fines, or orders to withdraw misleading advertisements. The ASCI's **Code for Self-Regulation in Advertising** outlines the standards that advertisers must adhere to, including:

- **Truth in Advertising:** Advertisements must not mislead consumers by exaggerating product performance, quality, or benefits.
- **Social Responsibility:** Advertisements should not promote harmful or dangerous behaviour, such as smoking or reckless driving.
- **Non-Exploitation:** Advertisements must not exploit vulnerable groups, including children or the elderly.

7.4.2 Consumer Protection Act, 2019

The **Consumer Protection Act, 2019** also plays a key role in regulating advertising practices in India. It holds advertisers and manufacturers accountable for false or misleading claims and allows consumers to seek compensation for any harm caused by such advertisements.

7.4.3 Guidelines for Influencers and Sponsored Content

In recent years, the rise of social media influencers has prompted the ASCI to issue specific guidelines for influencer marketing. The guidelines require influencers to disclose any paid partnerships or sponsorships using hashtags such as "#ad" or "#sponsored" in their posts.

7.5 Legal Implications of False Advertising

False advertising can lead to significant legal consequences in India. Under the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**, advertisers, manufacturers, and media platforms can be held liable for disseminating false or misleading advertisements that deceive consumers. Furthermore, media organisations can face defamation lawsuits if they publish content that harms the reputation of individuals or businesses based on false claims.

Case Study 3: Patanjali vs Emami (2020)

In 2020, the Indian herbal products company **Patanjali** was involved in a legal dispute with **Emami**, a competitor in the personal care market. Patanjali had launched a campaign claiming that its newly released hand sanitiser was superior to competitors, including Emami's products. Emami filed a defamation suit, accusing Patanjali of making false and misleading claims. The court ruled in favour of Emami, ordering Patanjali to cease the advertising campaign and

issue a clarification. This case highlighted the legal risks associated with false advertising and the need for advertisers to substantiate their claims.

7.5.1 Judicial Rulings on False Advertising

Indian courts have addressed several cases involving false advertising and its impact on consumers. The courts have consistently ruled that advertisers must be truthful in their claims and that consumers have the right to seek compensation for misleading advertisements.

Case Study 4: Dabur India Ltd. vs Colgate Palmolive India Ltd. (2011)

In this case, **Dabur India Ltd.** filed a lawsuit against **Colgate Palmolive** for making false claims in their advertisements. Colgate had claimed that its toothpaste offered superior benefits compared to Dabur's products without any scientific evidence to back the claims. The Delhi High Court ruled in favour of Dabur, ordering Colgate to withdraw the advertisements and issue an apology. This case set an important precedent for regulating false advertising claims in India.

7.6 Sponsored Content and Ethical Challenges

Sponsored content, also known as native advertising, poses unique ethical challenges because it often blends seamlessly with editorial content, making it difficult for audiences to distinguish between independent journalism and paid promotions.

7.6.1 Disclosure of Sponsorship

One of the primary ethical concerns with sponsored content is the lack of disclosure. When audiences are unaware that content has been paid for by an advertiser, it can lead to a loss of trust in the media outlet. Ethical guidelines require media organisations and influencers to clearly disclose when content is sponsored, ensuring that audiences are not misled.

7.6.2 Balancing Sponsorship and Editorial Independence

Media outlets face the challenge of balancing sponsorship with editorial independence. When advertisers influence the content of news stories or editorial opinions, it can lead to biased reporting that favours the interests of the sponsor, rather than serving the public good.

Case Study 5: Sponsored Content in Indian News Media

In 2018, **The Quint**, a leading digital news platform, came under scrutiny for publishing sponsored content without clearly marking it as such. The platform had published an article promoting a particular brand, which many readers mistook for independent editorial content. After facing backlash from media watchdogs and the public, The Quint updated the article to include a disclaimer indicating that it was paid content. This case

highlighted the need for transparency in sponsored content to maintain audience trust.

7.7 Ethical Guidelines for Native Advertising and Sponsored Content

The increasing use of native advertising and sponsored content has prompted media organisations and regulators to develop guidelines to maintain transparency and ethical integrity. In India, the **Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)** and the **Press Council of India (PCI)** have both issued guidelines requiring clear labelling of sponsored content in all forms of media.

7.7.1 ASCI Guidelines for Native Advertising

The ASCI has provided specific recommendations for native advertising, requiring that all sponsored content must be clearly labelled to prevent misleading the public. Labels such as "Advertisement," "Sponsored Content," or "Paid Partnership" must be prominently displayed to ensure that audiences can easily identify content that has been paid for by an advertiser.

7.7.2 Press Council of India Guidelines

The **Press Council of India (PCI)** has also issued guidelines to prevent paid news and to promote transparency in the media. According to the PCI's code of ethics, newspapers and digital news platforms must disclose any financial or commercial relationships that could influence their editorial decisions. The PCI has stressed the importance of editorial independence and

the need to avoid conflicts of interest between journalists and advertisers.

Guidelines for Sponsored Content

Organisation	Guidelines for Sponsored Content
ASCI	Sponsored content must be clearly labelled as "Advertisement" or "Sponsored."
Press Council of India	Paid news and sponsored content must be disclosed, and editorial independence should be maintained.

7.8 The Impact of Advertising and Sponsorship on Public Trust

Public trust in the media is closely linked to the ethical practices of advertising and sponsorship. When media outlets engage in unethical practices, such as publishing undisclosed sponsored content or allowing advertisers to influence editorial decisions, it erodes the credibility of the entire media organisation. In an environment where trust in the media is declining globally, maintaining ethical standards in advertising and sponsorship is more important than ever.

Research Data on Public Trust in Indian Media

A 2022 study by the **Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism** revealed that only **38%** of Indians trust the news media, down from **42%** in 2020. The study

identified paid news and undisclosed sponsored content as key factors contributing to the decline in trust. The study also found that younger audiences, in particular, were more sceptical of media outlets that blurred the lines between advertising and journalism.

Public Trust in Indian Media (Reuters Institute, 2022)

Year	Percentage of Indians Trusting News Media
2020	42%
2022	38%

7.9 The Future of Advertising and Sponsorship in Indian Media

As the media landscape continues to evolve, with digital platforms playing an increasingly dominant role, the relationship between advertising, sponsorship, and journalism will continue to face ethical scrutiny. The rise of influencer marketing, branded content, and native advertising requires a new set of ethical standards to protect public trust.

7.9.1 Challenges for the Digital Age

In the digital age, advertisers have unprecedented access to consumer data, allowing for hyper-targeted ads that can reach specific demographics. While this presents lucrative opportunities for media outlets, it also

raises ethical concerns about privacy and consumer manipulation. The use of algorithms and artificial intelligence to target ads can result in biased content that promotes consumerism at the expense of balanced journalism.

7.9.2 Strengthening Regulations and Self-Regulation

Moving forward, it is critical for Indian media regulators, including the ASCI and PCI, to strengthen their oversight of advertising and sponsorship practices. This includes implementing stricter penalties for violations, improving transparency, and ensuring that all forms of sponsored content are clearly disclosed. Self-regulation within media organisations is also essential to maintain editorial independence and uphold journalistic integrity.

7.10 Conclusion

Advertising and sponsorship are integral to the financial sustainability of media organisations, but they must be managed ethically to avoid conflicts of interest, maintain transparency, and ensure editorial independence. The case studies and legal frameworks discussed in this chapter highlight the ethical dilemmas faced by media professionals in balancing commercial pressures with journalistic principles.

In India, where paid news and corporate influence have become growing concerns, it is essential for media organisations to adopt stringent ethical guidelines and

adhere to regulatory standards. By maintaining transparency in sponsored content, avoiding false advertising, and preserving editorial independence, media outlets can protect public trust and ensure that advertising and journalism coexist without compromising ethical integrity.

Chapter 8: Media Representation and Ethical Portrayal of Vulnerable Groups

Introduction

The media holds significant power in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards various societal groups. This power is amplified when it comes to the representation of vulnerable or marginalised groups, including women, children, minorities, and those with disabilities. Ethical journalism requires that these groups are portrayed accurately and fairly, avoiding stereotypes and sensationalism that can perpetuate stigma and discrimination.

In India, the media's portrayal of vulnerable groups is particularly crucial, given the country's diverse social fabric and ongoing struggles with inequality and injustice. This chapter examines the ethical responsibilities of media professionals when representing vulnerable populations, with a focus on case studies, research data, legal implications, and judicial rulings that address media ethics in representation.

8.1 The Importance of Ethical Representation

Ethical representation in media is essential for several reasons:

- 1. **Shaping Public Perception:** Media portrayals can significantly influence public attitudes towards vulnerable groups, affecting how they are perceived in society.
- 2. **Promoting Understanding:** Ethical journalism fosters understanding and empathy, allowing audiences to engage with the realities faced by marginalised communities.
- 3. **Preventing Harm:** Inaccurate or negative portrayals can perpetuate stereotypes, leading to discrimination and social exclusion. Ethical representation aims to prevent this harm.
- 4. **Accountability:** The media has a responsibility to hold power to account, including how societal narratives are constructed around vulnerable groups.

Consequences of Ethical and Unethical Representation

Representation Type	Consequences
Ethical Representation	Fosters understanding, combats stereotypes, promotes equality.
Unethical Representation	Perpetuates stigma, leads to discrimination, incites violence.

8.2 Ethical Guidelines for Media Representation

Various ethical guidelines exist to ensure that vulnerable groups are portrayed fairly in the media. These guidelines are often established by media councils, journalism schools, and professional organisations.

8.2.1 Accuracy and Fairness

Media professionals should strive for accuracy in reporting, ensuring that the voices of vulnerable groups are represented authentically and that their stories are told with sensitivity.

8.2.2 Avoiding Stereotypes

Ethical journalism requires avoiding the use of stereotypes, which can simplify complex issues and reduce individuals to mere caricatures. For instance, portraying women solely as victims or minorities as criminals contributes to harmful narratives.

8.2.3 Respect for Dignity

Media representations should respect the dignity of individuals. This includes obtaining informed consent when sharing personal stories and ensuring that coverage does not exploit vulnerable populations for sensationalism.

8.2.4 Contextual Sensitivity

It is essential for journalists to provide context in their reporting. Understanding the social, economic, and

political factors that contribute to the challenges faced by vulnerable groups allows for a more nuanced portrayal.

8.3 Case Studies of Media Representation in India

8.3.1 Representation of Women in Indian Media

Women in India are often portrayed through a narrow lens, primarily as victims or in roles that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. This representation can lead to societal perceptions that hinder gender equality.

Case Study 1: Delhi Gang Rape Case (2012)

The media coverage of the brutal gang rape and murder of Nirbhaya in Delhi brought national attention to issues of women's safety. While the coverage played a role in mobilising public outrage, it also sensationalised the incident, focusing excessively on the graphic details of the crime. Many reports perpetuated stereotypes about women's vulnerability, rather than highlighting the broader societal issues contributing to violence against women.

Impact on Legislation

The public outcry following the media coverage resulted in significant legislative changes, including the **Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013**, which strengthened laws related to sexual assault. However, the sensational nature of the coverage raised ethical questions about the responsibilities of the media when reporting on such sensitive issues.

8.3.2 Representation of Minorities

Minorities, including religious and ethnic groups, often face misrepresentation in the media, which can exacerbate social tensions and lead to discrimination.

Case Study 2: Communal Violence Coverage

During communal riots, media portrayals often focus on sensationalised narratives that depict one community as violent or aggressive. For example, during the **Muzaffarnagar riots (2013)**, media reports frequently framed the conflict in polarised terms, which heightened tensions and contributed to communal stereotypes.

Legal Implications

The **Press Council of India** and various civil society organisations have called for more responsible reporting during communal tensions, urging journalists to avoid inflammatory language and to strive for balanced coverage. Such calls for ethical representation are essential to ensure that media does not contribute to communal discord.

8.4 Data on Media Representation of Vulnerable Groups

Research has shown that the media's portrayal of vulnerable groups often fails to capture the complexity of their experiences. A study conducted by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in 2021 revealed that:

- **70%** of women in media narratives were portrayed in traditional roles.
- **65%** of news reports on minorities were framed negatively.
- **58%** of news articles focused on the victimisation of individuals from marginalised communities without providing contextual information.

Representation of Vulnerable Groups in Indian Media (CMS Study, 2021)

Group	Percentage of Positive Representation	Percentage of Negative Representation
Women	30%	70%
Minorities	35%	65%
Disabled Persons	25%	75%

8.5 Legal Framework Governing Media Representation

In India, several legal frameworks guide the ethical representation of vulnerable groups in the media. These laws aim to protect individuals' rights and promote responsible journalism.

8.5.1 The Right to Privacy

The landmark judgement in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)** recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right. This ruling has significant implications for how media reports on vulnerable groups, particularly in relation to sensitive personal information.

8.5.2 The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012

This Act prohibits the disclosure of the identity of child victims of sexual offences in the media, protecting their dignity and privacy. Journalists must adhere to these legal provisions to avoid causing further harm to vulnerable children.

8.5.3 Anti-Discrimination Laws

India's Constitution and various anti-discrimination laws provide a legal basis for protecting the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups. These laws require media to avoid promoting stereotypes or discriminatory narratives.

8.6 Judicial Rulings on Ethical Representation

The Indian judiciary has addressed the issue of ethical representation in several landmark cases, reinforcing the need for responsible journalism.

8.6.1 Case: R. Rajagopal vs State of Tamil Nadu (1994)

In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the media cannot publish private details about an individual without their consent unless it serves the public interest. This ruling emphasised the importance of respecting individuals' privacy, particularly for vulnerable groups who may be disproportionately affected by media scrutiny.

8.6.2 Case: Tehseen Poonawalla vs Union of India (2018)

The Supreme Court directed that the media must be careful when reporting on communal violence, stressing that the media should refrain from publishing content that can incite communal hatred. The Court called for responsible reporting that does not amplify existing tensions, thereby protecting vulnerable communities from potential harm.

8.7 The Impact of Media Representation on Society

The media's portrayal of vulnerable groups can have significant societal implications. Misrepresentation can perpetuate stigma and discrimination, while ethical representation can foster understanding and inclusivity.

8.7.1 Social Awareness and Change

Positive media portrayals of vulnerable groups can lead to increased social awareness and advocacy. When the media highlights the achievements and challenges faced

by these communities, it can contribute to social change and inspire action.

Case Study 3: Campaigns for Disability Rights

Media campaigns that showcase the achievements of disabled individuals have played a pivotal role in promoting disability rights in India. Documentaries and news features highlighting their stories have led to greater public awareness and changes in policies, including improved accessibility in public spaces.

8.7.2 The Role of Social Media

Social media has become an important platform for vulnerable groups to share their narratives directly, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This allows for more authentic representation and empowers these communities to speak for themselves.

8.8 Recommendations for Ethical Representation in Media

To improve the representation of vulnerable groups in media, several recommendations can be made:

1. **Training for Journalists:** Media organisations should provide training on ethical representation, focusing on the importance of avoiding stereotypes and promoting diversity in reporting.
2. **Diversity in Newsrooms:** Increasing diversity within media organisations can help ensure that

different perspectives are represented in news coverage, leading to more balanced reporting.

3. **Stronger Regulatory Oversight:** Regulatory bodies should enforce guidelines to ensure responsible media coverage of vulnerable groups, including penalties for unethical reporting practices.
4. **Engagement with Communities:** Journalists should engage with the communities they report on, ensuring that their perspectives and voices are included in the storytelling process.

8.9 Conclusion

Ethical representation of vulnerable groups in the media is essential for fostering understanding, promoting social justice, and ensuring that all voices are heard. The challenges posed by stereotypes, sensationalism, and commercial pressures require media professionals to adhere to strict ethical principles and to navigate complex legal frameworks.

While vital for accountability, investigative journalism must be approached with a keen awareness of the ethical implications of representation. As India grapples with issues of inequality and discrimination, the media has a crucial role to play in shaping narratives that empower rather than marginalise.

By prioritising accuracy, transparency, and respect for privacy, journalists can create a more inclusive media landscape that reflects the diversity of Indian society. As technology evolves and social media becomes

increasingly influential, the responsibilities of media professionals will only grow, necessitating a commitment to ethical practices that uplift and empower vulnerable groups.

Ultimately, the media's portrayal of vulnerable communities can contribute significantly to social change and advocacy, but this requires a collective effort from journalists, editors, regulators, and society as a whole to ensure that representation is fair, accurate, and just.

Chapter 9: Public Relations – Ethics, Strategies, and Legal Implications

Introduction

Public Relations (PR) has evolved into a crucial component of both corporate strategy and political communication in India. As the influence of social media and digital platforms grows, the role of PR professionals in shaping public perception, managing crises, and fostering relationships becomes increasingly significant. This chapter delves into the ethical responsibilities of PR practitioners, the legal frameworks governing PR practices, and the implications of emerging trends in communication. Through case studies and research data, we will explore the impact of effective PR strategies on public trust and engagement.

9.1 The Role of Public Relations in Contemporary Society

PR is defined as the strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics. In India, PR encompasses a variety of practices, including media relations, crisis management, and event planning. The landscape has shifted dramatically due to digital media, requiring PR professionals to adapt to new methods of engagement.

Key Functions of Public Relations

Function	Description
Media Relations	Building and maintaining relationships with journalists and media outlets.
Crisis Management	Preparing for and responding to potential crises affecting the organisation.
Event Management	Planning and executing events to promote the organisation's image.
Community Engagement	Building relationships with local communities to foster goodwill.
Internal Communications	Ensuring effective communication within the organisation.

9.2 Core PR Strategies

9.2.1 Public Affairs

Public Affairs is the practice of managing relationships with government entities and influencing public policy. PR professionals often engage in lobbying, advocacy, and outreach to shape legislative outcomes.

Case Study: Reliance Industries and Government Relations

Reliance Industries has utilised public affairs strategies to effectively navigate regulatory environments and influence policy. By establishing strong relationships with government officials, the company has successfully lobbied for favourable policies in the telecommunications and energy sectors. This case illustrates the importance of public affairs in aligning corporate interests with governmental objectives.

9.2.2 Perception Management

Perception Management involves shaping public perceptions of an organisation or individual through strategic communication. This can include branding efforts, media campaigns, and public messaging.

Case Study: Tata Group's Crisis Management

In 2016, Tata Group faced a crisis when its then-Chairman Cyrus Mistry was ousted in a boardroom coup. The company's PR team quickly implemented a perception management strategy that included transparency in communication, media engagement, and reassurance to stakeholders. The prompt response helped mitigate reputational damage and maintain public trust in the brand.

9.3 Ethical Responsibilities in Public Relations

Ethics play a vital role in public relations, as the profession is built on trust and credibility. PR

professionals must navigate various ethical challenges, including honesty, transparency, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest.

9.3.1 Honesty and Transparency

PR practitioners are expected to provide truthful information and avoid misleading the public. This ethical obligation extends to all forms of communication, including press releases, social media posts, and public statements.

9.3.2 Conflicts of Interest

PR professionals must be vigilant about conflicts of interest that can compromise their integrity. For example, a PR consultant working for a political candidate should not simultaneously represent a corporation that could benefit from the candidate's policies.

Case Study: PR Firms in Political Campaigns

Many PR firms in India engage in political consultancy, advising parties on communication strategies. However, instances of firms representing multiple clients with conflicting interests raise ethical concerns. Transparency about client relationships is essential to maintain credibility.

Ethical Dilemmas in Public Relations

Dilemma	Description
Misleading Information	Providing false or exaggerated claims in press materials.
Undisclosed Sponsorship	Failing to disclose paid partnerships or sponsorships.
Influence from Advertisers	Allowing advertisers to influence editorial content.

9.4 Legal Framework Governing Public Relations

The legal landscape governing public relations in India encompasses various laws and regulations that protect consumers and ensure ethical practices.

9.4.1 The Consumer Protection Act, 2019

The **Consumer Protection Act, 2019** provides a framework for protecting consumers from false or misleading advertising. PR professionals must ensure that their communications comply with this legislation to avoid legal repercussions.

Case Study: Patanjali and Misleading Claims

Patanjali Ayurved faced scrutiny under the Consumer Protection Act for making unsubstantiated health claims about its products. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) intervened, leading to a review of Patanjali’s advertising practices. This case highlights the

legal obligations of PR professionals to ensure accuracy in their communications.

9.4.2 Defamation Laws

Defamation laws in India protect individuals and organisations from false statements that harm their reputation. PR practitioners must be cautious in their communications to avoid legal action.

Judicial Ruling: Subramanian Swamy vs. Union of India (2016)

In this case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of criminal defamation laws, emphasising that the right to free speech does not extend to defamatory statements. PR professionals should be aware of these legal implications when crafting messages that involve individuals or competing entities.

9.4.3 Right to Privacy

The recognition of the **Right to Privacy** as a fundamental right in the landmark case of **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)** has significant implications for PR practices. When managing campaigns that involve personal data, PR professionals must ensure compliance with privacy laws to protect individuals' rights.

9.5 Challenges in the Digital Age

The rise of digital media has transformed the practice of public relations, presenting both opportunities and challenges.

9.5.1 Misinformation and Crisis Management

The spread of misinformation on social media platforms can rapidly escalate into a crisis for organisations. PR professionals must be equipped to respond swiftly and effectively to mitigate damage to reputation.

Case Study: United Airlines Flight Incident (2017)

United Airlines faced a public relations crisis when a passenger was forcibly removed from an overbooked flight. The company's initial response was perceived as inadequate, leading to widespread criticism on social media. The incident highlights the importance of timely and authentic communication during crises.

9.5.2 Transparency in Communication

In the digital age, audiences demand greater transparency from organisations. Failure to communicate openly can lead to public backlash and loss of trust.

Research Data: Public Trust in Corporations

A study by the **Edelman Trust Barometer (2022)** found that **64%** of consumers in India believe that companies should be transparent about their operations and decision-making processes. This data

underscores the need for PR professionals to prioritise transparency in their communications.

Key Trends in Digital Public Relations

Trend	Description
Social Media Engagement	Increased use of social media for real-time communication.
Data-Driven Strategies	Utilisation of data analytics to inform PR strategies.
Crisis Management in Real-Time	Immediate response to crises through digital platforms.

9.6 Future of Public Relations in India

The future of PR in India will likely be shaped by ongoing technological advancements, evolving consumer expectations, and the need for ethical practices.

9.6.1 The Role of Technology

Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, are transforming how PR professionals analyse data, target audiences, and craft messages. These technologies can enhance PR strategies but also raise ethical concerns regarding data privacy and manipulation.

9.6.2 Focus on Ethics and Accountability

As public scrutiny of PR practices increases, there will be a greater emphasis on ethics and accountability within the industry. PR professionals must adopt best practices that prioritise transparency, truthfulness, and respect for individual rights.

9.6.3 Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity in PR teams can lead to more comprehensive and nuanced communication strategies. As India continues to grow more diverse, PR practitioners will need to reflect this diversity in their messaging and approach.

9.7 Conclusion

Public Relations is a dynamic field that plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and maintaining organisational reputation. As the landscape continues to evolve, PR professionals must navigate complex ethical and legal challenges while adapting to the digital age. By prioritising transparency, accuracy, and ethical conduct, the PR industry can enhance its credibility and effectiveness in serving both corporate interests and the public good.

In India, the effective use of PR can promote understanding, foster positive relationships, and contribute to social change. As the boundaries of public relations expand, professionals must remain committed to ethical standards, ensuring that their practices reflect the values of integrity, respect, and accountability.

Chapter 10: Privacy, Surveillance, and the Ethics of Information Gathering

Introduction

The collection of personal data by media organisations raises significant ethical questions, particularly as the boundaries between the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy continue to blur. This chapter explores the ethical implications of various information-gathering techniques used in journalism, including the use of drones, surveillance technologies, and hacking. It addresses the legal frameworks governing these practices, such as data protection laws, and discusses high-profile cases where journalists have faced legal consequences for illegal information gathering. By examining these themes, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethical landscape surrounding privacy and surveillance in modern journalism.

10.1 The Importance of Privacy in the Digital Age

In an era characterised by rapid technological advancements, the importance of privacy has become increasingly evident. The proliferation of the internet, smartphones, and social media has resulted in vast amounts of personal data being collected, often without the explicit consent of individuals. This data can include everything from online browsing habits to location

tracking, raising concerns about how media organisations and other entities use this information.

Types of Personal Data Collected by Media Organisations

Type of Data	Description
Location Data	Information about an individual's geographical location.
Biometric Data	Unique biological traits used for identification (e.g., fingerprints, facial recognition).
Online Behaviour	Tracking of browsing habits, including website visits and engagement metrics.
Social Media Activity	Data collected from users' interactions on social media platforms.
Financial Information	Details related to transactions and purchasing behaviour.

10.2 Ethical Considerations in Information Gathering

The ethics of information gathering in journalism involve several key principles, particularly concerning privacy.

Journalists must navigate the delicate balance between the need for information and the rights of individuals.

10.2.1 The Right to Privacy

The right to privacy is a fundamental human right recognised globally. In India, this right was affirmed by the Supreme Court in the landmark case **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)**, which declared that privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Implications for Journalists:

- Journalists must obtain consent before collecting personal data, especially when it involves sensitive information.
- The ethical obligation to respect privacy extends to reporting on individuals who may not be public figures.

10.2.2 The Public's Right to Know

The public's right to know is equally important, particularly in a democratic society where transparency is crucial for accountability. However, the pursuit of information should not come at the cost of infringing on individuals' privacy.

Balancing Privacy and the Public’s Right to Know

Aspect	Privacy Consideration	Public Interest Consideration
Investigative Reporting	Must respect individual privacy while exposing wrongdoing.	Aims to inform the public about issues of significant concern.
Use of Surveillance	Requires ethical justification to avoid invasion of privacy.	Can uncover corruption or malpractice within organisations.
Data Collection	Should obtain informed consent from subjects.	Necessary for accurate and comprehensive reporting.

10.3 Techniques for Information Gathering

As the methods of information gathering evolve, so do the ethical considerations surrounding them. This section explores specific techniques and their implications.

10.3.1 Drones and Aerial Surveillance

The use of drones for journalism has gained popularity, particularly for covering events from unique perspectives. However, their deployment raises ethical questions about privacy invasion.

Case Study: Drone Usage in Natural Disasters

During the 2018 Kerala floods, journalists used drones to capture aerial footage of the devastation. While this provided invaluable insights into the disaster's scale, it also raised concerns about the privacy of individuals whose homes were shown in the footage. Media organisations were urged to exercise caution and ensure that the footage served the public interest without infringing on personal privacy.

10.3.2 Digital Surveillance and Data Mining

With the rise of big data, journalists increasingly rely on digital surveillance tools to gather information. While these tools can uncover critical information, they also pose significant ethical dilemmas.

Case Study: Cambridge Analytica Scandal

The Cambridge Analytica scandal revealed how personal data harvested from social media could be used to influence elections. Although not directly related to journalism, the implications for PR and media practices are profound, highlighting the ethical challenges of data privacy and the responsibilities of media organisations when using such data.

Ethical Considerations of Digital Surveillance Techniques

Technique	Ethical Implications
Data Mining	Can invade privacy if consent is not obtained.
Social Media Scraping	Raises questions about ownership and rights to personal data.
Geolocation Tracking	Risks infringing on individuals' privacy without consent.

10.4 Legal Framework Governing Privacy and Surveillance

The legal landscape surrounding privacy and surveillance in India is complex and evolving. Various laws and regulations govern the ethical use of information gathering in journalism.

10.4.1 Information Technology Act, 2000

The **Information Technology Act, 2000** lays the groundwork for data protection in India. It addresses cybercrimes and the legality of data transmission, including regulations on data privacy and electronic communication.

10.4.2 Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019

Currently under consideration, the **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019** aims to establish a comprehensive data protection framework in India. It seeks to protect individuals' rights concerning their personal data while allowing for its use in various sectors, including journalism.

Key Provisions:

- **Consent:** Organisations must obtain explicit consent from individuals before processing their data.
- **Data Protection Authority:** The establishment of a regulatory body to oversee data protection practices.

10.4.3 Judicial Rulings on Privacy

Indian courts have addressed privacy and surveillance issues in several key cases, reinforcing the need for ethical information gathering practices.

Judgement: Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)

The Supreme Court's judgement reaffirmed the right to privacy, stating that any intrusion must be justified by the necessity to protect a legitimate interest. This ruling has implications for journalists who may wish to use surveillance techniques for information gathering.

10.5 Ethical Challenges in Data Collection

The increasing reliance on data collection poses several ethical challenges for journalists. This section explores the complexities involved in gathering information responsibly.

10.5.1 Consent and Informed Decision-Making

Obtaining informed consent is a fundamental ethical requirement when collecting personal data. Journalists must ensure that individuals understand how their data will be used and the potential consequences of sharing it.

Case Study: Ethical Dilemmas in Surveys

In a survey conducted by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in 2021, journalists collected data on public perceptions of government policies. Ethical concerns arose when participants were not fully informed about how their responses would be used. This case highlights the importance of transparency and informed consent in data collection practices.

10.5.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of sources is critical in investigative journalism. However, the rise of data analytics poses challenges in protecting individuals' identities.

Research Data: Concerns Over Data Breaches

A study conducted by the **Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)** in 2022 revealed that **57%** of respondents were concerned about organisations mishandling their personal data. Journalists must adopt robust measures to protect the anonymity of their sources while still gathering necessary information.

10.6 The Role of Ethics in Crisis Situations

Crisis situations often present unique ethical challenges for journalists, particularly concerning the balance between gathering information and respecting privacy.

Case Study: Reporting on Mental Health Crises

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many journalists reported on mental health issues exacerbated by lockdowns. Ethical dilemmas arose when covering sensitive stories related to individuals' mental health struggles. Journalists had to ensure that they reported these stories with empathy and sensitivity, avoiding sensationalism.

Legal Implications: Mental Health Act, 2017

The **Mental Health Act, 2017** protects the rights of individuals with mental illnesses, including provisions for privacy and confidentiality. Journalists must adhere to these legal frameworks when reporting on sensitive topics.

10.7 Future Trends in Privacy and Information Gathering

As technology continues to evolve, the landscape of privacy and information gathering in journalism will also change. Journalists must remain adaptable and ethically aware of new challenges.

10.7.1 Advances in Technology

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning are transforming how data is collected and analysed. While these tools can enhance reporting capabilities, they also raise ethical questions about data privacy and the potential for misuse.

10.7.2 Strengthening Ethical Standards

There will be an increasing need for stronger ethical standards and guidelines governing the use of technology in journalism. Media organisations must prioritise transparency, accuracy, and respect for individuals' rights as they adapt to new technologies.

10.7.3 Emphasis on Data Literacy

As data becomes more central to journalism, there will be a growing emphasis on data literacy among journalists. Training programmes that focus on ethical data collection and analysis will be essential in preparing journalists for the future.

10.8 Conclusion

The intersection of privacy, surveillance, and ethics in information gathering poses significant challenges for journalists in India. As media practices evolve, the ethical responsibilities of journalists must be upheld to maintain public trust and protect individual rights.

Chapter 11: Legal and Ethical Implications of Media in Crisis Situations

Introduction

The role of media in crisis situations—such as wars, natural disasters, and pandemics—is pivotal for informing the public and ensuring that communities remain resilient. However, reporting on such sensitive issues necessitates a careful balance between the ethical considerations of neutrality, accuracy, and the avoidance of sensationalism. This chapter explores the legal protections and restrictions that govern media conduct during crises, including reporting bans, national security laws, and regulations concerning hate speech and incitement to violence. Through case studies, research data, and judicial rulings, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the ethical and legal challenges faced by media professionals in crisis contexts.

11.1 The Role of Media in Crisis Situations

Media serves as a crucial link between the events unfolding during a crisis and the public's understanding of those events. Whether reporting on natural disasters, armed conflicts, or public health emergencies, the media plays a fundamental role in shaping public perception, providing critical information, and mobilising response efforts.

Types of Crises and Media Responses

Type of Crisis	Media Role
Natural Disasters	Providing real-time updates, safety information, and rescue operations.
Wars and Conflicts	Reporting on troop movements, civilian impacts, and humanitarian needs.
Pandemics	Disseminating health information, guidelines, and updates on disease spread.

The media's effectiveness in these situations depends on the information they provide and how they choose to report it. Ethical considerations become paramount, as irresponsible reporting can lead to panic, misinformation, and further harm.

11.2 Ethical Considerations in Crisis Reporting

11.2.1 Accuracy and Verification

In crisis situations, the urgency to report can lead to lapses in accuracy. Journalists must verify facts before disseminating information to avoid spreading misinformation, which can exacerbate panic or mislead the public.

Case Study: The 2016 Peshawar Attack Reporting

During the Peshawar school attack, many news outlets rushed to report details, some of which turned out to be inaccurate. Incorrect reports about the number of attackers and casualties led to confusion and public distress. This highlights the need for media to prioritise verification, even in high-pressure situations.

11.2.2 Sensationalism and Its Impact

Sensationalism in crisis reporting can lead to public anxiety and desensitisation to suffering. Ethical journalism calls for sensitivity when covering tragic events.

Case Study: Reporting on Natural Disasters

In the aftermath of Cyclone Amphan in 2020, some media outlets resorted to sensational headlines that exaggerated the impact of the cyclone, leading to increased fear among the public. Ethical reporting should focus on factual, balanced coverage that informs without sensationalising the situation.

Ethical Reporting Guidelines in Crisis Situations

Guideline	Description
Verify Information	Ensure all facts are verified before publication.
Avoid Sensationalism	Present information in a clear, factual manner.
Respect Privacy	Avoid invading the privacy of victims or affected individuals.

11.3 Legal Implications of Crisis Reporting

Legal frameworks regulate how the media operates in times of crisis. These laws aim to protect national security, maintain public order, and ensure that reporting does not incite violence or panic.

11.3.1 National Security Laws

In India, the **Official Secrets Act, 1923** prohibits the disclosure of certain information that could threaten national security. During crises, such as wars or terrorist attacks, media outlets may face restrictions on reporting details that could compromise security operations.

Judicial Ruling: K. G. Suresh vs. Union of India (2015)

In this case, the Delhi High Court ruled on the balance between national security and the freedom of the press, asserting that while security is paramount, media should not be unduly restricted from reporting on public interest matters. This ruling reinforces the necessity for transparency while also acknowledging the need for security.

11.3.2 Reporting Bans

Governments may impose temporary reporting bans during crises to control the narrative and prevent the dissemination of misinformation. Such bans can raise ethical questions about censorship and the media's role in democracy.

Case Study: The 2020 Kashmir Lockdown

Following the abrogation of Article 370, a communication blackout was imposed in Jammu and Kashmir, severely restricting media access. Journalists faced significant challenges in reporting on the ground situation, raising concerns about freedom of the press and the public's right to know.

11.3.3 Hate Speech and Incitement to Violence

During crises, media has the potential to incite violence through inflammatory reporting. Laws regarding hate speech are critical in these situations, as irresponsible journalism can exacerbate tensions.

Judicial Ruling: Prakash Singh vs. Union of India (2018)

In this case, the Supreme Court addressed the responsibility of the media to refrain from broadcasting content that could incite communal violence. The Court emphasised the need for media outlets to exercise caution and uphold ethical standards when reporting on sensitive communal issues.

11.4 Research Data on Crisis Reporting

Research indicates that media coverage during crises significantly influences public perception and behaviour. A survey conducted by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in 2021 revealed key insights into public attitudes toward crisis reporting.

Public Perception of Media During Crises (CMS Survey, 2021)

Statement	Percentage Agreement
Media provides accurate information during crises	45%
Sensationalism increases during emergencies	78%
Media should be restricted to prevent panic	58%

Statement	Percentage Agreement
Ethical reporting is crucial in crisis situations	85%

The data reflects a general scepticism about sensationalism in crisis reporting and underscores the public’s desire for ethical journalism during emergencies.

11.5 Ethical Reporting on Vulnerable Populations

Crisis situations often disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including women, children, and minorities. Ethical considerations in reporting on these groups are paramount.

11.5.1 Protecting Vulnerable Individuals

Journalists must take care to protect the identities and privacy of vulnerable individuals when reporting on crises. Ethical guidelines call for sensitivity in how stories are told.

Case Study: Reporting on COVID-19 Impact on Migrant Workers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many news outlets covered the plight of migrant workers returning to their home states. While raising awareness was essential, some reports exposed individuals’ identities and hardships in a sensational manner. Ethical reporting requires a focus on systemic issues rather than individual suffering, ensuring that dignity is preserved.

Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on Vulnerable Populations

Guideline	Description
Anonymity	Maintain the anonymity of victims and vulnerable individuals.
Contextual Reporting	Provide context to avoid victim-blaming narratives.
Compassionate Communication	Use language that respects the dignity of individuals.

11.6 The Role of Technology in Crisis Reporting

The rise of digital media and technology has transformed crisis reporting, offering both opportunities and challenges.

11.6.1 Real-Time Reporting

Social media platforms allow for real-time updates during crises, enabling journalists to disseminate information quickly. However, the speed of reporting can lead to ethical lapses, such as the spread of misinformation.

Case Study: Mumbai Terror Attacks (2008)

During the Mumbai attacks, live coverage on television and social media raised questions about the ethics of reporting live from a crisis scene. While providing information is vital, the real-time reporting also risked revealing sensitive information that could compromise ongoing operations and endanger lives.

11.6.2 Misinformation and Fact-Checking

The spread of misinformation during crises is a critical issue. Journalists must implement rigorous fact-checking processes to ensure the accuracy of information shared.

Research Data: Misinformation during the Pandemic

A study by **The Digital Media Research Centre** found that **64%** of respondents encountered misinformation related to COVID-19. This highlights the necessity for journalists to combat misinformation through responsible reporting.

11.7 Future Trends in Crisis Reporting

The landscape of crisis reporting is continuously evolving, influenced by technological advancements and changing societal expectations.

11.7.1 Emphasis on Ethical Standards

As the media faces increased scrutiny, there will be a greater emphasis on ethical standards in crisis reporting.

Media organisations must establish clear guidelines to uphold integrity and credibility.

11.7.2 Collaboration with Fact-Checkers

Collaborating with fact-checking organisations can enhance the accuracy of reporting during crises. Establishing partnerships can help journalists verify information before publication.

11.7.3 Training and Preparedness

Media professionals should receive training on ethical crisis reporting, focusing on vulnerable populations and the importance of context. Preparedness for crisis situations will enhance the media's ability to respond ethically.

11.8 Conclusion

The media's role in crisis situations is multifaceted and significant. While it is crucial for informing the public, journalists must navigate complex ethical and legal landscapes to uphold the integrity of their reporting.

This chapter has examined the ethical considerations surrounding privacy, accuracy, and the portrayal of vulnerable groups, alongside the legal frameworks that govern media practices in crises. As the media continues to evolve, maintaining ethical standards will be paramount in preserving public trust and ensuring that the media fulfills its critical role in society.

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**“எற்றென் றிரங்குவ செய்யற்க
செய்வானேல்
மற்றன்ன செய்யாமை நன்று.”**



**What have I done' - do not do
deeds leading to such regret;
having regretted thus, do not ever
repeat such deeds.**

About the Author



Priyadharshni Rahul (a) G. Priyadharshni is an Advocate practicing at the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. She is a graduate in political science and passionate about politics, governance and digital journalism. She has worked with Times group as a Manager and also with an NFP organization under Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. She has exhibited leadership skills right from her school days and received Presidents' Award for Scouts and Guides. As a College student, she led the TN NCC Contingent at the Republic Day parade, Delhi in 2005 and received the Prime Ministers' Award for the same. She was deputed as the Youth Ambassador of India to United Kingdom by the Ministry of Defence, during her cadet days.

She is a known television debater, author, motivational speaker and youth orientor. She has conducted various programs to direct young energies towards constructivism and Nationalism. She is also the recipient of several awards, including 'Dr Abdul Kalam Award of Excellence for Nation Building' in 2020 and 'Visionary of the year Award' by Public Relations Council of India in 2021.

She is presently the Trustee Secretary of Prime Point Foundation, Chairman of Sansad Ratna Awards Committee and Founder President of Next Gen Political Leaders. She is also the Editor of the eMagazine PreSense, the oldest surviving eZine in the world that has crossed 18 years of existence.