

Ethical Issues and Concerns in News Management: A study of TV news channels in India

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Abstract: News Management means acts intended to influence the presentation style and content within the news media. There has been an ongoing debate within the news media industry about the news management or managing the news. The practice is more popular in political reporting and investigative reporting. The upsurge of TV news channels in India has instigated a war between news channels to show their content first and better than their competitors. The content war has made it difficult for reporters, editors and production team to make their content and presentation style as per the market needs. Media has been considered watchdog of society and the fourth pillar of democracy.

The growing competition has led to the pressure from owners for reporting it first and be called "NEWS BREAKER" for as much news as possible. As a result, there is a risk for the reporter to fall prey to news management practice. In such scenario 'news management' has become a challenging task to deal with.

The study will highlight the ethical issues faced by journalist in dealing with news management. The paper will explore practical solutions to address these issues and concerns. It will be an exploratory study. The primary data will be collected through in-depth interviews of working journalists, media educators and experts.

Keywords: News management, media, ethics, news channels, spin

Well, to be honest I think I tell less truth when I write journalism than when I write fiction. - Julian Barnes

I. INTRODUCTION

News is acronym of North, East, West and South. News is an important element required in process through which the world is constructed, and social meanings are created. News is the product of judgments and is constructed too at times. For Philip Schlesinger, news is "the product of judgments concerning the social relevance of given events and situations based on assumptions concerning their interest and importance." Making news, in his words, is "putting 'reality' together."

Sawant, 2003 as mentioned in Raj, S. J., Sreekumar, R., & Kalorth (2014) "The Press Council of India (PCI) was established in 1966, with funding from the State, as an autonomous, nonofficial, and statutory body comprised of political appointees, journalists, and editors". The PCI code of conduct addresses issues of accuracy, fairness, privacy, obscenity, vulgarity, suggestive guilt, violence, social evils, riots, and sensationalism.

"The influx of several 24-hr news channels in the Indian media-scape has dramatically changed the concept of news in India because of a turn toward media practices." Thus (2000) called globalized infotainment, an infotainment that works through its "hegemonic appeal rather than force" (p. 342).

Tulloch defines news management as 'an attempt by an organization or individual to systematically influence the coverage of news media through: [1] the planned production of information and events and/or [2] the creation of a manipulative relationship with journalists and media executives' (Tulloch, 1993, p. 367).

Brown, R. (2011) in his study defined "News management is an element of the broader process of professionalization of political communications. It is concerned with the efforts of political actors to shape the way in which media organizations report politics." Alike the above-mentioned quote by Julian Barnes portrays media is something unacceptable as what news, which media, in what manner disseminates is also a part of decision of a news management.

Spin doctors play huge role in news management. The official spokesperson and lobbyists are called spin doctors. Their job is to make their organizations' event in most positive way and create spin on events. As a result, stories are planted, and journalists fall prey to such spin stories at times. Such cases are common in investigative reporting.

"These spin doctors often spy on journalists to find out what investigators know, they even attempt to recruit them (in some cases, successfully). But just as often, they feed journalists (often spectacular-sounding) information with the objective of spinning them, and through them, the public. Be very, very cautious when someone seems all too willing to 'help' you with important tapes and documents, even if their motivations sound plausible." ("How to Deal with Spin Doctors?" Investigative Journalism Manual, n.d.)

Jaya Uttamchandani (2004) in article Journalists and spin-doctors wrote "Spin-doctors are frowned upon mainly because they bear no responsibility for the speech, their depiction or interpretations. But then again, it's the

media's job to play watchdog, to differentiate between reality and fiction. Increased reliance on news management leads to a kind of 'meta journalism'."

The objectives of the study are to explore the ethical issues related to news management practice in television news media and to find out how journalists deal with such challenges.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Davis, R., & Owen, D. M. (1998) in their book *New media and American politics* stated "Today, the definition of news is more malleable and is determined majorly by market forces. An increasing proportion of the news product is manufactured. News management does not rely on the talents of a better educated, more diverse class of professional journalists to decide what news is. Further, there is a fear that news content and critique may be limited by the requirement that it not offend the media organization's corporate partners."

Mayer-Schonberger and Hurley, (2000) in their study conclude "News management includes the need to demonize the enemy, build a moral and virile self-image and to carefully select coverage of the event. These images are built by relying on a variety of techniques, such as generalizations, recalling past violations, and suppressing or omitting information not conducive to the cause. In many cases, media access to a region of conflict is restricted or heavily monitored so that there is little independent reporting, forcing reporters to rely on official sources. In this manner, it is possible to supply carefully chosen information to the media and hence the public—limiting open debate." Shrivastava & Hyde-Clarke (2004).

"A news management regime would be able to affect 'the creation, availability, dissemination, and use of information in global information systems'" (p. 330).

Brown (2006) argued that at a structural level effective news management relies on three dimensions. Firstly, the ability to shape events, secondly, the ability to give journalist access and finally, the narrative that accompanies the unfolding of the events. However, it is the consistency between these three elements that generates success.

Jackson, D. (2013) in *Time to get serious? Process news and British politics* quoted theory of Media Politics, Zaller (1992) which offers an illuminating theoretical explanation for exactly why journalists respond to news management the way they do.

Zaller (1992) concludes that "if reporters were forced to work as news readers, they will not be able to do justice with their profession." In his study he found that "Reporters from elite media such prefer producing a highly sophisticated news product in terms of journalistic interpretation and critical analysis. The reasons could be more pay, status, peer recognition and intellectual interest professional and personal rewards. The elite journalists want to pursue a profession that adds something to the news and freedom to select frames, investigates, interprets, and regulates the flow of political communication."

Zaller (1992) states that "the effort to control media through news management has lot of disadvantages also, it angers journalists, who find ways to even up the score. News management involves the physical exclusion of reporters from events. The cost of this form of news management is extreme as well. The reporters become gets furious and respond by turning out lurid stories about "isolated," "secretive" and "reclusive" officials".

III. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted 12 in-depth interviews were conducted of working journalists, media experts and academicians to know their view point on news management practice. The three segment of people were chosen because it is imperative to understand the issues from people who are facing the problem of news management, academicians were chosen because they are the one who closely follow media and are in process of training future journalists and media experts were questioned to get an opinion from someone is not part of process but carefully observes the industry.

Research Objectives:

- To explore ethical issues in news management
- To find out ways of dealing with news management
- To discuss advantages of news management

The sampling tool used was Purposive Sampling. It was ensured that respondents should be within the age group of 18 years to 70 years.

To attain the objectives of the study following questions were asked from the respondents:

- Q.1 What are the ethical issues linked to News Management?
- Q.2 Which media is more prone to spin? TV or Print?
- Q.3 According to you what are the best ways of dealing with News Management?
- Q.4 Are there any advantages of news management?

The identity of working journalists has been kept confidential due to professional concerns.

The media experts interviewed were:

Ms. Nikita Arora, CEO, Webnnel

Mr. K.B. Pandit, Coordinating Editor

Mr. Rajesh Shandilya, Editor

Dr. Ambrish Saxena, Professor and Dean, DME Media School and Director, DME Studios and Production

The academicians interviewed were:

Dr. Kiran Bala, Professor and Dean, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, K.R. Mangalam University

Prof. Abrol, Professor, Government College Karnal

Mr. K G Dutt, Former Journalist and Academician

Prof. Subhash Dhuliya, Central University of Rajasthan

The brief synopses of the answers of respondents have been presented in the given tables.

Respondents	Ethical issues linked to News Management	Media more prone to spin
Journalists	fake, sensational news are the major ethical concerns	Both the mediums are equally prone to spin It is not about the media pressure is on reporter
Academicians	Basic Journalistic ethics accuracy, factual correctness, unbiased, inclusive and beneficial to people are compromised event-based reporting Paid News is becoming prevalent	TV journalism is facing more ethical issues as compared to other media because to become 'sabsetez'.
Media Experts	News is sometimes concealed for far too long than it should be Can lead to unrest and mistrust Misinformation gets floated News is twisted or given a spin Creates a false/biased picture Denying the public, the actual truth or balanced information	Television is more highlighted as they have to show visualize things Yes, broadcast news media succumb to pressure easily as compared to print media.

Table 1

Respondents	Best ways of dealing with News Management	Advantages of news management
Journalists	Has to be proactive in finding a credible source Verify and cross verify before publishing the news	News management generally has a negative connotation in journalistic terms Pressure for professionals
Academicians	Only Management can help and decide not to become tool of propaganda There is no way to deal with it Media needs to practice need based journalism	There are no direct advantages, but media is an expensive business. It needs management but not according to the market forces but for the audience interests.
Media Experts	Professional honesty and integrity are the best ways of dealing with News Management	News Management is being structured in view of larger interests of the people, it is a welcome sign

Table 2

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Media is the watchdog of society. As people depend on media for all the information, News must be based on facts so that people can trust on Media. It is very important to present news story in unbiased form, but news management practice leads to circulation of misinformation leading to unnecessary speculation, news is twisted and given a spin as a result false/biased picture is created. Fake, sensational news are the major ethical concerns for reporters. Paid news is becoming more prevalent. Non-issues are getting center stage whereas agenda of public interest is losing its grip in the race of TRP. News has to be accurate, factually correct, unbiased,

inclusive and beneficial to people. News Management practice damage individual or institution and journalistic ethics are compromised.

Both the mediums are equally prone to spin. Television is more highlighted as they have to show visual things, the use of image make is easier to understand and catch things. In the race of ratings TV journalist are facing more ethical issues as compared to other media. Broadcast news media succumb to pressure easily as compared to print media. Dropping TRP and falling revenue is always worrisome and TV channels are ready to comprise to contain such trend.

Professional honesty and integrity are the best ways of dealing with News Management. A journalist needs to proactive in finding a credible source and practice need based journalism. News need be presented according to the audience interests and society needs rather than channel owners' interests. Management should take stern decisions not to fall prey to external pressure. A

News management generally has a negative connotation in journalistic terms but if News Management is being structured in view of larger interests of the people, it is a welcome sign. But in practice it has become tool of influencing reporters prior to elections

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