

“The Ailing Watchdog”: Exploring Media and Journalism Ethics in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: By situating journalism ethics within a larger intellectual context of global communication and social change, this study explores and documents the state of media ethics and journalistic standards in Bangladesh and the theoretical and conceptual development of Bangladeshi media ethics in its many forms. Drawing upon recent studies, meta-analysis of ethical issues and review of ethical lapses in Bangladeshi journalism, this study covers three aspects. First, it explicates the media practices and journalism ethics theories as they relate to Bangladeshi media. Second, it provides a thorough assessment of journalism ethics through a comprehensive review of a Jatri (2019) survey of Bangladeshi journalists. Third, it identifies theoretically-grounded approaches to unethical practices in Bangladeshi journalism by exploring a seven-point categorized listing of various instances of ethical lapses in Bangladeshi journalism. In conclusion, this study also identifies the need for a comprehensive code of ethics for Bangladeshi media. In its mission to advance its watchdog role, the Bangladeshi code of ethics should draw upon the evolution of its media ethics as a 20th century phenomenon and seek a sustaining significance in the 21st century digital age that is transforming Bangladesh’s contribution to global communication and social change.

Keywords: Media Ethics; Journalism; Bangladesh Media.

I. Introduction

The study of journalism ethics and media practices connotes myriad innovations in news, information, and entertainment among other modes that enhance human communication (Christians et al., 1998, Habermas, 2003, Nordenstreng, 2000). As one of the most densely populated nations with a high poverty rate, Bangladesh provides a captivating context for studying journalism ethics (Kai, 2001, Bhuyian, 2022, Sobhan & Khan, 2006).

Bangladesh, a relatively new country in South Asia, deserves attention for a number of reasons. The country, which has a predominantly Muslim population, is an example of moderation with a secular constitution and largely free and vibrant media. Bangladesh, about the size of Iowa with an estimated population of 165 million, operates under a multi-party parliamentary democracy. Although Bangladesh faces weak governance and pervasive corruption, the country regard democracy as an important legacy of their bloody war for independence from Pakistan in 1971 (U.S. State Department, 2022). Even though

Bangladesh is a democracy, much of the political process and the activities of the government do not function as they might in a strong, well-established democracy. The practice of journalism is also no exception.

By situating journalism ethics within a larger intellectual context of global communication and social change, this study explores and documents the state of media ethics and journalistic standards in Bangladesh and the theoretical and conceptual development of Bangladeshi media ethics in its many forms. Drawing upon recent studies, meta-analysis of ethical issues and review of ethical lapses in Bangladeshi journalism, this study covers three aspects. First, it explicates the media practices and journalism ethics theories as they relate to Bangladeshi media. Second, it provides a thorough assessment of journalism ethics through a comprehensive review of a Jatri (2019) survey of Bangladeshi journalists. The Journalism Training and Research Initiative (Jatri), a new organization supported by the USAID, conducted the survey among the Dhaka-based (Bangladesh’s capital) journalists to assess the ethical practices and standards of journalism in

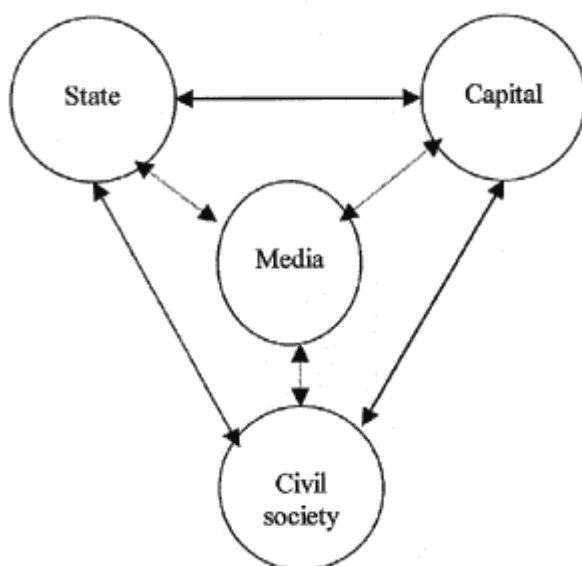
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Bangladesh. Third, it identifies theoretically-grounded approaches to unethical practices in Bangladeshi journalism by exploring a seven-point categorized listing of various instances of ethical lapses in Bangladeshi journalism. This study also explores further implications of journalism ethics in Bangladesh to advance the field of mass communication. It also explores the state of media ethics in Bangladesh as a 20th century phenomenon and its surging significance in the 21st century digital age.

II. Significance of The Study: Media Ethics and Codes are Inadequately Addressed

Despite a rapid rise in research studies on the impact and influence of media practices, the field of communication lacks significant research works that re-conceptualize and theorize the unique features and effects of recent media practices innovations such as the Internet, digital devices, mobile phones, the social web and other changes in journalism ethics in our society. This study fills a gap in the communication research literature. In addition to enhancing existing knowledge about theoretical issues that confront journalism ethics challenges, this study makes a vital scholarly contribution because understanding media practices in countries such as Bangladesh is critical to the success of any communication effort in our global society.

Media practices transform journalism ethics research. However, media ethics and journalism standards are an understudied area.



The figure is from the Norwegian-born social scientist and peace research pioneer Johan Galtung (1999), in whose three-sided model the pillars of society are the State or government, capital or market forces, and civil

society or non-governmental and non-commercial people's activities. In this setup the media are not necessarily located at the apex of the triangle but rather float somewhere between the pillars. In the history of many countries the media have found their place first close to the state, then drifting towards the civil society, and more recently, increasingly close to capital-driven markets.

Galtung does not expect market forces to completely absorb globalizing society; he also sees a burgeoning strength in the civil society with its new movements. Thus the media take a challenging place in a field of conflicts. The media are vital channels not only for the civil society in relation to the state and capital, but also in communication between the state and capital in order to ensure a common public sphere and dialogue in society. If the media succeed in attaining a strong and independent position in this triangle, they could, according to Galtung, assume the status of a fourth pillar in the power structure of society.

It is typical to exaggerate the power of the media to exert influence by ignoring the fact that communication is not generally an independent power, but rather a continuation of more fundamental social forces (Nordenstreng 2000b). However, there have been in recent years - in conditions of the so-called "information society" - good reasons to speak of the "medialization" of social relations and of the significant power position of the media in society (for a new reader on the topic, see Karvonen 2001). The media have become kingmakers in the field of politics at the same time as an institution the political party has lost ground. In the old days newspapers were typically an extension of politics, and newspapermen (indeed mostly men!) were politicians. Today politics and the media have split into two institutions, and the media frequently appear to be the stronger.

Traditionally the influence of the media has been emphasized by talk of the "fourth estate" or "fourth branch of government" alongside the legislative (parliament), executive and judicial branches. This view has gained new impetus from the perspective of the "media society". For example, recent events in Pakistan's conflict with the lawyers and the media's role in promoting lawyer protests has generated a proposal that the classic doctrine of the three branches is no longer valid and should be complemented by such contemporary branches as trade unions, market forces - and mass media.

The basic setup, however, is clear and the core question remains, what is the relation of the media power to the people’s power. Taking freedom of speech as a basic principle, the task of the media, and of journalism in particular, is to serve the people and not those who wield power, be that power political or economic. Thus, in Galtung's figure the media should be located closer to the civil society. It is not healthy for the cause of democracy that the media should move from the political camp to the economic camp and remain the tool of those elites in society, while the people continue on their own path as consumers and spectators.

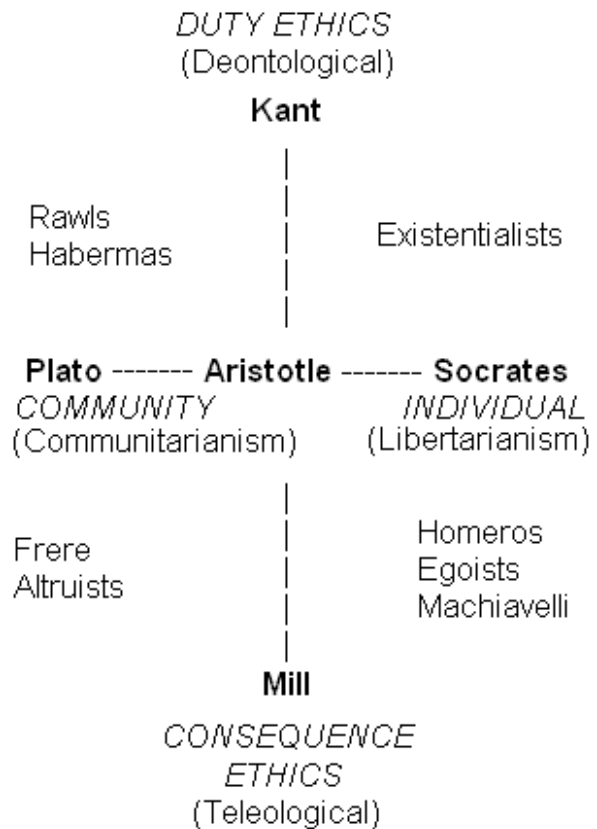
III. Theorizing Media Practices in Journalism Ethics

Dramatic forces are remaking the evolution of journalism ethics in Bangladesh. As in other nations, media ethics provides defining principles in professional and academic circles. It also draws upon the overall value foundation of media content or the normative orientation of the media. This can refer to both the actual media performance and to the intended media performance. In such a general sense it is logical that media ethics is part and parcel of the media-society relationship; as soon as we talk about the role and mission of media in society, we also face the issues of media ethics. Media ethics may also be related to simply self-regulation of the media (Nordenstreng 1995c).

In myriad ways, media ethics refers to the basic principles about how to define good and bad media performance, rather than to its actual practice. In everyday discussion, ethics is often used to mean exactly the opposite: concrete behavior of journalists/media (Nordenstreng 1995c).

It is also important to journalism and media practitioners to study the basics of philosophy to be conceptually equipped to understand various aspects of media ethics. Following Christians and his colleagues (1998), our students are reminded of the five principles, which dominate Western thinking - from Aristotle’s golden mean through Kant’s categorical imperative, Mill’s utility and Rawl’s justice to the Judeo-Christian adage: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” A condensed framework (inspired by Merrill 1997) of the philosophical legacy for media ethics follow this meta-model in the next row:

Consequently, when approaching ethics we inevitably encounter philosophy - at least its landmarks - and we are led to a terrain of contradictions, which offers few simple “right answers”. As Nordenstreng (1995c)



delineates how it may be “intellectually stimulating” to study media ethics as a tussle among three dilemmas: universal vs. particular, individualism vs. communitarianism, freedom vs. control.

It is for this reason that several media observers in Bangladesh have called for the teaching of the conceptual fundamentals of media ethics and basic knowledge of the media laws of the land in teaching of journalism and mass communication.

IV. The History and Culture of Media in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is among the most densely populated countries in the world with a high poverty rate. However, per-capita (inflation-adjusted) GDP has more than doubled since 1975, and the poverty rate has fallen by 20% since the early 1990s. The U.S.-based investment banking firm, in a report on world’s potential economies, listed Bangladesh among the “Next Eleven” economies (Khan, 2005). The Goldman Sachs coined the term “Next Eleven” to describe economies with high growth potential after Brazil, Russia, India, and China. As the World Bank noted in its July 2005 Country Brief, the country has made significant progress in human development in the areas of literacy, gender parity in schooling and reduction of population growth. However, Bangladesh continues to face a number of major challenges, including

widespread political and bureaucratic corruption, economic competition relative to the world, serious overpopulation, and an increasing danger of hydrologic shocks brought on by ecological vulnerability to climate change.

The media play an important role in Bangladesh in its path toward development. The print media is highly competitive, but television and radio have been less so. The terrestrial broadcast media are state monopolies in Bangladesh, a situation that naturally generates constraints on those media. The law restricts ownership of mass media to citizens of the country, while ownership with foreign media companies is not restricted (Bhuyian, 2002). The stifling of the flow of information contributes to the divide between rich and poor, further removing power from the hands of the poor and reducing their chances of improving their lives. In the last 20 years, the country has seen changes as a result, in part, of national policy development as well as a growing business market. Investors have become more involved with media ventures, likely to achieve some economic advantages. Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the 1980s, there was a boom in the print media, caused by large investments of a few who sought prestige, power and privilege from such investments (Chowdhury, 2003). Satellite television has expanded recently, since a change in licensing made the process less complicated, yielding 19 private satellite television channels that broadcast 24 hours a day. Apparently, control of private media currently belongs to a few with close ties to political parties.

The data received from the Department of Film and Publications (DFP) show that, as of 2022, a total of 973 newspapers are published from Bangladesh. Among those, 543 are dailies and 257 are weekly newspapers. Out of the total 543 dailies, only eight national daily newspapers published from the capital Dhaka have more than 200,000 circulations (DFP, 2022).

There exists in Bangladesh “media divide” and “media darkness,” largely because politicians and the government fail to recognize the importance and impact of media, resulting in the isolation of a large percent of the population from vital information. A study in 2006 shows 28.5 percent of Bangladeshis have no consistent radio, television, newspaper or magazine access – a media darkness – the figure rising to 35.9 percent in rural areas and 36.3 percent among women. The figures rise as household income declines; about 46 percent of the most destitute homes have no media access (Bangladesh Media and Demographic Survey, 2006).

While there is a free press with no official censorship, several laws exist that hinder the flow of information to the public. Article 39 (2) of Bangladesh Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression and freedom of the media ‘subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement of an offence’ (Constitution of Bangladesh). Despite the constitutional safeguard, in Bangladesh there are at least 21 laws designed to regulate the media. The idea of freedom in Bangladesh includes some regulation, in all forms of the media, resulting in a failure to establish a more free set of guidelines, even though its neighboring countries of India, Nepal and Malaysia have successfully done so (Sobhan & Khan, 2006). As democracy itself is not governed by the parliament or rule of law and cannot be protected by the judiciary, “media freedoms in this country are asymmetric and unpredictable” (Chowdhury, 2003).

A free media and a developing society have a mutually beneficial relationship, but years of control are difficult to overcome. All media outlets in Bangladesh, no matter whether run by the government or privately held companies, continue to use their position to their advantage in their relationships with the powerful, perhaps the root of their lack of independence. It is said there are three types of censorship in Bangladesh: state, public and self. While the government and media outlets censor themselves, those in power financially and political use their power to sway media coverage (Sobhan & Khan, 2006). There is no shortage of foreign cable channels in Bangladesh. Since the 1990s, when there were about 10 channels, the media choices have grown to 65, 30 of which are pay channels; the rest are delivered through about 550 local cable operators. In addition, there are hundreds of free to air channels (AMIC, 2006).

V. Journalistic Standards in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, journalism as a profession is considered “very risky.” Many journalists cite fear of possible harassment, retaliation, or physical harm as a reason to avoid sensitive stories. Violent attacks on journalists and newspapers, and efforts to intimidate journalists, frequently occur in Bangladesh mostly by government leaders, political activists, and other influential groups with vested interests. These crimes largely remained unresolved and the perpetrators, often identified by name or party affiliation in press reports, have not been held accountable. Attacks by political activists on journalists also are common during times of political street violence. Some journalists also get injured during

police actions. A survey conducted by Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication (BCDJC) shows that at least 119 incidents of harassment of journalists took place in 2008 where 285 journalists were mentally and physically assaulted. During the January-March 2009, 28 such incidents of journalist harassments took place and 49 journalists became victim of those incidents (BCDJC, 2009)

Bangladesh's recent history of democratic governance suffered a setback when a state of emergency was declared on 11 January, 2007 and the country's television and radio stations except the state-run Bangladesh Television were ordered to stop broadcasting their news programs for two days. The Bangladesh media had to face tremendous snakes during the tenure of the military backed caretaker government from early 2007 to late 2008. The then interim government imposed the emergency rule on the news media too. The Bangladesh Annual Report 2008 of Reporters Without Borders mentioned that "the army, the real power in the country, committed serious press freedom violations aimed at silencing independent journalists" (Reporters Without Borders, 2008). The report also mentioned that the intelligence services officers summoned editorial heads and threatened them with draconian criminal proceeding, including under Article 5 of the State of Emergency Regulations. The privately owned television stations, which enjoy growing popularity in the country, were the main targets of crackdowns. Some popular dailies such as the Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Jugantor, and Shamokal were also victims of judicial harassment. The newspapers had to employ a large number of lawyers to keep their editors and journalist out of prison in the face of around 100 defamation suits, the report observed. Because of this state-run terrorism against the press, the Bangladeshi media was ranked at 136th out of 173 countries on the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index (2009) with 1st being most free.

Apart from outer threats, the media professionals in Bangladesh always suffer from the threat of losing jobs. There are instances when journalists were fired from their jobs without prior notices. Irregular payment of salary is a common picture in Bangladesh media industry. These bars create direct obstacles to the professional excellence and freedom of the press in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Journalism Review (BJR), Vol-4, Issue-7, October 2008).

As regard to the press freedom and the standard of journalistic practices, the present democratically elected government that came to power in early 2009 made a significant progress. Following the demand of the

journalists' organizations and the civil society for ensuring the free flow of information, the Right to Information Act 2009 was passed as a law of the land in March 2009. Under this new law, authorized officers are bound to provide information to the public.

VI. Ethics and Standards in Bangladesh Journalism: The Jatri Survey

The Journalism Training and Research Initiative (Jatri) of BRAC University conducted a survey among 335 Dhaka based journalists in September 2019 to investigate the ethical practices, journalistic standards and codes of conduct in Bangladeshi media houses. The main objective of the survey, the first ever in its kind in Bangladesh, was to gauge the journalists' perceptions of ethics and standards currently prevalent in the Bangladesh media. A questionnaire was first developed in English. Then it was translated into Bangla and tested. Five working journalists were employed as data collectors so that they could get easy access to the media houses and the journalists. The data collectors were given orientation and their areas were divided. Besides the survey, seven key informant interviews were conducted with senior journalists of Dhaka media houses. A focus group interview session was also conducted with a group of senior journalists. The Jatri followed a model of similar survey conducted in the United States. It also hired an American journalist as consultant to guide the survey team.

The results of the Jatri survey were not published before. As we approached, the Jatri shared the survey results and other related data with us to incorporate in this paper. Based on the raw data provided to us, we identified some key findings of the survey. These findings are presented below to get a first-hand understanding of ethical practices and journalistic standards in Bangladesh

Among the 335 respondents, 291 (87%) were male while 39 (12%) were female. The sample for this survey was very representative given the fact that out of the total 2000 journalists working in Dhaka, there are less than 150 women journalists (OneWorld South Asia, 2009). The respondents included news editors, reporters, photojournalists, sub editors, camera persons, and producers. Majority (242 out of 335) were reporters. In terms of different platforms, 249 respondents used to work for the print medium, 59 for television, 10 for radio, 10 for web-based news organizations, and 5 for news agencies. Nearly half of the respondents (48 %) belonged to professional associations for journalists. Most of the respondents were highly educated; 67 % having Master's and 41% having degrees in mass communication and journalism.

The survey findings revealed that the majority of journalists rated the world of Bangladeshi journalism poor in terms of ethical standards. Despite high educational qualifications the economic conditions of the majority of the journalists were poor. Most of the journalists were not provided salaries under the government prescribed wage board. Their salary starts from five thousand taka (the Bangladesh currency; one Taka is equivalent to roughly 70 U.S. dollar), and the majority of the journalists (62%) get less than fifteen thousand taka salary per month. The survey also revealed that over 80 percent of them live in rented houses. Most of them do not have any personal vehicle and lack another income source.

According to the survey a considerable section of journalists do not follow ethical standards. Although nearly all respondents feel that taking money from a source is wrong, 27 percent of journalists know their colleagues who accept money from sources. 46 percent of journalists believe that accepting gifts from a source is innocuous while almost 30 percent stated that they have accepted gift from a source. Most journalists seem to be oblivious of the scenarios that are seriously in conflict with personal interests. 84 percent of the journalists said if their editor asks they would investigate their close friend's corruption charges. 41 percent of the respondents said they would pretend to be someone else if it were the only way to get accurate information for an important story. In a society where ethical standards are not given importance it is difficult for journalists to maintain higher standards. However, the good news was that 94 percent of journalists wanted an ethics and standards guidebook to follow in their profession.

VII. Key Findings of the Jatri Survey

1. Lack of Ethical Standards: On a scale of 1-10 (1 being extremely poor and 10 being excellent), 59 % of journalists rated the world of Bangladeshi journalism between 0 to 5 while the remaining 41 % rated between 6 to 10. In this context, one of the key informant interviewees observed that the general ethical situation in the Bangladesh media is not satisfactory. According to chief reporter of a national daily, the overall ethical practices in Bangladesh society are below standard. "In this society, journalists report about corruption... of politicians, civil servants, lawyers and doctors. But the journalists are also part of that very society, they live with those professionals; therefore, they are not different from others" (Jatri, 2019).

On a scale of 1-10, how ethical would you rate the world of Bangladeshi journalism (1 being extremely poor and 10 being excellent)?

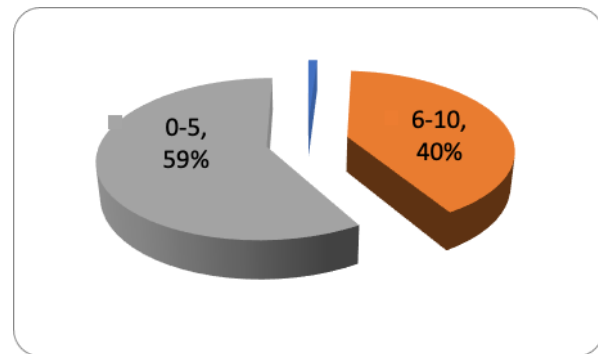


Figure 1: Lack of Ethical Standards in Bangladeshi Journalism.

2. Paying News Sources: Forty percent of the journalists the Jatri surveyed said they approved of their news organizations paying money for a crucial interview if it was the only way to get someone to talk. While any and all ethics guidebooks would certainly stress that a news organization should never pay for interviews, some of the respondents explained the unique and difficult situation journalists face in Bangladesh (Jatri, 2019).

Do you approve of news organizations paying money for a crucial interview if it's the only way to get someone to talk?

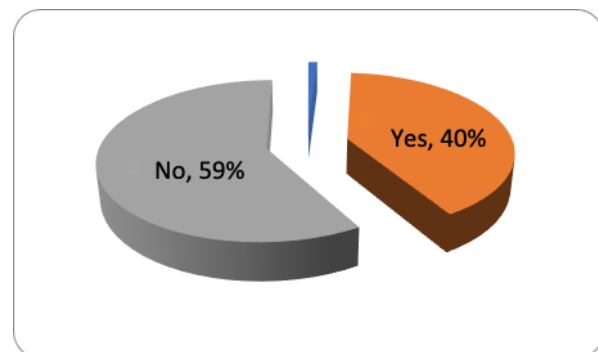


Figure 2: Paying News Sources in Bangladeshi Journalism.

The Chief News Editor of a national daily newspaper noted that paying the source is a delicate issue. It is not at all preferable to pay the sources; however, he said exceptions could be made based on the nature of the issue concerned and it depends on the personal judgement of the reporter. The news editor said that it is better to maintain long-term friendly relationships with sources. For maintaining that relationships token gifts like books, note books and so on could be given in different occasion like new-year celebration (Jatri, 2019). A senior reporter of another daily newspaper mentioned that in Bangladesh it is very difficult to work without paying the sources. Most of the sources of news

are the junior level staffs of different government offices. Unless they have some benefit they do not continue their cooperation. So, reporters sometimes give them little amount of tips in different occasions. In this context, 16 % of the respondents said that they have paid to their sources to get information for a news story.

3. Bribery in Bangladeshi Journalism: Interestingly, while 40 percent said they approved of their news organization paying a source for an interview, 98 percent of the respondents said they have never accepted money from a source.

Have you ever accepted money from your source?

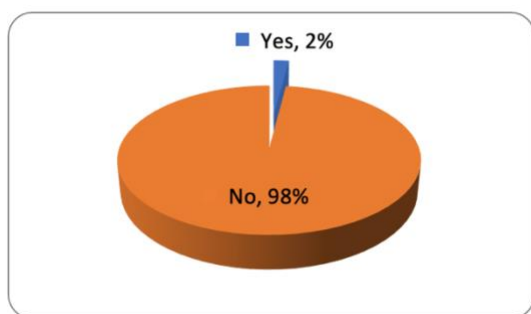


Figure 3: Sparse Cases of Paid News in Bangladesh Journalism.

But also, interestingly, when asked if they knew of any journalists who did accept money from sources, 27 percent said they did (Jatri, 2019). A news editor of a television channel said that he heard that some journalists take money from sources. “The number is not many,” he said adding that not more than 50 percent journalists accept money from sources.

Do you know any journalist who accepts money from source?

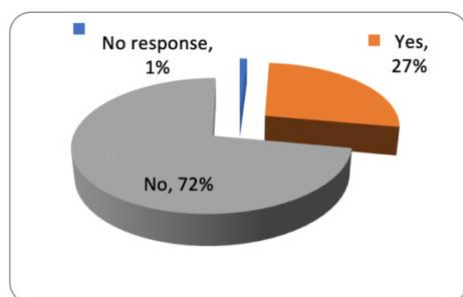


Figure 4: Bribery in Bangladesh Journalism.

4. Receiving Gifts from Sources: Although 46 percent of the journalists surveyed said it was okay to receive gifts from sources, seventy percent of them said they

themselves had never accepted any gifts. But, again, when asked if they knew any journalists who accepted gifts from sources, 48 percent said yes. A senior reporter of a national daily said in the key informant interview that the corporate houses regularly send gift packs by post to the reporters. On some occasions journalists receive money for publishing or not publishing reports.

Do you know any journalist who accepts gifts from source?

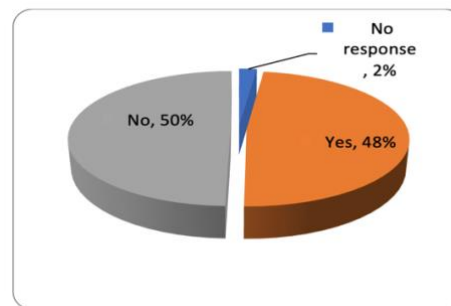


Figure 5: Accepting Gifts by Bangladesh Journalists.

Do you feel it is okay to accept a gift from a source?

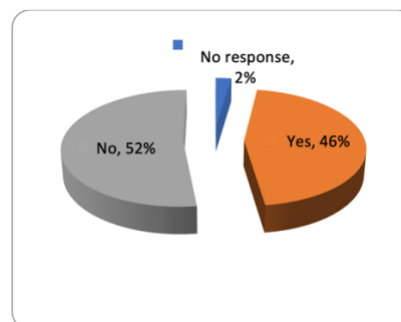


Figure 6: Ethics of Gifts in Bangladesh Journalism.

Have you ever accepted a gift from a source?

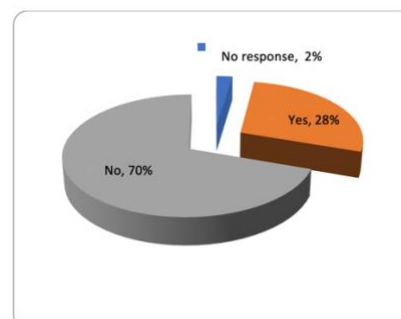


Figure 7: Bangladeshi Journalists Accepting Gifts.

5. Self-Censorship: Although 68 percent of the journalists surveyed said there was *not too much* self-censorship at their news organizations – all of the

senior reporters interviewed said that self-censorship was one of their biggest concerns. Though there was censorship during the emergency period, government censorship is not significant in the print media.

However, self-censorship is a big concern. The self-censorship is practiced by individual reporters from the bottom and by the editors and owners at the top. Self-censorship is practiced due to political and ideological bias of the journalists or editorial policy. Personal political bias is much more decisive than institutional political influence.

Another increasing influence is from the business organizations and corporate houses. It is even stronger than the political one, because, media organizations are dependent on corporate advertisements for their existence. Now commercial managers have closer relationships and greater interactions with the editors and owners than the news editors or chief editors. They are now interfering in the works of reporters and editors. They are even dictating the assignments.

News media is now forced to send reporters to the very trivial events of corporate houses even at the cost of missing other more important news events. It is seriously affecting the ethical standard of the media.

The deputy chief reporter of a national daily told that some journalists including senior reporters kill news for money. They do not publish the news of huge corruptions and irregularities receiving money from the perpetrators.

6. Conflicts of Interest: Eighty-four percent of the respondents said they would have no hesitation investigating a close friend who was suspected of being involved in corruption.

Similar survey questions have been asked of journalists around the world and typically results are completely opposite (Jatri, 2019). For example, in Tim Harrower's book, *Inside Reporting*, one hundred professional journalists were asked a similar question: "A friend of yours is the lead singer of a local rock group. Your editor wants you to review the band. Would you agree to do it?" Ninety-five percent of the respondents in that survey said no.

A close friend of yours becomes a politician or business person who is suspected of being involved in corruption – your editor wants you to investigate. Would you agree to do it?

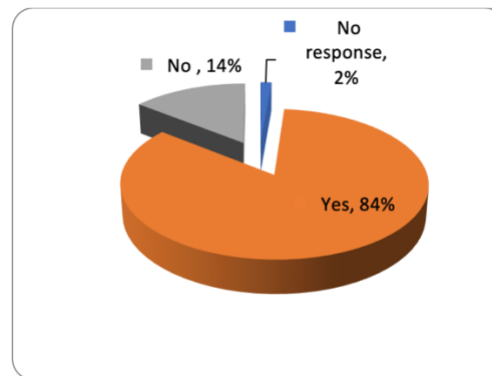


Figure 8: Conflict of Interest in Bangladesh Journalism.

7. Lying About Identity: Forty-one percent of those surveyed said they would "lie" (by pretending to be someone else) if it were the only way to accurate information for an important story.

If it's the only way to get accurate information for an important story, would you pretend to be someone else?

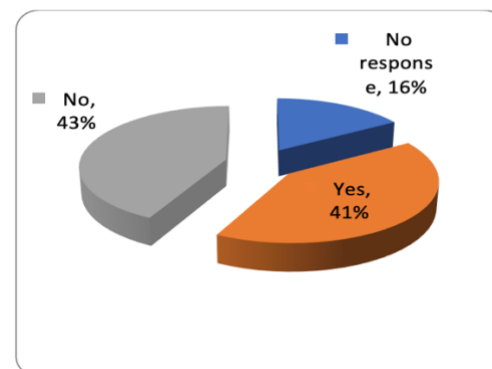


Figure 9: Lying About Identity in Bangladesh Journalism.

8. Concealing Identity: Forty-eight percent of respondents said they would not identify themselves as a reporter in order to get accurate (truthful) information from a source.

9. Secret Taping or Recording: Twenty nine percent journalists surveyed in Bangladesh said that they would secretly record conversation. In the US in answer to similar question 37% said they would record secretly if it was legal.

If it's the only way to get accurate information or an important story, would you not identify yourself as a reporter?

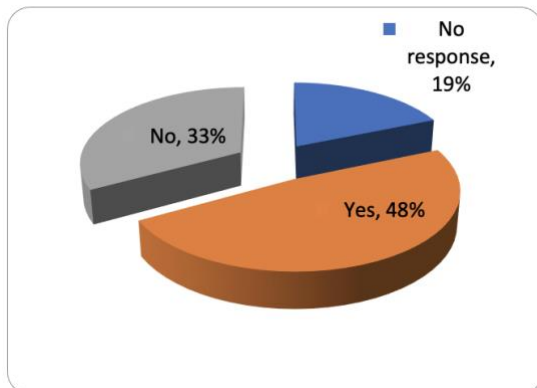


Figure 10: Lying by Omission in Bangladesh Journalism.

10. Most Journalists want Written Guidebook on Ethics and Standards: Seventy-Five percent of the respondents said that their news organization did not have a written ethics and standards guidebook. Our research indicates that only one media house - *Prothom Alo* - in Dhaka has a professional, comprehensive ethics and standards guidebook.

Does your news organization have a written ethical standards guidebook that journalists follow?

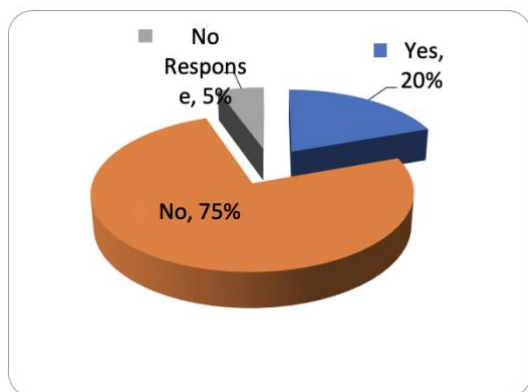


Figure 11: Sparse Codes of Ethics in Bangladesh Journalism.

VIII. Ethical Lapses in Bangladesh Journalism

To identify the ethical lapses in Bangladesh journalism, we consulted other sources and personally interviewed some senior-level journalists and editors in Bangladesh. Our meta-analyses reveal the following ethical lapses in Bangladesh journalism.

1. Unethical Ways to Gather and Publish News and Information

1.01 Unauthorized access to information (such as theft of information)

1.02 Hidden gadgets (such as cameras and other recording devices) for news gathering

1.03 Deceptive ways to gather information

1.04 Pilfering news

1.05 Concocted coverage with purported dispatches from fictitious places.

1.06 Fabricate news and information, publishing false statements.

1.07 Offering bribes and other incentives for gathering news and information.

1.08 Lack of clear divisions or signaling between news/editorials and advertising/advertorials.

1.09 Checkbook journalism and offering bribes and other incentives for gathering news and information

1.10 Other unethical ways to gather news

2. Bribery, Extortion and Illicit Agency

2.01 Paid news or presenting sponsored content (such as video news releases) as original news

2.02 "Church and State" violations (such as separation of advertising interests and editorial intentions): Almost all the newspapers and TV channels are owned by conglomerates. The owning conglomerates use these media outlets to promote or protect their business interests. A conglomerate owning a newspaper or group of media outlets, sometimes, will publish news against the other conglomerate that also has news business. In some cases, they use these platforms to make a journey from business to politics. Also, some politicians invest money in news business to gain more power.

2.03 Coercive tactics for gathering news. For instance, threatening sources with dire consequences if they do not divulge information.

2.04 Accept or extort favors, freebies and expensive gifts.

2.05 Develop deceitful or unethical collusions.

2.06 Resort to illicit agency such as acting as a clandestine agent for people in power

2.07 moonlighting (work for both a newspaper and another employer, say a foundation as media relations/press consultant): This can present conflicts of

interest or blurs the lines between journalistic expectations of "objectivity" and employer expectations for advocacy.

2.08 "Envelopmental journalism" or the practice of money-stuffed envelopes given by government officials and corporate executives to journalists.

2.09 Accessory to police/other forces

2.10 Other acts of bribery, extortion and illicit agency

3. Fabrication or Plagiarism

3.01 Willing distortion of news coverage, out-and-out lying

3.02 Wanton speculation and conjectures with made-up material and information

3.03 Copyright violations and unethical reproduction of copyrighted works. Lifting material from other newspapers and wire services. It is very common that the newspapers will get a story from the wire services, but they won't give credit to the wire service. It is mostly common among the English language newspapers and the state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV).

3.04 Deriving concocted details from photographs, videos and other sources to create the false impression that the journalists were somewhere or witnessed an event, when they did not.

3.05 Plagiarism and using information without attribution, failing to give proper credit to the original source, concealing the source of rewritten material to make it seem original, reports that closely reflect phrasing from documents or published works, recycled, re-written or cannibalized content and other crimes of copying

3.06 Quoting "anonymous" sources based on fictitious sources. In most cases, journalists attribute their own statements/versions in the disguise of "anonymous sources"

3.7 Other acts of fabrication or plagiarism

4. Unscrupulous Journalism and Wanton Negligence

4.01 Staging events, doctoring documents and indoctrinate sources

4.02 Biased news reporting;

4.03 Refusing to admit errors in reporting and publish corrections. Newspapers or TV channels do publish corrections and statements from the accused persons.

But the corrections will be published in page 8, while the original report was a front-page story.

4.04 Failing to fact-check stories beyond just verifying the names of people, companies and institutions. This is widespread in Bangladeshi journalism. Very often different newspapers or TV channels will report a single incident/issue in many different ways. There will be differences in simple facts and figures of the same incident reported in different news outlets.

4.05 Willful ignorance and corner-cutting and sloppiness in reporting

4.06 Wrongful negligence such as failing to fact-check sources. Failing to follow up on a story. Failing to make prompt and full corrections. Failure to include a diversity of sources.

4.07 Confidentiality violations such as failing to grant anonymity for off-the-record interactions. Breach assurances of confidentiality. In a handful of cases, journalists preferred jail rather than disclosing the identity of the sources.

4.08 Conflicts of interest and full disclosure violations

4.09 Defamatory writings

4.10 Other acts of unscrupulous journalism and wanton negligence

5. Ethical Lapses in Truthfulness, Accuracy, Fairness, Transparency and Other Ethical Principles Expected of a Journalist

5.01 Failing to adhere to the ethical behavior expected of a journalist. These may include, but not limited to, moral integrity, sound character, and unimpeachable honesty.

5.02 Privacy violations

5.03 Sensationalism

5.04 Failure to redress reader grievances. Only one newspaper has the position of Ombudsman.

5.05 Denying freedom of expression for critics who despise the news entity

5.06 Failing in the responsibility of the press to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" and thereby become an instrument of injustice by delaying or denying a voice to the afflicted.

5.07 Subversive criticism.

5.08 Refrain from transparency of its policies and practices.

5.09 The real or perceived conflict of interest in Bangladesh media when media owners and journalists are involved directly or indirectly with financial investments in the business world.

5.10 Other ethical lapses in accuracy, fairness and professional violations.

6. Infractions in Situation Ethics in Community Context

6.01 Discriminate against or for people on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

6.02 Obscenity and vulgarity

6.03 Professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs to the detriment of another community

6.04 Failing to protect communal or racial sentiments (such as Hindu-Muslim unity in Bangladesh communities)

6.05 Depriving access to on the basis of race, color, gender, age, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

6.06 The collusion (real or imagined) between the media enterprise and other entities in the government and business world.

6.07 Other acts of infractions in situation ethics in community context.

7. Ethical Lapses in News Presentation

7.01 Trivializing stories by playing a background music track while presenting news (E.g., "Jhinchak" or rhythmic music, at varying tempos, routinely accompanies somber stories on TV)

7.02 Displaying visuals of violence or gore (E.g., pictures of dying police officer, whom criminals had killed; account of slaying wild life)

7.03 News hosts interrupting guests as a matter of style (routine on almost every TV show)

7.04 Old visuals shown repeatedly with no regard for relevance – that is, confusing background for news (E.g., showing archival footage or visuals, etc.)

7.05 Jingoism in international matters (E.g., coining biased terms for suspected persons; Using pejorative adjectives in a routine manner while discussing terrorists, troops, war threat, etc.)

7.06 Disrespecting language as a matter of style by routinely/casually mixing two or more languages (E.g., "Benglish," etc., is routine on almost every TV show)

7.07 Other ethical lapses in news presentation

Bangladeshi media reflect the society it serves and this list of "Ethical Lapses in Bangladesh Journalism" should be read and reviewed in that spirit. The primary purpose of this list is to identify unethical practices and invite ethical evaluation of Bangladeshi media.

IX. Summary and Conclusion

Drawing upon recent studies, meta-analysis of ethical issues and review of ethical lapses in Bangladeshi journalism, this study covered three aspects. First, it explicated media practices and journalism ethics theories as they relate to Bangladeshi media. Second, it assessed journalism ethics in Bangladesh through a comprehensive review of a Jatri (2019) survey of Bangladeshi journalists. Third, it identified theoretically-grounded approaches to unethical practices in Bangladeshi journalism by exploring a seven-point categorized listing of various instances of ethical lapses in Bangladeshi journalism. By situating journalism ethics within the larger intellectual context of global communication and social change, this study documented historical, theoretical, and practical realities of Bangladeshi media, journalistic practices, and the state of Bangladeshi media ethics in its many forms.

This study highlights the need for a comprehensive code of ethics for Bangladeshi media. The woeful lack of media ethics in Bangladesh and the related lack of ethical action in Bangladeshi journalism may affect the role of Bangladeshi media as a watchdog of democracy.

In its mission to advance its watchdog role, the Bangladeshi code of ethics should draw upon the evolution of its media ethics as a 20th century phenomenon and seek a sustaining significance in the 21st century digital age that is transforming Bangladesh's contribution to global communication and social change.

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