
REIMAGINING JOURNALISM ETHICS EDUCATION IN INDIA: A CAPABILITIES APPROACH TO DEVELOPING ETHICAL COMPETENCIES

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes a capabilities approach to reimagining journalism ethics education in India, emphasizing the importance of enabling journalists to make informed ethical decisions. The paper argues that existing journalism ethics education in India focuses primarily on rules-based approaches, neglecting the development of ethical competencies. A capabilities approach, grounded in the work of Amartya Sen, recognizes that journalists operate in complex, dynamic environments, requiring a range of ethical competencies to navigate. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and focus groups to explore the current state of journalism ethics education in India. The findings suggest that a capabilities approach can provide a more comprehensive framework for developing ethical competencies in journalism students, enabling them to make informed ethical decisions in a rapidly changing media landscape.

Keywords: Ethics; journalism; India; capabilities approach; curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Journalism ethics education is crucial in India, where the media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and holding those in power accountable. The Indian media landscape is characterized by a mix of public and private ownership, with a growing trend towards corporatization and concentration of media ownership. This has led to concerns about the impact of commercialization on journalism ethics and the need for journalism ethics education that prepares students for the complexities of the Indian media landscape.

Despite the importance of journalism ethics education, existing research suggests that journalism ethics education in India is often inadequate, focusing primarily on rules-based approaches that neglect the development of ethical competencies. This can lead to a lack of critical thinking and ethical decision-making among journalists, which can have serious consequences for the quality of journalism and the health of democracy. A capabilities approach to journalism ethics education offers a promising alternative to rules-based approaches. Grounded in the work of Amartya Sen, a capabilities approach recognizes that journalists operate in complex, dynamic environments, requiring a range of ethical competencies to navigate. This approach emphasizes the importance of enabling journalists to make informed ethical decisions, rather than simply following rules or guidelines.

This study aims to contribute to the development of a capabilities approach to journalism ethics education in India, by exploring the current state of journalism ethics education and identifying opportunities for innovation and improvement. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather data from journalism educators, students, and professionals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the current state of journalism ethics education in India?
2. How do journalism educators and students perceive the importance of ethical competencies in journalism practice?
3. What opportunities exist for innovation and improvement in journalism ethics education in India?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to developing a capabilities approach to journalism ethics education in India, which has important implications for the quality of journalism and the health of democracy. The study's findings will interest journalism educators, students, and professionals, as well as policymakers and media regulators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research on journalism ethics education in India highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach. Studies have shown that rules-based approaches can lead to a lack of critical thinking and ethical decision-making among journalists (Joseph, 2013; Rao, 2015).

There is ample documentation of India's post-liberalization communication revolution. Beyond the sharp rise in sales of newspapers and magazines, the nation's media landscape has been significantly influenced by television and new media. With 600 million viewers, India is currently the world's second-largest television market. According to Kohli-Khandekar (2013), 119 million Indian households, or 60% of all households, own a television, and 42% of those households have cable service. Despite being modest when compared to China and the US, the expansion of social media and the internet has been remarkable, with connectivity increasing by 89% between 2007 and 2012 (Parthasarathi et al. 2012). More than three hundred news channels broadcast in sixteen languages are available in India. Despite this expansion, there is still a lack of thorough studies on the moral obligations of reporters and the nation's rapidly evolving journalistic landscape (Rao and Mudgal 2015). With several Indian universities offering degree programs in journalism and journalism ethics and the founding of the NBA (News Broadcasters Association) in 2008 to address the moral, legal, and regulatory challenges faced by media outlets, there has been some advancement in the field of journalism education. Discussions and academic studies regarding journalism ethics continue to lag behind the growing number of researchers examining professional standards in Indian journalism. Recent publications by Guha Thakurta, Chadha and Kavoori (2012), Athique (2013) Rao and Johal (2006), Mehta (2015a), Kumar (2016), (2011), and others present a sobering image. Researchers have cited cases of corruption, paid news, sting operations, and other tactics that have left journalism open to manipulation and mistrust. Chattarji and Ninan (2013, 10) write

“The notion of media power has come to loom large in India over the last decade. The men and women chasing stories have often become stories themselves when their first take is scrutinized ... to judge if that first draft of history was a job well done, or whether it was lazily or unethically constructed”.

Some people think that a "shift in media responsibility away from news in the public interest and the dilution of its accountability to the ethical code on reporting of the personal" has happened (Seshu 2015). An extensive ethics monitoring of news content and reporting of daily occurrences across various languages, regions, and cultures would undoubtedly be

highly helpful given the complexity of India's media landscape. Ethics education is still viewed by students as an adjunct to other journalism-related professional skills (Oppenhaffen, d'Haenens, and Corten 2013; Creech and Mendelson 2015; Hermann 2017). As a result, rather than anecdotal or situational instances that aren't necessarily generalizable, students are rarely introduced to the norms and principles required to make ethical decisions. Others have argued that ethics should be taught as a core component of media education in all its forms and that practitioners, media ethics instructors, and college administrators should work together more effectively on ethics research and teaching (Christians 2007). Given that Indian media claims to employ six million full-time journalists, journalists, educators, and scholars all agree that journalism ethics education in India is grossly inadequate. According to a 2015 survey by the nonprofit Centre for Media Studies in Delhi, there are now about 310 journalism programs available in India, up from 25 in 1981. About half of these are undergraduate or graduate-level university degree courses, excluding the 54 distance-learning programs. Certificate and diploma programs offered by commercial and a few state-financed media institutions make up the remaining half.

In contrast, a capabilities approach emphasizes the importance of enabling journalists to make informed ethical decisions (Sen, 1999). This approach recognizes that journalists operate in complex, dynamic environments, requiring a range of ethical competencies to navigate.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs a capabilities approach, grounded in the work of Amartya Sen. Sen's capabilities approach emphasizes the importance of enabling individuals to achieve their full potential, recognizing that freedom and agency are essential for human development (Sen, 1999). In the context of journalism ethics education, a capabilities approach emphasizes the importance of enabling journalists to make informed ethical decisions, recognizing that

CAPABILITIES APPROACH

The capabilities approach emphasizes the importance of enabling individuals to achieve their full potential, recognizing that freedom and agency are essential for human development (Sen, 1999). In the context of journalism ethics education, a capabilities approach emphasizes the importance of enabling journalists to make informed ethical decisions, recognizing that ethical competencies are essential for responsible journalism practice. What is Capability Theory?

Capability Theory, also known as the Capabilities Approach, is a normative framework for evaluating individual well-being and social justice. It was developed by economist and philosopher Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum.

KEY CONCEPTS

1. **Capabilities:** The ability of individuals to achieve certain valuable states or functions, such as being educated, healthy, or able to participate in public life.
2. **Functioning:** The actual achievements of individuals, such as being literate, having good health, or participating in public debates.
3. **Agency:** The ability of individuals to make choices and act on them, which is essential for achieving capabilities and functions.
4. **Freedom:** The ability of individuals to make choices and act on them without being constrained by external factors, such as poverty, oppression, or lack of education.

CORE PRINCIPLES

1. **Focus on Human Beings:** Capability Theory focuses on the well-being and agency of human beings, rather than on economic growth or income.
2. **Pluralism:** Capability Theory recognizes that there are many different valuable capabilities and functions that individuals may pursue.
3. **Contextualism:** Capability Theory recognizes that the capabilities and functions that are valuable for individuals depend on the social, cultural, and economic context in which they live.
4. **Participation:** Capability Theory emphasizes the importance of participation and agency in achieving capabilities and functions.

APPLICATIONS

Capability Theory has been applied in a wide range of fields, including:

1. **Development Economics:** Capability Theory has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of development policies and programs.
2. **Education:** Capability Theory has been used to evaluate the quality of education and to develop new approaches to education.
3. **Healthcare:** Capability Theory has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of healthcare policies and programs.
4. **Social Justice:** Capability Theory has been used to evaluate the fairness and justice of social institutions and policies.

CRITICISMS AND CHALLENGES

1. **Operationalization:** Capability Theory is often criticized for being difficult to operationalize and measure.
2. **Cultural Relativism:** Capability Theory is often criticized for being culturally relativistic, and for failing to provide a universal framework for evaluating capabilities and functions.
3. **Resource Constraints:** Capability Theory is often criticized for failing to take into account resource constraints and the trade-offs that must be made in achieving capabilities and functions.

Capability Theory provides a powerful framework for evaluating individual well-being and social justice. Its focus on human agency and freedom, and its recognition of the importance of context and participation, make it a valuable tool for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners. However, it also faces several challenges and criticisms, including operationalization, cultural relativism, and resource constraints.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

1. **Journalism ethics education should prioritize the development of ethical competencies:** The capabilities approach assumes that journalism ethics education should prioritize the development of ethical competencies, rather than solely focusing on rules-based approaches.
2. **Journalists should be enabled to make informed ethical decisions:** The capabilities approach assumes that journalists should be enabled to make informed ethical

decisions, recognizing that ethical competencies are essential for responsible journalism practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and focus groups to explore the current state of journalism ethics education in India. The collection of data can be broken down into three phases: (a) face-to-face interviews with senior journalists and editors of Indian newspapers and television stations in the city of Lucknow, India; (b) eight brainstorming sessions (Delphi technique) with journalists at media houses (daily newspapers and television); and (c) a two-day workshop with journalists and academics, organized with the help of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Lucknow, India, to provide a platform and space for the academic and professional interface, the goal is to establish a professionally oriented curriculum for journalism students and a training module for entry-level journalists.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that a capabilities approach can provide a more comprehensive framework for developing ethical competencies in journalism students. The study found that existing journalism ethics education in India focuses primarily on rules-based approaches, neglecting the development of ethical competencies. In contrast, a capabilities approach emphasizes the importance of enabling journalists to make informed ethical decisions, recognizing that ethical competencies are essential for responsible journalism practice. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the current state of journalism ethics education in India. The study's results suggest that journalism ethics education in India is often inadequate, with a focus on rules-based approaches that neglect the development of ethical competencies.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The study's findings have significant implications for journalism ethics education in India. The emphasis on rules-based approaches may lead to a lack of critical thinking and ethical decision-making among journalists, which can have serious consequences for the quality of journalism and the health of democracy.

COMPARISON WITH EXISTING LITERATURE

The study's findings are consistent with existing literature on journalism ethics education, which highlights the importance of developing ethical competencies among journalists (Josephi, 2013; Rao, 2015). However, the study's findings also suggest that journalism ethics education in India may be lagging behind international standards, with a greater emphasis on rules-based approaches rather than ethical competencies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations. First, the study's sample size was limited to journalism educators and students in India, which may not be representative of the broader journalism community. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases and limitations.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research should build on the findings of this study, exploring the development of ethical competencies among journalists in India. Research should also examine the impact of journalism ethics education on the quality of journalism and the health of democracy in India.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings have practical implications for journalism educators and practitioners in India. Journalism educators should prioritize the development of ethical competencies among students, recognizing that these competencies are essential for responsible journalism practice. Journalism practitioners should also recognize the importance of ethical competencies, seeking ongoing training and professional development to enhance their skills.

IMPACT

The study's findings have significant implications for journalism ethics education in India, and its impact can be seen in several areas:

1. **Improved Journalism Ethics Education:** The study's recommendations for a capabilities approach to journalism ethics education can lead to improved journalism ethics education in India. By prioritizing the development of ethical competencies, journalism educators can better prepare students for the complexities of journalism practice.
2. **Enhanced Ethical Decision-Making:** The study's emphasis on ethical competencies can lead to enhanced ethical decision-making among journalists in India. By developing the skills and knowledge needed to make informed ethical decisions, journalists can better navigate the complexities of journalism practice.
3. **Better Journalism Practice:** The study's findings can lead to better journalism practice in India. By prioritizing ethical competencies and developing the skills and knowledge needed to make informed ethical decisions, journalists can produce high-quality journalism that serves the public interest.
4. **Increased Transparency and Accountability:** The study's recommendations for a capabilities approach to journalism ethics education can lead to increased transparency and accountability in journalism practice in India. By developing the skills and knowledge needed to make informed ethical decisions, journalists can better serve the public interest and increase transparency and accountability in journalism practice.
5. **Contribution to Media Development:** The study's findings can contribute to media development in India. By prioritizing ethical competencies and developing the skills and knowledge needed to make informed ethical decisions, journalists can better serve the public interest and contribute to media development in India.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings have policy implications for journalism ethics education in India:

1. **Development of Journalism Ethics Education Policy:** The study's recommendations for a capabilities approach to journalism ethics education can inform the development of journalism ethics education policy in India.
2. **Increased Funding for Journalism Ethics Education:** The study's findings can inform increased funding for journalism ethics education in India, prioritizing the development of ethical competencies.
3. **Development of Ethical Guidelines:** The study's recommendations for a capabilities approach to journalism ethics education can inform the development of ethical guidelines for journalists in India.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Integrate a capabilities approach into journalism ethics education: Journalism educators should incorporate a capabilities approach into their teaching practices, emphasizing the importance of enabling journalists to make informed ethical decisions.
2. Develop ethical competencies: Journalism educators should prioritize the development of ethical competencies in journalism students, recognizing that these competencies are essential for responsible journalism practice.
3. Encourage critical thinking and reflection: Journalism educators should encourage critical thinking and reflection among journalism students, recognizing that these skills are essential for navigating complex ethical dilemmas.

CONCLUSION

This study proposes a capabilities approach to reimagining journalism ethics education in India. The findings of this study suggest that a capabilities approach can provide a more comprehensive framework for developing ethical competencies in journalism students. By integrating a capabilities approach into journalism ethics education, journalism educators can prioritize the development of ethical competencies, encouraging critical thinking and reflection among journalism students. In conclusion, the study's findings have significant implications for journalism ethics education in India, and its impact can be seen in several areas, including improved journalism ethics education, enhanced ethical decision-making, better journalism practice, increased transparency and accountability, and contribution to media development. The study's findings also have policy implications, informing the development of journalism ethics education policy, increased funding for journalism ethics education, and the development of ethical guidelines.

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