



## NEWS MEDIA ETHICS IN ASSAM

**Dr. Kisholoy Choudhury and Bhanupriya Daimari**  
Assistant Professor(s), Department of Political  
Science, Tezpur College, Tezpur, Assam, India.



### ABSTRACT:

Any sort of technological advancement, has both its pros and cons in the context of social change. Technological advancements, especially the changing role of the media, have a lasting impact on molding cultural attributes—ways of thought, attitude and lifestyles. Whether this impact is healthy or not from the viewpoint of developing a 'culturally' sustainable society is a crucial question. But the fact is that in Assam media has also its negative impact on the society which cannot be nullified. This paper is an attempt to study on the status of the social responsibility of media in Assam and its impact on the society at large. There is also an acute awareness that the media should be responsible in what and how it report and also clearly distinguish disseminating information from analysis and opinions.

The role of news media is very significant in Assam, and Assam has a very vibrant news media. It is strongly vocal about the policies and programmes of the government. However, "Assamese" as a community has always been quite emotional and thus being easily moved by sentiments. This has induced political leaders and other vested interest groups to easily motivate the masses for their own selfish motives by using the news media and mass media directly or indirectly. At times media persons are also seen going against the rules by glorifying political leaders or political parties thereby misleading the people and the society. Therefore the concept and status of media ethics in context to news media holds prime value for the overall development of the society.

**KEYWORDS:** social change, cultural attributes, social responsibility, news media, media ethics.

### INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves recommendations on right and wrong conduct. Media ethics is a topic of discussion for nearly a century. Media ethics is the subdivision of applied ethics dealing with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, arts, print media and the internet. The field covers many varied and highly controversial topics, ranging from war journalism to Benetton advertising. As the influence, impact and existence of media have become widespread, its moral stance and adherence to ethical codes have become importance issues. <sup>1</sup>Ralph. E Hanson (2015) has stated that media ethics is complex topic because it deals with an institution that must do things that ordinary people in ordinary circumstances would not do. Media ethics deals with the specific ethical principles and moral standards of all forms of media including print, broadcast, film, theatre, advertising and the internet. The ethics of journalism is one of the most well defined branches of media ethics and is often the most discussed one.

<sup>1</sup> Media Ethics: Truthfulness, Fairness and Standards of Decency, Ralph. E Hanson, CQ Press, an imprint of Sage Publications, Chapter 14, 2015.

Media ethics can be said to be principles and or the code of conduct which journalists and media house are required to follow while conducting their work. In general, ethics is a code of values which govern our lives and is essential for maintaining a healthy and moral life. Ethics can also be termed as a way of how people behave, based on their beliefs about what is right and wrong. The term 'Ethics' is derived from the Greek word 'Ethos' meaning character, or what a good person is or does to have a good character (Jay Black and Chris Roberts). Webster's New World Pocket Dictionary defines ethics as "moral standards" and as a "system of morals." Furthermore, Webster's dictionary then defines moral as, "of or dealing with right or wrong". Ethics however are not absolute rules, and individuals and organizations who work with codes of ethics are morally bound if not legally. But, a media person may be held professionally responsible for their actions if they are in conflict with their professions code of ethics.

### **MEDIA ETHICS**

In the context of media, it can be described as a set of moral principles or values which guide the conduct of journalism; whether be it print media or electronic media. Media ethics can also be termed as those moral standards that are applied to the media. Just as codes of ethics are utilized in various ways, the definition of media ethics is also multifaceted in nature. There is no single universal ruling definition of media ethics.

Broadly speaking, in the context of media ethics there are two major theories relating to mass media ethics, namely Authoritarian theory and Social Responsibility theory. According to the former, the press is seen as a very powerful; tool and the rules control the Press. This theory states that the people in power or the rules use the Press to convey such information that they want the public to know. Though the Authoritarian theory has gradually decayed with the decline in monarchy, yet some instances of practice of this theory in certain countries cannot be ruled out even today. For instance, the Press in Communist China is firmly controlled by the government. On the other hand, with the spread of modernization and democracy the Social Responsibility theory has come to the forefront of modern day media ethics. According to this theory, the media should adhere to the lines responsibility while conducting its work by providing truthful, objective and balanced information to the public. At the same time, it is supposed to respect the privacy of individuals and maintain secrecy of issue related to national security while disseminating news. This theory expects the media to behave responsibly n addressing social issue and concern. Moreover, this theory stands for societal intervention if the media fails to meet or maintain its professional standards.

The work of the media is to present news to the people in a true, unbiased manner by the use of restrained and socially acceptable language, but very often is it seen that certain newspapers and TV Channels flout norms or rather print publish and air false and fabricated content and news. Since the mass media has a social responsibility to develop and create awareness in the society it has to rise above "TRP's" (Television Rating Points) and monetary benefits. Hence, the issue of "media ethics" becomes momentous day by day in all the development countries in particular and the world in general.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF NEWS MEDIA ETHICS**

Without a doubt it can be said that the news media occupies a most important place in today's society. In all its forms, whether be it print or electronic, the news media acts as a mirror of the society of its time. It connects us to the world and vice versa. It is through news media that we come to know about the various happenings in and around the world within a short span of time. The news media today is powerful enough to make or mar one's image, to change and alter governments. The media therefore is truly regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy. This is very true in view of the fact that it plays a most important role in terms of social responsibility with which it is vested. Therefore, news

---

<sup>2</sup> *Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications*, Jay Black and Chris Roberts, pp. 17, Routledge (19 April 2011), ISBN: 0415881501

media forms an integral part of the lives of all people from different walks of life. Owing to the important role that it plays, the news media in particular and the mass media in general is therefore supposed to be a most responsible department who adheres to strict ethics in its daily working so as not to disrupt the social fabric. The news media exercises tremendous influence upon the people of all age group. It can also shape and reshape the society. But sooner said than done, the news media be it anywhere in India has lost its golden touch. In Assam too, the news media is well known for its disturbing acts at different times, places and situations.

Therefore, the work of the news media in Assam needs to be thoroughly analyzed and reviewed. Has the news media in Assam been able to live up to the expectations of the society and has been responsibly carrying forward its duty of social responsibility or is it more interested in collecting "TRP's"(Television Rating Points) and the like. Hence a research on this topic is essential in order to determine the current status of the news media in Assam. It should therefore come as no surprise to expect that the news media in Assam and also in India needs drastic changes for the benefit of the society.

Almost all the respondents interviewed for this survey, which included senior editors and executives from print and electronic media groups, think that some unethical instances of some media persons had dented their integrity and that of their profession too at various times. Most agreed that there needed to be changes and that ethical issue of journalism had to be given a higher priority than before. However, quite astonishingly, some feared that the debate on ethics would lead to the suppression of good journalism and thus important stories may go unreported. The majority of media persons which included editors, reporters and executives did acknowledge the fact that a "certain ethics" was essential to keep the bond between the media and the public intact.

Apart from this section of media persons the general people from different walks of life were also interviewed and their views collected; and majority of people have agreed that the news media of Assam, especially the electronic media act and behave most irresponsibly in their work of journalistic pursuits.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A critical and scholarly effort has been made to go through the related literature and a brief review of the studies related to the current problem is discussed. As the topic of discussion is mainly on media ethics, so its meaning and definition needs priority. Media ethics is a topic for discussion for nearly a century. As the influence, impact and existence of media have become widespread its moral stance and adherence to ethical codes have become important issues.

### **Steed, Wickham. (1938).**

In his book, "The Press", the famous author and journalist Wickham Steed has said that the focal issues of the press and democracy are alike. After that mass media have gained in number and impact to an unbelievable extent. But the utterance has become even more contemporary with the passing time. In the foreword of the book Dr. Anjan Bera has mentioned, that the media freedom is no longer treated as freedom of the media owners or media persons only. The emphasis is now on freedom of the citizens to have a free media.

### **Agrawal, S. (1970).**

According to S. Agarwal, the Newspaper has become an important means of mass communication. She says that the press has been a medium of inter communication between the government and the public. In a democratic set-up of society, the Press or the Print Media, the Government and the People forms a triangle in their relationship. Thus, the emergence of Press has led to the expansion of public opinion in India. She points out that any democracy is meaningless if public opinion is not empowered.

**Prabhakar, M. and Bhanawat, S. (2001).**

Prabhakar and Bhanawat analyses the changing scenario, current trends and breath-taking developments in the various forms of mass communication in the 20th century. It highlights that the realm of Media has observed many changes during the past two decades. On one hand, there has been an explosion of information due to the rapid growth of different means of communication and on the other side; this information explosion has resulted into serious threat and challenge to the Indian social-cultural structure. Thus, this development has served the society in many ways but at the same time, raised many ethical concerns which need to be addressed.

**Manna, Bansi. (December, 2010).**

In the article, "Media Freedom: A changing Status", edited by Bansi Mannas, various aspects of media freedom were discussed along with a review of several authors on the field. According to Marshall MacLuhan, media are the extension of the eyes and ears. In today's world the presence of mass media is not only overwhelming but its reach has also been increasing. Number of scholars and researchers are exploring multi-dimensional implications associated to this arena.

**Katju, M. (June, 2011).**

In an article published in The Hindu, "Freedom of the press and journalistic ethics", Markandey katju discussed about the importance of the freedom that the press should have and at the same time the responsibility that press should have towards the citizens and public at large. He exclaimed that media is the only means by which people receive free flow of information's and ideas which is essential for smooth running of intelligent self-governance and functioning of the democracy. He further added that for a proper functioning of democracy, the public is kept informed about news from various parts of the country and even abroad for forming rational opinions. According to him, a citizen surely cannot be expected to gather news to enable him or her to form such opinions. Hence, the media play an important role in a democracy and serve as an agency of the people to gather news for them.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this research work is to understand the practice as well as influence of media ethics on the regional news media of Assam in particular. The objectives of the study are discussed below:-

- (a) To examine the actual working of the news media houses in Assam and assess their performance regarding their duty of social responsibility.
- b) To analyze the role played by the Press Council of India in the context of media ethics.
- c) To analyze the role of media houses in the context of state politics.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Before preparing the draft questionnaire a preliminary survey was conducted in the study locale area in order to identify the variables to be included in the questionnaire. An unstructured interview was done with different stakeholders from different fields related to the research topic. Accordingly, intellectuals, journalists, common public and even illiterate people were interviewed whose participation was felt indispensable for a comprehensive research study. On the basis of the variables received from the unstructured interviews, a draft Questionnaire was prepared by using five point Likert Scale. In order to finalize the draft Questionnaire for the purpose of research, a pilot survey was conducted taking 25 respondents from different towns, cities and villages of Assam, and they were asked to fill up the Questionnaire. The filled in Questionnaires were then tested for reliability by using a statistical tool namely "Reliability Test" on SPSS version 16. Accordingly, the calculated Alpha Value (Cronbach's Alpha) was found to be .929, which proves that the Questionnaire is highly reliable and can be used for research study. It may be mentioned that the commonly accepted values regarding internal consistency of Cronbach's Alpha is shown in the table below:

Cronbach's alpha	Internal consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

This draft Questionnaire was thus finalized and personally administered to respondents in selected districts throughout Assam. The filled in questionnaires were then put to a series of analysis.

### DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

**Table 1.1: Overall responses to the statement that Regional mass media plays a positive role in the social fabric of Assam.**

Opinion	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Strongly Disagree	19	4.7	.60
Disagree	42	10.3	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	77	18.9	
Agree	215	52.7	
Strongly Agree	55	13.5	
Total	408	100.0	

**Table 1.2: Religion wise response to the statement that Regional mass media plays a positive role in the social fabric of Assam.**

Opinion Variable	Total Frequency	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Hindu	320	12.5	52.8	19.1	12.2	3.4	.59
Muslim	24	20.8	45.8	33.3	-	-	.88
Christian	39	7.7	51.3	12.8	7.7	20.5	.18
Others	25	28.0	60.0	12.0	-	-	1.16

The above table reveals that 60 percent of "Others" which includes the religions Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists have agreed to the above statement with the highest Mean value of 1.16.

### ANOVA Test

To find out whether there is significant differences of mean beliefs among different religious groups regarding the statement that Regional mass media plays a positive role in the social fabric of Assam, the researcher have made an ANOVA test.

**Table 1.3: The table shows the ANOVA Test result regarding the statement that Regional mass media plays a positive role in the social fabric of Assam.**

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.601	3	5.534	5.743	.001
Within Groups	389.279	404	.964		
Total	405.880	407			

The above table shows that the  $p < \alpha$  value, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is significant differences in mean belief among the different religious communities.

**Table 1.4: Overall responses to the statement that the regional mass media is necessary for the society.**

Opinions	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Strongly Disagree	8	2.0	1.2426
Disagree	14	3.4	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20	4.9	
Agree	195	47.8	
Strongly Agree	171	41.9	
Total	408	100.0	

**Table 1.5: Religion wise response to the statement that the regional mass media is necessary for the society.**

Opinion Variable	Total Frequency	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Hindu	320	41.6	47.2	4.7	4.4	2.2	1.2156
Muslim	24	50.0	29.2	20.8	-	-	1.2917
Christian	39	35.9	61.5	-	-	2.6	1.2821
Others	25	40.0	60.0	-	-	-	1.4000

The above table reveals that 60 percent of "Others" which includes the religions Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists have agreed to the above statement with the highest Mean value of 1.4000.

### ANOVA Test

To find out whether there is significant differences of mean beliefs among different religious groups regarding the statement that the statement that the regional mass media is necessary for the society, the researcher have made an ANOVA test.

**Table 1.6: The table shows the ANOVA Test result regarding the statement that the regional mass media is necessary for the society.**

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.760	3	.587	.808	.490
Within Groups	293.218	404	.726		
Total	294.978	407			

The above table shows that the  $p > \alpha$  value, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is significant differences in mean belief among the different religious communities.

**Table 1.7: Overall responses to the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam is unregulated and unaccounted.**

Opinion	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Strongly Disagree	5	1.2	.5564
Disagree	56	13.7	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	113	27.7	
Agree	175	42.9	
Strongly Agree	59	14.5	
Total	408	100.0	

**Table 1.8: Religion wise response to the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam is unregulated and unaccounted**

Opinion Variable	Total Frequency	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Hindu	320	15.6	43.4	25.9	14.4	.6	.5906
Muslim	24	16.7	20.8	58.3	4.2	-	.5000
Christian	39	12.8	61.5	25.6	-	-	.8718
Others	25	40.0	24.0	36.0	-	-	.0400

#### ANOVA Test

To find out whether there is significant differences of mean beliefs among different religious groups regarding the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam is unregulated and unaccounted, the researcher have made an ANOVA test.

**Table 1.9: The table shows the ANOVA Test result regarding the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam is unregulated and unaccounted.**

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15.484	3	5.161	5.755	.001
Within Groups	362.311	404	.897		
Total	377.794	407			

The above table shows that the  $p < \alpha$  value, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is significant differences in mean belief among the different religious communities.

**Table 1.10: Overall responses to the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam should be regulated.**

Opinions	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Strongly Disagree	12	2.9	.93
Disagree	29	7.1	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	46	11.3	
Agree	211	51.7	
Strongly Agree	110	27.0	
Total	408	100.0	

**Table 1.11. Religion wise response to the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam should be regulated.**

Opinion Variable	Total Frequency	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Hindu	320	25.9	47.5	14.1	8.8	3.8	.83
Muslim	24	12.5	83.3	4.2	-	-	1.08
Christian	39	43.6	56.4	-	-	-	1.44
Others	25	28.0	68.0	4.0	-	-	1.20

**ANOVA Test**

To find out whether there is significant differences of mean beliefs among different religious groups regarding the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam should be regulated.,the researcher have made an ANOVA test.

**Table 1.12: The table shows the ANOVA Test result regarding the statement that the Electronic Media in Assam should be regulated.**

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	23.533	3	7.844	9.399	.000
Within Groups	337.171	404	.835		
Total	360.703	407			

The above table shows that the  $p < \alpha$  value, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is significant differences in mean belief among the different religious communities.

**Table 1.13: Overall responses to the statement that the Press Council of India needs to be restructured to effectively regulate the mass media .**

Opinions	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Strongly Disagree	4	1.0	1.0564
Disagree	16	3.9	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	58	14.2	
Agree	205	50.2	
Strongly Agree	125	30.6	
Total	408	100.0	



Opinions	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Strongly Disagree	4	1.0	1.0564
Disagree	16	3.9	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	58	14.2	
Agree	205	50.2	
Strongly Agree	125	30.6	
Total	408	100.0	

**Table 1.14: Religion wise response to the statement that the Press Council of India needs to be restructured to effectively regulate the mass media.**

Opinion Variable	Total Frequency	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Hindu	320	29.1	49.7	15.0	5.0	1.2	1.0031
Muslim	24	33.3	58.3	8.3	-	-	1.2500
Christian	39	43.6	43.6	12.8	-	-	1.3077
Others	25	28.0	60.0	12.0	-	-	1.600

#### ANOVA Test

To find out whether there is significant differences of mean beliefs among different religious groups regarding the statement that the Press Council of India needs to be restructured to effectively regulate the mass media, the researcher have made an ANOVA test.

**Table 1.15: The table shows the ANOVA Test result regarding the statement that the Press Council of India needs to be restructured to effectively regulate the mass media.**

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.539	3	1.513	2.205	.087
Within Groups	277.165	404	.686		
Total	281.703	407			

The above table shows that the  $p < \alpha$  value, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is significant differences in mean belief among the different religious communities.

**Table 1.16: Overall responses to the statement that the Press Council of India is a toothless tiger.**

Opinions	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Disagree	40	9.8	.6005
Neither Agree nor Disagree	134	32.8	
Agree	183	44.9	
Strongly Agree	51	12.5	
Total	408	100.0	

**Table 1.17: Religion wise response to the statement that the Press Council of India is a toothless tiger.**

Opinion Variable	Total Frequency	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Hindu	320	10.6	46.2	32.5	10.6	-	.5688
Muslim	24	20.8	37.5	25.0	16.7	-	.6250
Christian	39	12.8	43.6	38.5	5.1	-	.6410
Others	25	28.0	36.0	36.0	-	-	.9200

### ANOVA Test

To find out whether there is significant differences of mean beliefs among different religious groups regarding the statement that the Press Council of India is a toothless tiger, the researcher have made an ANOVA test.

**Table 1.18: The table shows the ANOVA Test result regarding the statement that the Press Council of India is a toothless tiger.**

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.953	3	.984	1.436	.232
Within Groups	276.927	404	.685		
Total	279.880	407			

The above table shows that the  $p < \alpha$  value, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is significant differences in mean belief among the different religious communities.

### FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

Regarding the belief of the people towards the role of the mass media, it has been found that the regional mass media of Assam plays a positive role in the society. From the analysis, it is seen that the majority of the people have agreed that mass media is necessary for the society and that it plays a significant role by educating and creating awareness among the people of Assam. The people also feel that the mass media of Assam is indispensable for the dissemination of news and information.

About 42.9% of respondents of the total data with a frequency of 175 have agreed that the electronic media of Assam is unregulated and unaccounted. This view of the people truly reflects the terror that the electronic media has created with its despotic work culture. The people also feel that the electronic media must be aptly regulated so that the society may not be endangered.

In regard to the working of the Print and Electronic media, majority of the people feel that the print media adopts a more balanced and ethical approach in its work as compared to the Electronic media. Thus it is found out that compared to the regional news channels of Assam, the regional news papers engage in less instances of unethical practices while the television news channels frequently indulge in different unethical instance of paid news, false and fabricated news etc.

Though this survey people have expressed that the Press Council of India has failed to effectively regulate media affairs and thus it has become a toothless tiger. As is evident from the opinions expressed by the people, the Press Council of India needs to be restructured. It is the need of the hour that the press council of India must include powers to regulate the electronic media apart from print media, which at present it lacks.

---

**REFERENCES****Reference from Books**

1. Aggarwal, V.B. & Gupta, V.S. (2002). *Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
2. Barua, L. K. (2010). *India's North-East Frontier: The Colonial Legacy*. Guwahati, Assam, India: Spectrum Publishers.
3. Jeffrey, Robin. (2000). *India's Newspaper Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
4. Mehta, D.S. (1992). *Mass Communication and Journalism in India*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited.
5. Thakuria, P. G. (2012). *Media Ethics: Truth, Fairness, And Objectivity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

**Chapter in an Edited Book**

1. Chakraborti, S. B. (2008). Religion and Colonial Politics: Assam, Myanmar and Buddhism. In J. K. Ray, & R. Bhattacharya, *Development Dynamics in North East India* (pp. 309-329). Delhi, Delhi, India: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata: Anshah Publishing House.
2. Saikia C. P. (n.d). Preface to the Assamese edition, 2007, March. In Sarma G. (2007). 150 Years of Journalism in Assam. Guwahati, Assam, India: Media Trust Assam.

**Reference from Journals**

1. Phillips, R. E. (1992). Historical Sketch of the Garo Field: The Assam Mission of The American Baptist Missionary Union. *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference held in Nowgong*. December 18-29, pp. 54-79.
2. Agnihotri, S. (2009). Minor Ethnic Groups of Upper Assam. *North East Quarterly*, 2(2), pp. 21-36.
3. Subhramaniam, K. (2009). Political Violence in the North East - Part II. *North East Quarterly*, pp. 7-20

**Dr. Kisholoy Choudhury**

Assistant Professor(s), Department of Political Science, Tezpur College, Tezpur, Assam, India.

**Bhanupriya Daimari**

Assistant Professor(s), Department of Political Science, Tezpur College, Tezpur, Assam, India.