

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF SOFT SKILLS AND ETHICAL PRACTICES IN MEDIA DEBATES AND INTERVIEWS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This review focuses on journalism and mass communication students as aspiring media professionals and critically analyzes the importance of ethical behavior and soft skills in Indian media discussions and interviews. Professional etiquette, effective communication, emotional intelligence, active listening, body language, and stage management are examples of soft skills that are crucial for preserving professionalism and credibility. However, a lack of these abilities frequently compromises the decency and efficacy of discussions and interviews. Sensationalism, unbalanced reporting, a lack of privacy awareness, and conflicts of interest are examples of ethical transgressions that further undermine the credibility of the media and affect the career perspectives of future journalists.

Additionally, the study highlights systemic issues in media education, such as out-of-date curricula, little exposure to real-world situations, a lack of ethical training, a lack of faculty experience, and little industry cooperation. These disparities impact audience trust, civic consciousness, and democratic debate in addition to individual competency. The review identifies the following tactics to address these problems: incorporating structured ethical training; updating curricula to incorporate contemporary tools and digital platforms; encouraging fact-checking; fostering balanced reporting; increasing practical exposure; and placing a strong emphasis on professional etiquette and ethical communication.

According to the findings, media professionals must be prepared to conduct reports, interviews, and debates responsibly, preserve their reputation, and favorably contribute to educated public conversation in India by fusing technical proficiency with interpersonal and ethical maturity.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Ethical Practices, Journalism Education, Media Credibility, Public Trust, Media Debates, Interviews, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

The media is one of the most powerful foundations of democracy because it offers forums for public participation, shapes public opinion, and promotes discussion of matters of national and international significance. The field of mass communication and journalism in India has changed as a result of the increasing popularity of broadcast debates, interviews, and panel discussions. These media serve as forums for discussion where opposing points of view can be discussed in addition to serving as channels for the distribution of information. Concerns have been expressed over the professionalism of these forms, despite their increasing significance. The ongoing absence of sophisticated soft skills and consistent ethical behavior is currently being closely examined by academics and professionals.

The foundation of effective media communication is soft skills. These consist of manners, stage management, emotional intelligence, clarity of expression, and etiquette. The way journalists and interviewers engage with participants and audiences is directly impacted by soft skills, as opposed to technical proficiencies like video production or editing. Inappropriate behavior and a lack of manners may quickly turn discussions that ought to be productive into hostile exchanges. Similarly, ineffective communication techniques frequently undermine the coherence and clarity of conversations, making it challenging for listeners to participate in a meaningful way. One important factor in determining professional behavior is emotional intelligence, which helps interviewers and moderators control conflict, keep their cool under pressure, and manage tensions. When it is absent, there is frequently insensitivity, impatience, or even plain disdain, which lowers the professional's credibility and the discussion's worth. Stage management, which entails allocating time equitably, arranging debates, and ensuring smooth transitions, is also crucial. —is essential. Without the media, events have the potential to spiral out of control and lose their educational or informational significance.

Ethical behavior is still essential to journalism's reputation, along with soft skills. The principles of fairness, objectivity, respect for participants, and adherence to factual accuracy are all part of media discussion and interview ethics. Sensationalism, bias, and forceful questioning have sadly been blamed for the modern Indian media's repeated shortcomings in these areas, overshadowing fair discourse. These moral failings damage public confidence and provide false role models for mass communication and journalism students. Aspirants who witness confrontational

approaches being rewarded with more popularity or ratings may imitate similar tactics without question because they think they are indicative of success in the workplace.

As the upcoming generation of media professionals, students studying mass communication and journalism are the primary subject of this review. Although these students frequently participate in debates, interviews, and discussions as part of their academic education, many find it difficult to exhibit the soft skills and moral maturity needed in practical situations. During classroom simulations, academic exercises, or internships, poor manners, poor communication, a lack of emotional intelligence, and poor stage management are frequently displayed. This is a sign of structural deficiencies in media education rather than just personal poor performance. While undervaluing the interpersonal and ethical aspects of professional development, training institutes usually place a higher priority on technical abilities like reporting, editing, and camera handling.

These shortcomings have far-reaching consequences. Fundamentally, journalism is a public service, and its integrity is in danger due to aspiring media professionals' lack of soft skills and ethical responsibility. Debates that are poorly moderated or interviews that are disrespectful can drive audiences away, increase divisiveness, and turn journalism into a theatrical production. In a nation as varied as India, where media is essential for developing democratic discourse and uniting communities, such failures are especially harmful. In addition to undermining the educational value of media interviews and debates, they also erode public confidence in journalism as a whole.

This review is motivated by the understanding that technological proficiency alone cannot maintain excellent journalism. Strong ethical underpinnings and the integration of soft skills are necessary for professional competence in the media. Media practice relies heavily on etiquette, manners, emotional intelligence, clear communication, and stage management; these qualities are essential to its legitimacy and efficacy. On the other hand, moral behaviors like impartiality, justice, and respect for variety are necessary duties rather than optional qualities. If students studying mass communication and journalism are to take on their future responsibilities responsibly and make valuable contributions to democratic discourse, they must cultivate these qualities.

This paper's goal is to critically analyze the ethical and soft skill gaps that are apparent in Indian media interviews and debates. Through an analysis of the experiences of aspiring media professionals, especially mass communication and journalism students, this paper identifies structural deficiencies in professional preparation and training. It also emphasizes the pressing need for curriculum reform that strikes a balance between technical education and moral and social education. The objective is to offer a helpful critique that can guide advancements in professional development and instruction, rather than directly blaming students or media organizations.

This review seeks to further scholarly discussions regarding the function of ethics and soft skills in journalism during this process. By placing these problems in the context of Indian media, it draws attention to the difficulties faced by future professionals and the obligations of educational establishments. In the end, fixing these issues will enhance the caliber of discussions and interviews while also bolstering journalism's legitimacy. The next generation of media workers can better carry out its democratic mandate and provide a forum for civil, polite, and productive public discourse if they possess both technological proficiency and ethical maturity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Soft Skills in Journalism and Mass Communication

Soft skills, including communication, interpersonal, and emotional skills, are essential for professional and personal success (Goyal & A S, 2019; Khera, n.d.). Excessive use of social media affects these skills by reducing active participation, promoting shortcuts in communication, and causing distraction (Goyal & A S, 2019). In media debates and interviews, ethical practices combined with strong soft skills ensure credibility and effective engagement. Training and awareness in soft skills and ethics are thus critical for learners and practitioners in India.

Public speaking is widely recognized as a critical skill in the holistic development of students, particularly in enhancing self-confidence (Jhunjhunwala, Vora, Malpani, Parikh, & Sanghvi, 2022). Research indicates that structured exposure to public speaking activities, including debates and presentations, improves both verbal and non-verbal communication skills, which in turn builds overall confidence (Jhunjhunwala et al., 2022). Furthermore, demographic factors such as age, gender, income level, and personality traits, as well as participation in courses or competitions, significantly influence the effectiveness of public speaking in fostering confidence among students (Jhunjhunwala et al., 2022).

Communication Skills and Stage Management

Effective stage management in theater relies heavily on communication, respect, and trust. Rosales (2017) highlights that clear verbal and nonverbal communication ensures smooth coordination among actors, directors, and technical

staff, preventing confusion and promoting efficiency. Respect fosters collaboration, values diverse contributions, and enhances morale, creating a positive and inclusive work environment. Trust is established through consistent engagement, guidance, and integrity, allowing the cast and crew to rely on the stage manager during rehearsals and performances. Collectively, these three aspects form the foundation for successful stage management, ensuring both artistic quality and a supportive production culture.

Emotional Intelligence in Media Practice

Muthiah and Krishnakumar (2014) highlighted the role of emotional intelligence as a soft skill influencing communication competence in journalism. Their study with journalism students found no significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and proficiency in journalistic English, though both genders displayed high emotional intelligence. Girls slightly outperformed boys in journalistic English, but the difference was not significant. These findings suggest that while emotional intelligence is valuable, linguistic and cognitive skills remain more decisive in effective media communication.

Kılıçarslan (2024) explored how emotional intelligence shapes audience perceptions of social media advertising, emphasizing its role in organizational communication. The study confirmed that emotional intelligence significantly impacts how individuals interpret, connect with, and respond to advertisements. Findings underscore that skills like empathy, emotional regulation, and relationship management enhance communication effectiveness. These insights are relevant to media debates and interviews, where soft skills and emotional awareness influence credibility and audience engagement.

Ethical Practices in Media

Niraimathi and Ramya (2023) emphasize that media serves as a vital link between the state and the public, providing information, motivation, and guidance for a healthy democracy. They highlight the critical role of media ethics in ensuring trustworthiness, fairness, and responsibility in reporting. The authors discuss various ethical theories, approaches, and codes that guide media professionals in balancing freedom of the press with social responsibility. They also note the challenges posed by technological advancements and sensationalism, underscoring the need for universal ethical standards.

Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature indicates that soft skills—including communication, emotional intelligence, interpersonal abilities, and public speaking—are fundamental to effective media practice and stage management. Studies highlight that structured training in these skills enhances professional credibility, audience engagement, and self-confidence, while demographic factors can influence skill development. Emotional intelligence plays a key role in interpreting audience responses and managing relationships, though cognitive and linguistic competencies remain essential for journalistic effectiveness. Ethical practices in media are equally critical, ensuring trust, fairness, and social responsibility, particularly in debates, interviews, and reporting. Collectively, these studies underscore that a combination of ethical awareness and well-developed soft skills is crucial for media professionals in India to maintain credibility, foster collaboration, and achieve communication effectiveness.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The following succinctly describes the difficulties faced by Indian journalism and mass communication students:

3.1. Deficiency in Soft Skills

- A lot of students struggle to maintain decorum in discussions and interviews by lacking fundamental professional manners and etiquette.
- Uncertain expression, combative approaches, and decreased audience involvement are frequently the results of poor communication abilities.
- Insufficient emotional intelligence leads to impatience, insensitivity, or an incapacity to resolve disputes amicably.
- Ineffective stage management techniques impede the natural progression of conversations, resulting in haphazard and disorderly exchanges.

3.2. Ethical Lapses

- Pupils frequently show a lack of comprehension regarding impartiality, fairness, and respect for opposing viewpoints.
- Students who watch contentious and dramatic conversations on television are influenced to accept unethical behavior as a standard for professionals.
- Credibility and the integrity of discussions and interviews are weakened when ethical principles are not upheld.

3.3. Systemic Gaps in Media Education

- Media courses place a greater focus on technical training (such as reporting, editing, and production) than they do on soft skills and ethics.
- Students are not adequately prepared for real-world situations due to a lack of opportunity for supervised practice in professional etiquette and ethical decision-making.
- Students so leave with excellent technical capabilities but lacking in moral and social qualities.

3.4. Broader Implications

- A lack of morality and poor soft skills could make conversations become confrontational spectacles instead of fruitful dialogues.
- These kinds of actions weaken public confidence in journalism, which lessens its capacity to function as a democratic institution.
- In the absence of remedial actions, Indian media's long-term professionalism and credibility will be seriously threatened.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

This article aims to critically analyze the function of ethical behavior and soft skills in Indian media interviews and debates, paying special attention to students studying mass communication and journalism as future media professionals. The precise goals are:

- Assessing and evaluating soft skill inadequacies
- Investigating moral dilemmas in media operations
- Assessing systemic issues in media education;
- Analyzing the effects on media credibility and democratic discourse; and
- Outlining improvement strategies
- Provide suggestions on how media education might incorporate ethics and structured soft skills training.
- Give students studying journalism and mass communication practical methods to assist them become more professional, polite, and accountable.
- Stress the value of training that strikes a balance between technical proficiency and moral and social maturity.

5. DISCUSSION

With an emphasis on the function of soft skills and ethical practices in Indian media discussions and interviews, this talk critically analyzes the literature review's findings in light of the study's goals.

To identify and analyze deficiencies in soft skills

Gaps: Professional manners, stage management, emotional intelligence, communication clarity, and etiquette are frequently lacking in media professionals and journalism students. Poor listening abilities, improper questioning, or a lack to recognize situational sensitivities are some examples of these gaps.

Impact: These shortcomings have a negative impact on the efficacy, caliber, and civility of discussions, interviews, and news reports. Interruptions, poor coordination, or miscommunication can lower audience engagement and jeopardize one's professional reputation. Specifically, a lack of soft skills can impair the perceived professionalism of media professionals by causing insensitivity in interactions, such as asking questions without taking into account the emotional or personal circumstances of others.

Example: These flaws can occasionally be seen in journalists' coverage of delicate subjects like accidents or personal tragedies in the real world. When a family member dies, for instance, reporters could ask, "How are you feeling?" in an attempt to create material rather than taking into account the emotional state of those impacted. Credibility and ethical standards may be compromised by such insensitivity, which betrays a lack of empathy, low emotional intelligence, and poor interpersonal skills.

Interpretation: The capacity of media workers to communicate effectively and sensitively is restricted by a lack of soft skills. Enhancing stage management, emotional intelligence, communication clarity, and professional etiquette is crucial to ensuring moral, courteous, and respectable media practices.

To explore ethical issues in media practices

Gaps: Misleading reporting, privacy violations, sensationalism, skewed coverage, disdain for participants, a lack of professional accountability, conflicts of interest, and plagiarism are just a few of the ethical issues that media workers frequently deal with.

Impact: The professionalism and legitimacy of media interviews and debates are impacted by these ethical transgressions. Audiences might be misinformed, and aspiring journalists might engage in similar impolitic

conduct. Insensitive questioning, sensationalist or biased reporting, and a disrespect for privacy all undermine public confidence and the moral foundation of media ethics.

Example: Journalists occasionally overstate minor instances, pose offensive questions, concentrate on a single viewpoint, or utilize content without giving due credit while covering delicate subjects. Such conduct can have a detrimental effect on audience perception and shows a lack of justice, decency, and professional accountability.

Interpretation: It takes organized training, adherence to professional ethics, and consideration for participants and audiences to close ethical gaps. To ensure credibility, public trust, and responsible journalism among present and future media workers, ethical procedures should be strengthened.

To evaluate systemic challenges in media education

Gaps: Academic curriculum frequently place less emphasis on manners, professional etiquette, effective presenting, active listening, body language, posture, gestures, tone control, pitch modulation, and ethical communication than do media education and practice. A lot of schools also place a strong emphasis on making a name for themselves through sensationalized content, out-of-date courses, little exposure to real-world situations, inadequate ethical training, a lack of resources, a lack of faculty experience, and little industry cooperation. Modern studios, equipment, and organized opportunities for experiential learning are frequently lacking in educational institutions, and some instructors may lack experience in the contemporary sector.

Impact: The overall growth and preparedness of journalism students for the workforce are diminished by these disparities. Inadequate instruction in soft skills, ethical communication, and presentation hinders their capacity to manage professional reporting, interviews, and discussions in the real world. Additionally, students' learning is hampered by inadequate academic knowledge and institutional support, and an excessive focus on sensational content might compromise ethics and trustworthiness.

Example: Instead of teaching students how to control their body language, posture, gestures, tone, and pitch during interviews or live discussions, many media programs concentrate on theoretical lectures and popular material. Students may not be able to practice these skills successfully in institutions with insufficient resources, and instructors lacking current industry expertise may offer out-of-date advice. This may result in unethical conduct in actual media practice.

Interpretation: In order to address these systemic issues, it is necessary to update curricula, enhance faculty knowledge, provide current infrastructure, improve training in soft and practical skills, integrate ethical decision-making, and promote cooperation with media organizations. By enhancing these areas, students would be more equipped to fulfill industry requirements while upholding professionalism, credibility, and moral principles in media practice.

To assess implications for media credibility and democratic discourse

Gaps: The media frequently ignores proper social media use, minority representation, balanced coverage, and ethical reporting. Accuracy, justice, and civic duty are usually neglected in favor of sensational content, popular subjects, or popularity.

Impact: These flaws undermine credibility, confuse audiences, stifle debate based on facts, split public opinion, and undermine institutional confidence. Public opinion and democratic engagement can be adversely affected by sensationalism and biased reporting.

Example: The media may overstate events, disregard minority viewpoints, or disseminate false material on social media during political discussions or when covering social concerns. Such actions skew the facts, cause misunderstandings, and erode public confidence in the media and government.

Interpretation: In order to maintain credibility, encourage informed civic engagement, and support the media's democratic role, it is important to strengthen ethical reporting, fair coverage, the inclusion of different viewpoints, and appropriate social media use.

To propose strategies for improvement

Strategies / Gaps Addressed: A number of tactics can be used to address systemic issues in media education, ethical practices, and soft skill gaps. By incorporating hands-on media ethics courses, case studies, and role-playing activities, media programs can enhance ethical training. It is necessary to adapt curricula to include contemporary instruments, digital platforms, and new developments in journalism. To reduce disinformation, students should be urged to double-check information and conduct fact-checking prior to publication. Programs should encourage students to convey a variety of viewpoints in interviews, debates, and news coverage in order to foster balanced reporting. Organizations should raise professional standards by establishing explicit rules for behavior,

communication, and stage management. Workshops, media simulations, live projects, and internships can all boost practical exposure. Critical ethical principles include minimizing sensationalism, assuring correct attribution of content, and respecting audience and privacy. Media professionals and students alike should be taught how to utilize technology responsibly, using digital platforms and social media to educate rather than control audiences. It is important to emphasize the importance of transparency and to disclose sources and conflicts of interest whenever possible.

Impact: Professionalism, credibility, and ethical awareness are fostered by putting these ideas into practice, which guarantee that aspiring media professionals develop both technical proficiency and interpersonal abilities. By strengthening audience trust and reaffirming the media's role in democratic discourse, this all-encompassing strategy assists students in handling debates, interviews, and reporting responsibly.

Example: Integrating ethics courses, practical projects, and fair reporting tasks into journalism programs teaches students how to moderate their tone and body language, communicate politely, and uphold ethical norms. In a similar vein, media organizations that place a high value on fact-checking, openness, privacy, and social media responsibility build authenticity and public confidence.

Interpretation: Media workers are given the information, abilities, and discernment necessary for responsible activity through organized training and ethical reinforcement. These tactics guarantee that media workers may provide truthful, impartial, and professional material while preserving audience trust and promoting informed democratic participation by fusing technical expertise, soft skills, and ethical awareness.

6. CONCLUSION

This review focused on journalism and mass communication students as aspiring media professionals and critically analyzed the significance of ethical behavior and soft skills in Indian media discussions and interviews. According to the data, the quality, efficacy, and professionalism of debates and interviews are greatly impacted by poor stage management, body language, tone modulation, emotional intelligence, active listening, professional etiquette, manners, and communication clarity. These disparities impede civil discourse, lead to misunderstandings, and have a detrimental effect on the audience's assessment of the media's reliability.

Sensationalism, biased reporting, disrespect for privacy, lack of objectivity, conflicts of interest, and plagiarism are examples of ethical transgressions that further undermine the credibility of the media. Exposure to aggressive or unprofessional tactics might influence students' professional perspectives by normalizing unethical behavior and lessening empathy for viewers and participants.

A number of systemic issues in media education, including as out-of-date curricula, a lack of real-world experience, a lack of ethical training, a lack of faculty knowledge, and a lack of industry collaboration, hinder the overall development of future media professionals. Less focus on soft skills like posture, tone control, gestures, and polite communication makes the issue worse and leaves students unprepared for media practice in the real world.

These shortcomings have consequences that go beyond individual performance; they have an impact on democratic debate, audience trust, and media credibility. Reporting that is biased, deceptive, or sensational can sway public opinion, undermine arguments based on facts, mislead the public, and undermine trust in government agencies. Therefore, the quality of public discourse and civic involvement are directly impacted by ethical and professional gaps in media practice.

In order to tackle these issues, comprehensive approaches are needed. Integrating organized ethical training, modernizing curricula to incorporate new technologies and digital platforms, encouraging fact-checking and fair reporting, increasing hands-on experience through workshops and internships, cultivating professional etiquette, and stressing openness and social media responsibility are all essential. Through these interventions, professionals and students will be able to integrate technical proficiency with social skills and ethical awareness, which will increase their credibility and professionalism.

Finally, enhancing soft skills, ethical awareness, and practical competencies in media education will guarantee that upcoming media professionals in India are prepared to carry out interviews, debates, and reporting with honesty, tact, and accountability, thus building public confidence and favorably influencing democratic discourse.

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