

## Question of Public Accountability of the Media: An Analysis of Journalists' Perceptions

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### **Abstract**

The press plays a vital role in democracy in disseminating information to the public to have the latter well informed. For this purpose, the press gathers news from various sources and disseminates it to the public. However, while gathering and disseminating the news, the press, although cautious, may be blamed of acting in an unfair and biased manner by violating the professional code of conduct. In the age of market-driven journalism, the media indulge in sensationalism to maximise profits and commercialism is said to be the motive for such behaviour. Thus, society expects the press to be accountable to its constituents and press accountability is central to its behaviour. Therefore, the present study is undertaken to examine the perceptions of journalists about the concept of accountability in relation to sources, use of language, ethics of the profession, among other issues.

### **Keywords:**

accountability, public accountability, ethics, objectivity, social reality, language and media

### ***Abstracto***

*La prensa juega un papel vital en la democracia, diseminando información para mantener al público bien informado. Para cumplir con este propósito, la prensa reúne noticias de diferentes fuentes y las dispersa al público. Sin embargo, durante el proceso de juntar y diseminar las noticias, a la prensa, aún manteniendo cautela, se le puede culpar por actuar de manera injusta y prejuiciosa por violar el código profesional de conducta. La era del periodismo enfocado en los mercados se ve influenciada por el sensacionalismo de la prensa, quien se interesa por maximizar sus ganancias a través de la comercialización. De esta manera la sociedad espera que la prensa sea responsable por sus constituyentes. Este estudio examina las percepciones de periodistas sobre el concepto de responsabilidad con relación a la búsqueda de fuentes, uso de lenguaje, ética de la profesión, entre otros asuntos.*

### ***Palabras clave:***

*responsabilidad, responsabilidad pública, ética, objetividad, realidad social, language y medios de comunicación.*

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## Introduction

### *Accountability: Definition and Classifications*

In the media discourse, accountability<sup>\*</sup> is used to explain a media channel's functioning to the higher authority or a group of persons in the event that its behaviour be deemed as questionable. The media is often accused of violating professional norms, and hence, its actions call for certain explanations. The press plays a vital role in democracy in disseminating information to the public to have the latter well informed. For this purpose, the press gathers news from various sources and disseminates it to the public. However, while gathering and disseminating the news, the press though is cautious may be blamed of acting in unfair and biased manner by violating the professional code of ethics. In the age of market-driven journalism, the media indulge in sensationalism to maximise profits and commercialism is said to be the motive for such behaviour. Therefore, society expects the press to be accountable to its constituents and press accountability is central to its behaviour. Pritchard (1991, 2000) defined press accountability as a process by which press organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account to their constituents. A constituent is an individual, group, or organization whose goodwill is important for any media organization. Moreover, a media organization can have many constituents including audience members, advertisers, news sources, peers in other organizations and regulatory authorities. In support of this definition, Plaisance (2000) observed that accountability is a manifestation of the interaction between the claims of one autonomous agent and the set of values of another. Further, these definitions discuss accountability of the

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<sup>\*</sup> The word accountability in language originates from the metaphor of 'keeping an account of one's conduct'. It means that an account has to be made available to a higher authority or another person (Buttny, 1993). The word

press to news sources, readers and others, while the press is increasingly becoming accountable to the employer. Thus in the classification of accountability by Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987), one can find only three classifications viz., accountability to employers, accountability to subjects and accountability to sources.

***Accountability to employers.*** Though the profession of journalism is considered to be a public service, journalists as employees are obliged to render an account to their employers. The employer considers his enterprise as a profit-earning enterprise instead of a public service unit to work for the welfare of society. A classic example is an editor failing to publish a legitimate news story that is potentially detrimental to the interests of an important advertiser because the advertiser declares that he will discontinue the advertising if the story appears. For instance, the case of *Observer* in the United Kingdom can be considered (Hamlin, 1992, p. 42). Publisher Tiny Rowland owns Lonorho International, which has a group of newspapers with business interests in Africa. In 1984, Donald Trelford, the editor of *Observer* published a full-page report alleging atrocities by the army in Zimbabwe where Lonorho companies earned £ 1500 million profit annually. Rowland cabled an immediate apology to Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwe President and sternly rebuked Trelford (p. 42).

Furthermore, the owners are also complacent about certain public issues to satisfy an advertiser. They highlight specific issues to bring them to the public view while suppressing certain other issues by placing them in the inside pages to keep them off from public view. For example, Allen (1990) observes that the American media are not totally accountable to women as they ignore women's issues in their coverage. For example, she said that some years ago when

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accountability came into English usage in 1583 in the context of financial transactions (Srivatsava, 1992).

women were injured, and many were dying from the use of the Dalken Shield contraceptive device, the mass media reported the information only on their financial pages where the many lawsuits were shown to affect profits. And hundreds of women continued for many years to use the device, and be injured and die, because they lacked information about the harm and deaths it already had caused. According to Allen, this catastrophe could have been averted if the male media owners had so wished.

***Accountability to subjects.*** The press is also expected to be accountable to the subjects involved in incidents while reporting stories. Journalists may get sensational stories when public personalities are the subjects involved in the issue. For example, the shooting incident that took place in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, in which prominent film star, Bala Krishna was allegedly involved. He reportedly shot at two other people over a financial issue (*The Hindu*, June 4, 2004). Though it was the job of the police or the court to pronounce the verdict whether he was guilty or not, the newspapers as well as the TV channels ran special stories and arraigned the film star allegedly involving him in the shoot-out.

Sometimes, institutional heads, elected representatives, civic officials or film stars get involved in scandals or controversies. The public is entitled to know about these people through media channels. However, if these subjects are misrepresented in the media, can they take legal recourse against the media? In such a situation, the media are expected to be accountable to the subject. A misjudgement on the part of the media tantamount to negligence and an error of this kind and its consequent harm may be excusable. But a valid excuse does not remove an obligation to accept accountability. For example, *The Statesman* of Kolkatta published a news

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Thereafter, accountability is used in various contexts to render accounts to one's behaviour to another person.

item 'Homeless children come home to slave' in its issue dated April 30, 1999. The news item focussed on the issue of alleged exploitation of children by an NGO, Nikhil Banga Kalyan Samithi, a social welfare organisation. The organization filed a complaint to the Press Council of India against the newspaper for defaming the organization as well as misrepresenting the case. The paper later rendered an apology (*The Press Council of India Quarterly Review*, 2001).

***Accountability to sources.*** In the process of gathering news from different sources, journalists are liable to be accountable to their sources of information. Because the source places faith and trust on the journalist not to disclose the identity of the source, the disclosure of the source's identity will harm him/her and consequently his/her privacy will be invaded. Although a journalist's main goal is to provide information to the public, the information given by the source should serve the interests of the public or the society. For example, the source may disclose some information related to a policy decision of the government and asks the reporter to maintain secrecy of the source. Sometimes, the source may say 'off the record', the journalist is bound to keep the information from being disclosed. However, the journalist can use his discretion in disclosing the information when it is related to a crime, national security, and financial loss to the organization, and so on. On the other hand, in securing the information to reveal the truth, the journalist gathers information by deceiving the source of his identity, and it is unethical on the part of the journalist to disclose secrecy of his identity. However, Christians, et al. (1991) argue that public good is more important than the means adopted to secure information.

***Accountability to the public.*** Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987) classify accountability in the three previously mentioned categories. However, a fourth classification can be added as *public accountability*. In a democracy, society depends on the mass media for information, and

society and mass media are interdependent. Mass media reflect the society in the news contents, and therefore, mass media and society share a symbiotic relationship. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989, p. 303) observe that the media system is assumed to be an important part of the social fabric of modern society, and it is seen to have relationships with individuals, groups, organizations, and other social systems. These relationships may be conflict-ridden, or cooperative; they may be dynamic and changing or static and orderly. They also may range from being direct and powerful to being indirect or weak. Whatever the particulars of the relationship, it is the relationship that carries the burden of explanation.

This relationship makes mass media being accountable to the public. In the dissemination of news, newspapers establish credibility and respectability among readers and therefore they patronise the newspapers. Because newspapers require continuous support from the readers, they render an account to them. In being accountable to the readers or the public, journalists report events. Though journalists do not witness the events, they construct the events in a language that is meant for communication. Rather, in the case of newspapers, the responsibility is much more than electronic media. In reporting an event, two dimensions must be taken into consideration. They are: a) construction of social reality, and b) objectivity.

*a) Construction of social reality.* In constructing the social reality of an event, journalists must be endowed with skill in projecting such reality. Thus, journalists learn the art of professionalism in which journalistic principles of accuracy, factuality and truthfulness play a key role. In the absence of good communication skills, journalists or newspapers distort social reality and they are held responsible for the consequences. For example, in reporting communal riots or accidents, the journalist by using inflammatory language may invoke passions and

thereby disturb the public tranquillity and peace. On many such occasions media behaviour is questionable. In projecting reality, the press defends it by saying that lack of space is a constraint in reporting details of an event. When news is written in an inverted pyramid style as practised by J P Reuter in which intro summarises the event, the loss of details will affect the credibility of the newspaper. Furthermore, when media act as 'windows of the world' to the reading public, the windows must let the viewer understand the reality truthfully. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989, p. 259) observed again that press's interpretations of events can radically alter people's perception of reality and their consequent patterns of action.

*b) Objectivity.* Objectivity can be defined as a value-neutral projection of reality and therefore objective view of an event is equally important while constructing social reality. Therefore, what can be objectivity in journalism? Objectivity, according to Boyer (1981), consists of six elements:

a) balance and even-handedness in presenting different sides of an issue; b) accuracy and realism of reporting; c) presentation of all main relevant points; d) separation of facts from opinion, but treating opinion as relevant; e) minimising the influence of the writer's own attitude, opinion or involvement; and f) avoiding slant, rancour or devious purpose.

However, Bagdikian (1987, p. 179) pointed out that objectivity is losing its sanctity and journalists often violate it. Nelkin (1987) also opined that journalists no longer believe that real objectivity is possible, but they are expected to approach the ideal of neutrality and unbiased reporting by balancing diverse points of view by presenting all sides fairly, and by maintaining a clear distinction between news reporting and editorial opinion. However, bias in news reports occurs unintentionally. Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987, p. 61) indicate that bias in journalism is

a distorted and unfair judgement or disposition caused by the values of a reporter, editor, or institution. Bias is not necessarily ideological, partisan, or manifest over an extended period, and it need not be introduced intentionally. In order to be objective, newspapers adopt various practices to prevent manipulation of information by giving by-lines, credit line to the sources or by writing explicit interpretive stories.

Nevertheless, objectivity is a virtue in the profession, and therefore in public accountability, journalists should not deviate from it. In the profession of journalism, one newspaper may deviate from it while other newspapers may represent reality as it is. Hence, in such an event, the credibility of the newspaper as well as the individual journalist's will be at stake. Ryan (2001) commented that objective journalists are accountable to their audiences, to the highest ethical and professional standards of objective journalism, and, finally, to their employers. They should never assume that employers, not themselves, bear the ultimate responsibility for their behaviour.

### ***Mechanisms to monitor media accountability***

Accountability means rendering an account of one's deeds to justify his/her actions when he/she is deviating from a set of rules or regulations. In such an event, he/she faces a variety of responses for his/her deviance. Generally, the responses, according to Buttney (1993, p. 3), are:

- i) Invoking legal sanctions and institutional authority
- ii) Verbal rebuke, accusations or criticism
- iii) Questioning, prompting or calling for accounts
- iv) Waiting for the offender to initiate an explanation
- v) Letting it pass or overlooking the offence

Normally, these accounts are distinguished into two main kinds: excuses and justifications. The offender will seek an excuse for his deviant behaviour or may explain his actions. However, when an institution like the press deviates from the ethical code, what can be done? Is there any ethical code for the press? In spite of having an ethical code, it may vary from country to country and from individual to individual because the value system is not constant, and it keeps on changing from time to time. However, countries as well as newspapers have evolved codes of ethics for journalists and newspapers. Former Chairman of the Press Council of India, P. B Sawant (2001) observed, "The ethics are essentially the self-restraints to be practised by the media persons voluntarily, to preserve and promote the trust and credibility of the people".

Collection and dissemination of information is the duty of the press. Because, the press as a mass communication channel that operates in a public sphere for the benefit of the readers, the actions of the press are expected to be above ground. The public scrutinizes the actions of the press on all occasions and expects the press to reflect values and ethics of the profession. In the process of collection and dissemination of information, the press adopts different means to obtain information and occasionally suppresses news from the public because of extraneous reasons.

The press is, therefore, expected to have certain norms and ethics in the collection and dissemination. When the press does not impose self-restraints on its gathering and dissemination process, a regulating mechanism is required. Sawant (2001) also noted that the code of ethics all over the world emphasises the following: a) honesty and fairness, b) reply to critical opinions, c) objectivity in reporting, d) prohibition to receive gifts, e) respect for privacy, f) distinction between fact and opinion, g) not to inflame hatred, h) not to use dishonest means to obtain information, and i) general standards of decency and taste. Nevertheless, in a study done in 31 countries on the ethical code, it is found that journalists adhere to 57 principles and 10 principles

are found to be common in all these countries. These 10 principles are: truthfulness, honesty, accuracy of information, correction of errors, prohibition of discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity/ religion etc., respect for privacy, prohibition to accept bribes or any other benefits, fair means in information collection, prohibition to allow any outsider to have influence on the journalistic work, prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex/class etc., freedom of speech, expression, comment, criticism, and professional secrecy (Sonnenberg, 2004). Though these codes specifically mention that public accountability and privacy of the individual seem to be important, the media violate them while asking for absolute freedom to discharge its duties. Thus, in many countries, certain elements of free press are regulated, such as press freedom, freedom of expression, privacy, libel/defamation/slander, right to reply, access to public information, discrimination, pre-condemnation and court proceedings, responsibility of the publication, censorship, source protection and minors. For example, the Indian Government imposes restrictions on the press not to disclose certain information. The government, according to Sorabjee (1990), considers the following as secret under Official Secrets Act, 1923 although the entire information is not officially secret:

- i) International relations and national security;
- ii) Law enforcement and prevention of crime;
- iii) International deliberations of the government;
- iv) Information obtained in confidence from some source outside the government;
- v) Information which, if disclosed would violate the privacy of an individual;
- vi) Information, particularly of an economic nature, which if disclosed, would confer an unfair advantage on some person or subject some person or government to an unfair disadvantage;
- vii) Information which is covered by legal professional privilege, like communication between a legal adviser and his/her client;
- viii) Information about scientific discoveries and inventions and improvements, essentially in the field of weaponry

Despite the code of ethics and the law in certain countries, if the press violates the code, what can be done to enforce the code and make the media accountable? Interestingly, five ways can be adopted to make the media accountable, viz., individuals, pressure groups, newspaper ombudsmen, Press Councils and other mechanisms.

**Individuals.** When the press intrudes into an individual's privacy or defames him/her, the press is liable for punishment. Hence, an individual can seek the redressal of the problem by going to a Press Council or a court of law. For example, in India and Sweden, if an individual is affected by the coverage of the news, he can go to a Press Council first for redressal of the problem, and if he is not satisfied by the Press Council's enquiry, he can approach a court of law for defamation. In India, the law of Torts and the Indian Penal Code deal with specific aspects of defamation to help the individual and gives the press an opportunity to defend its actions. 'The law of Torts' says that defamation is an injury to the reputation of a person. If a person injures the reputation of another person, he does so at his own risk as in the case of an interference with the property. A man's reputation is his property, and if possible, more valuable than other (materialistic) property. For example, in the case of *D P Choudhary vs. Manjulatha* (AIR 1997 Raj 170), a news item was published in a local Hindi daily, *Dainik Navjyothi* in Jodhpur on December 18, 1977 that 17-year-old Manjulatha went out of her house at 11 pm on the day earlier on the pretext of attending night classes with a boy named Kamlesh. She was a graduate student and belonged to an educated family. The news item, which was untrue, was published with utter irresponsibility and without any justification. Such publication resulted in her being ridiculed and affected her marriage prospects. Since the news item is defamatory in nature, the court held the press liable for defamation (Bangia, 1999, p. 170).

Nevertheless, the press has to function in a democracy and the press is given an opportunity to justify its actions in the face of a plaintiff's claim of being defamed. The defences are i) justification or truth, ii) fair comment, or iii) privilege which may be either absolute or qualified. In justifying its actions, the press must prove that the statement or news item is made in public good. Making a fair comment on matters of public interest is a defence to an action for defamation. For this defence to be available, three essentials are required viz., i) it must be a comment i.e. an expression of opinion rather than assertion of fact, ii) the comment must be fair, and iii) the matter commented upon must be of public interest. The other essential is privilege in which there are certain occasions when the law recognises that the right of free speech outweighed plaintiff's right to reputation. The law treats such occasions to be privileged and a defamatory statement made on such occasions is not actionable. For example, the press has freedom to cover the parliamentary proceedings, which are not liable for defamation.

***Pressure groups.*** Pressure groups can be formed to fight for media accountability. Normally, groups of people rely on media for information for their day-to-day information. In fact, media may sensationalise the news and may exaggerate the situation. For example, an overzealous hockey fan, Andrew Linnehan, posted a letter on the Internet on May 23, 2002 questioning the media coverage of sports events. The important part of the letter is as follows:

Brittanie Cecil, a spectator at the Blue Jackets-Calgary Flames game at Nationwide Arena, was struck in the temple by an errant puck. After the accident that resulted in her death two days later, people all over the nation called for more safety precautions in National Hockey League (NHL) rinks, an attack that every

professional sporting league has experienced at least once during its existence.

While Cecil's death was a terrible and unfortunate tragedy, it marked the first time in the NHL's 85-year existence that a fan has died as a result of a puck flying into the stands. Not to say that the NHL should disregard the incident, but neither they nor any other professional sports league should attempt to drastically alter the way a fan views the sporting world.

The main problem with this tremendous uproar from the press is that they're making an unpreventable, unforeseen accident turn into bad publicity for the sporting world.

The press has a duty to report the truth and to raise questions that wouldn't normally be asked, but how much analysing is too much? The NHL says that they do not plan to put nets up behind the goals to prevent pucks from flying into the audience, even after Cecil's death. This is a smart move, and the press and American public alike should stop overreacting to an unfortunate accident.

According to the American Lung Association, about 430,000 deaths are attributed each to smoking. And we're panicking over one death in 85 years at a hockey event?

The letter writer raised an important issue of media credibility and accountability of the press in the US. It is not only the press, but also television's role in society that is questionable. Television serials, news and current affairs programmes are also scrutinized by pressure groups, peers in the profession and lawyers. The increasing amount of television violence has its impact on the young and women. Various media studies corroborated TV violence with real life events. For example, Dee (1987) listed a few cases that linked TV violence with real life incidents. The case of *Olivia N vs National Broadcasting Company* involved a specific television programme that became the catalyst for an act of violence. The case was the result of a broadcast of NBC's TV movie *Born Innocent*. The movie exposed the savage conditions in girl's reform schools. The movie was aired at 8 pm on September 10, 1974. A scene depicting four teenage girls use a plumber's helper to sexually assault a new girl in the school. Four days later a 15-year-old and three teenage were arrested for assaulting a 9-year-old girl Olivia Neimi and her friend, whom

they had “raped” with an empty beer bottle. When questioned by the police, their leader said that she had gotten the idea from *Born Innocent*. Neimi’s mother sued NBC seeking damages for its alleged negligence in airing the sexual assault scene. The case reinforces the belief that television violence has impact on the people. This apart, many TV programmes contain explicit violent scenes. Thus, a pressure group, ‘Our Media Voice’ campaigning for media accountability came into existence in 1999 in the US launched by two people, Helen Grieco and Kimberly Weichel ([www.ourmediavoice.org](http://www.ourmediavoice.org)). The group stated that its campaign although is concerned about all forms of mass media, its initial focus is on broadcast television as most people get most of their information about the world from the TV. TV broadcasts use the public airwaves and so, their first priority is “to serve the public interest”.

***Ombudsman.*** The institution of ombudsman is intended to protect an individual from media assault on his personal and private life. Sweden is the first country to set up an ombudsman in 1916 for the newspapers to monitor its behaviour. In order to curb the misuse of information, the Swedish law, Freedom of the Press Act, 1766, empowers every citizen to access every official document irrespective of his position, like a journalist or civil servant or a lawyer. The information thus collected can be used without defaming any individual. In order to curb the misuse of information, the media in Sweden drafted a code of ethics in not violating the individual privacy. The code said: the press, radio, and television shall have the greatest possible degree of freedom, within the framework of the Freedom of the Press Act and the constitutional right of freedom of speech, in order to be able to serve as disseminators of news and as scrutinizers of public affairs. In this connection however, it is important that the individual be protected from unwarranted suffering as a result of publicity. Ethics do not consist primarily in

the application of a formal set of rules, but in the maintenance of a responsible attitude in the exercise of journalistic duties (Jigenius, 2003). In order to control the media in not abusing the information, newspapers set up a press ombudsman to monitor press behaviour when the latter treated an individual unethically. In India, *The Times of India* was the first newspaper in the country to appoint a press ombudsman in 1988. Former chief justice of India P.N.Bhagwati was appointed ombudsman and during one year of his office, he received 180 complaints. Out of these complaints, the majority focussed on non-publication of their letters in the column meant for it. After adjudicating some complaints, Bhagwati (1989) observes: “The fledgling institution of the ombudsman in our country needs the goodwill and support of media men and it must be viewed with understanding and should receive encouragement from senior and experienced journalists and the public at large. If this institution strikes roots in Indian soil, the result will only be improved credibility and effectiveness of the Fourth Estate and its role in our democracy.” However, after 10 months, the newspaper management decided to disband the office of the ombudsman. Nevertheless, internal monitoring of the press is necessitated in the modern times and all newspapers can appoint an ombudsman to look after the paper functioning. Hence, the media organisations all over the world are increasingly recognising the importance of ombudsman in dealing with complaints because the governments are passing specific laws to protect the individuals’ privacy.

***Press councils.*** In regulating press behaviour, institutions like Press Councils can be of vital importance. Normally, a Press Council is constituted by a government with the help of a statute like in Indian or by big newspapers like in Sweden, Germany or others. A Press Council,

according to Bertrand (1996), is a group of people whose concern for the quality of media leads them to use what moral influence they have on public opinion to improve it. Hence, any Press Council is entrusted with two tasks: improve the quality of media, and defend media freedom. In improving the quality of the media, the Press Council is expected to monitor the media behaviour. In its observance of media behaviour, the Press Council has the onerous task of seeing that the media is not distorting the news or suppressing it. Often, the press is known for distorting the reality keeping its priorities in view. Therefore, when it receives any complaints, the council will enquire and adjudicate the complaint. This apart, the council can train the journalists in upholding the media ethics. By the same token, the council can safeguard the freedom of the press. In defending the media freedom, the council can fight against the governments when the latter interfere with it. For example, the Press Council of India acted firmly on getting a clause removed when the Indian government is about to pass an Ordinance on Prevention of Terrorism. The clause hampers the freedom of the journalist in reporting issues related to terrorism. The other aspect is monitoring the influence of ownership on contents and concentration of ownership in a few hands to stifle diversity of views. One important function of media is plurality of opinion for the survival of democracy, and the Press Councils can monitor 'media monopoly' of certain media *moguls*.

In view of these roles, the Press Councils function to make the media more accountable to the public. Although Press Councils function in all these countries, they lack effective laws to impose penalties on the wrongdoer. In practice, the Press Councils can act as deterrent to curb excessive media misbehaviour.

**Other mechanisms.** Media scholars observe that the mainstream media all over the world have assumed an unhealthy role in public affairs. Since profit making is the goal of the media, newspapers publish news stories, features and even headlines on an individual or a government servant or a public issue. The newsroom agenda decides the issue even before the final copy arrives from the reporting desk. Stories are published without acknowledging the source or attributing to a non-existent or a false source to strengthen the news credibility. For example, newspapers use words like ‘allegedly’, ‘reportedly’, ‘prima facie’ and so on to justify their stories and some times cases that are *sub-judice* are reported in the newspapers. Mostly, the public may not be aware of newspaper practices. In such a situation, what can be done? Instead of regular media accountability systems which may not be effective, alternative mechanisms can be considered.

Regular media sections or newspaper columns can analyse the issues of the mainstream media. For example, Sevanti Ninan’s column in *The Hindu* in India on Sunday’s analysis of media issues throws light on certain inside happenings of the media, which may call for media accountability. Journalism criticisms are of vital importance to inform and educate the media people. For instance, *American Journalism Review*, *British Journalism Review* and *Columbia Journalism Review* and so on act as agents of accountability. *Columbia Journalism Review*, which was established in 1961 at the Columbia University School of Journalism, remains the leading review of the American media. These apart, books written by academicians examine the accountability of media critically and may offer suggestions to further improve media accountability. Peer reviews of news items within the newspaper establishment will also influence journalists in pursuing ethics. Further, Bertrand (2003) noted some other media

accountability systems that are in operation in other countries. Some of them are: a) Citizens appointed to the editorial board; b) Liaison committees set up by media and some others with which they often clash like the police, lawyers, etc. c) Special quality groups like media-related groups (Reporters sans frontières in France), professional associations and non-governmental organisations; d) Consumer associations, especially associations of media users, using awareness sessions, mail campaigns, opinion polls, evaluations, lobbying, even boycotts

### *Review of some studies*

Many studies have been carried analysing the role of media in society. Two types of studies have emerged in this analysis, particularly focussing on the press. Some studies criticised the role of media as contributing to negative trends in society though the media are expected to play a constructive role. The secondary category of studies, which analysed the role of media in society, offered suggestions to improve the functioning of the press. In this second category of studies is where we find accountability studies, which emphasised ethics and responsibility of the media on the belief that the media would be involved in some self-introspection of its role. A few studies attempted to define media accountability. More aptly, Pritchard (1991) could offer a definition of accountability. In his later study (2000), he elaborated the definition comprehensively by including the constituents in the process of accountability who can play a key role in making the media accountable. In making the media accountable, the role of a journalist is critical and crucial. In being accountable, the journalist can render an account to the higher authorities. Thus, the Klaidman and Beauchamp analysis (1987) classified accountability into three categories viz., accountability to sources, accountability to subjects and accountability to employers. However, the study did not consider accountability to public though the fourth

category is very important in the existence of the media. In the analysis of media, the media accountability to the society is crucial, the contents in the media are expected to be ethical, socially responsible and should promote harmony keeping in view the public interest.

Contrary to these expectations, the media promotes sensationalism, violence and occasionally disharmony. In one such study, Dee (1987) listed some cases in the US where different TV channels depicted violence, resulting in real-life violence. Thus, certain mechanisms are necessary to control such dissemination of information to the public, and in some other occasions, the media misrepresented the issue, defaming the individuals, civil servants and institutions. Gibbons (1991) studies various forms of accountability to call for accounts from the media. One such form of accountability is supervision to control the content. Apart from supervision, certain institutional mechanisms can also be in operation. Press Councils seem to play a significant role. Two studies support this view. Pritchard (1991) observes that Press Councils can provide the kind of justice most libel plaintiffs say they would like to have. Press Councils are quicker and cheaper than courts, and they accept complaints from a broader range of problems. Although Press Councils cannot impose fines or send people to prison, the American survey suggests that what most complaints want is not a pound of flesh, but rather an impartial review of press performance. Supporting this argument, former Press Council of India chairman, and also Supreme Court judge Sawant (2003) argued that legal measures are counterproductive in dealing with complaints. He favoured Press Councils to settle the cases, stating that Press Council supports the need for free press systems for the survival of democratic institutions. He expressed the opinion that the society has an obligation to monitor media systems so they remain free. However, the studies favour Press Councils, the councils lack

powers to deal with errant newspapers. Bertrand (1996) who immensely studied the role of Press Councils all over the world argues that Press Councils require penal powers.

Nevertheless, the crux of the problem lies with the media. If newspapers are objective and follow ethics, the need for more powers will not arise. Thus, ethics are the need of the hour. In the era of globalisation, the role of newspapers is very significant and they are expected to be much more responsible to the public because of their reach-out capacity to the global audience. However, the journalistic ethics can be uniform all over the world. Callahan (2003) calls for development of ethics universally as globalisation can speed up global ethics. Truly, one can accept that global ethics are necessary while scholars like Plaisance (2000) doubt the concept of ethics. He says, “Professional codes of ethics have become popular among news organisations as a demonstration of accountability. However, reliance on ethics generates significant suspicion that they often are used to merely put an ethics veneer over questionable behaviour”. While disproving a code of ethics can be only a veneer, he points out accountability too cannot be defined. He points out, “Accountability will remain fluid, even, vague, because it will continue to evolve to correspond with the shifts in values we hold as media users. Those values... shift and create different “calls for account” for media behaviour at different time periods”.

Essentially, the media as a pillar of democracy are expected to be value-oriented which will give credibility to the newspaper. According to Gunther (1992), the credibility of a paper depends on the newspaper characteristics, audience demographics, and personal dispositions. Readers’ distrust is very likely to be a situations response, stemming from involvement with issues and groups. But, for the newspapers, the values are only news values, which are supposed to be their values of existence, which will keep their credibility intact when the newspapers

adopt them. Thus, the media without misusing their freedom can uphold news values such as accuracy, impartiality, and decency aiming at larger sections of population. Krishnamoorthy (1988) clarifies that ‘news values must relate to the ongoing context in a country. The largest section of the people must be their primary beneficiaries’. Further, he adds that “ a re-examination of news values and concepts in Indian print is essential to ensure that like every other public activity, journalism too has a public service objective on the basis of which newspapers by themselves can claim and exercise freedom of the press”. When the important actors in journalism are journalists, their perceptions of their role in society are very important. If they perceive journalism as a profession for the public welfare, the profession sets two standards (Soloski, 1989): 1) It sets standards and norms of behaviour, and 2) it determines the professional reward system. Studies did in two different settings reveal the perceptions of their role. An Indian study found a large number of trained journalists had the view that journalists sacrifice public interest if it clashes with their self-interest. Most of the journalists exploit their status for non-journalistic purposes (Sharma, 1990). Further, the study found that 9.6% of journalists reported that journalism is meant for public service. The study revealed that sensationalism had become a practice in journalism, and sometimes sensationalism was practiced in the name of investigative journalism. It helps the journalists and newspapers, while journalists achieve fame and personal gains in their career, since newspapers achieve larger circulations. In contrast, the American study found that a majority (60%) of journalists now say the editorial policies of their organisations are very important in how they rate their job (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1997). The study also found the chance to help people remains a very important aspect of news work for a majority (61%), but altruism is somewhat more apt to be cited by journalists, especially by minority journalists in broadcasting and the weekly newspapers than other media.

In view of these studies, it can be inferred that the concept of accountability is increasingly found in the discussions at various forums about public institutions like the judiciary, the executive, and the legislature. Further, the media, which are considered to be the fourth pillar of democracy, are also another institution in democracy, and therefore the role of media in society is also significant like other three institutions. Since checks and balances control the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive branches of a republic, the fourth estate i.e. the press has no such mechanism to control it, except in certain circumstances where the law can be invoked against the media. Contrary to these three institutions, the media have the duty to represent the case of the public to the other three institutions for public good and that duty gives power to the media to be used for any purpose. Whereas the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive have a fixed tenure in office and their behaviour is subjected to laws and regulations that are enacted from time to time, and one institution checks the other institution and in the process one is accountable to the other. In respect to media, a higher authority is not there to call for accounts, the media behaviour, often, is questionable. If the media do not serve the public good, the public will scrutinise its role and in the process, it will lose the public support. The readers have the ultimate power to discontinue the newspaper, which does not serve its purpose (Shourie, 1990). However, even before, the public scrutinizes the media's role; the media itself can evaluate its role. In light of this observation, the present study is undertaken to ascertain the perceptions of journalists on the newspapers' role to society with the following objectives.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

The present study has the following objectives. These are:

1. To find out the profile of journalists who figured in the study sample;
2. To ascertain the concept of accountability as perceived by journalists under the study sample;
3. To find out the concept of accountability to sources of information as perceived by journalists in the study sample;
4. To ascertain the language used in news reports in the process of accountability by the journalists in the study sample; and
5. To ascertain the perceptions of journalists on professional ethics.

## Methodology

The present study makes an attempt to examine the perceptions of journalists working in seven the largest circulated dailies in Visakhapatnam<sup>†</sup> viz., *The Hindu*, *The New Indian Express*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *Eenadu*, *Vaaritha*, *Andhra Jyothi* and *Andhra Bhoomi* .

**Study sample.** Keeping in view the objectives of the study, the present study used the survey method to collect data from the respondents (journalists) by using a questionnaire. The universe of the study consisted of all full-time journalists in seven-broadsheet newspapers with an inclusion criteria of having a minimum of three years of service as a journalist. With the adoption of the inclusion criteria, a list of total number of journalists irrespective of his/her position in the newspaper, like news editor or special correspondent, has been prepared for

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<sup>†</sup> Visakhapatnam with a population of 1.5 million is a rapidly growing city in India, and the third largest city in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Since 1974, the city has witnessed a growth of publications numbering around 80, which includes small, medium and big newspapers. These publications include dailies, weeklies, and monthlies. Out of these dailies, three broadsheet English newspapers and five broadsheet Telugu newspapers cater to half a million readers. Print media apart, the city has three local television networks and 40 film theatres. However, the city *a la* other cities in India has problems like pollution, sanitation, lack of proper waste disposal mechanisms, urban slums, unsafe drinking water, urban slums, and traffic congestion, and so on.

administering the questionnaire. A total of 70 journalists figured in the universe and all of them were administered the questionnaire.

***Data collection instrument.*** The data collection instrument was a questionnaire containing close-ended structured questions relevant to the study. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part I dealt with the identification data of the respondent such as age, gender, education, income, and length of service. Part II contained questions relating to the professional obligations such as the role of journalists role in society, their coverage of stories, limitations in covering stories, professional problems and others. Part III focussed on the use of language in news reports and how the language is used in reporting reality. Finally, Part IV comprised questions related to ethics of the profession such as journalists' belief of ethics, and how can they be imposed.

***Pilot study.*** The closed-ended structured questionnaire thus prepared was pilot-tested before the study began. The questionnaire was given to five journalist-respondents working in the English newspapers and five others working in Telugu newspapers. Based on their responses, a few questions like verification of press notes and sources used in the news reports, etc. were included in the coverage of news and language used in the news reports.

***Data collection procedure.*** The data pertaining to the study were collected between June and August, 2006. The questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents in the first week of June with an oral request to return them within a week. They were also requested to fill

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the questionnaires leisurely. Initially, in spite that the purpose of the study was explained to them, some of the respondents were not inclined to accede to the request. Since the researcher had worked as a journalist in the city newspaper before, some of the journalists obliged, and cooperated with the researcher. A total of 70 journalists comprised the universe, and all of them were administered the questionnaire. But, the response rate was slightly more than half despite many reminders.

***Problems in data collection.*** In collecting back the questionnaires, the researcher came across a few problems. Although the researcher informed the respondents that the information would be kept secret, some respondents did not repose faith on the researcher's words in the initial stages. In subsequent requests, they showed interest in filling the questionnaires. Since some of the respondents were working as reporters, they could not be contacted in a week's time. This resulted in delay in the data collection work. A second problem was that the journalists did not return the questionnaires, citing some reason or other. While some said that they had lost the questionnaire, others said that they were busy. Despite reminders, they did not return the questionnaires; after some time, the researcher gave up the idea of persuading them.

## **Results**

***Profile of the respondent.*** Out of 70 journalists who were administered a questionnaire, only 37 respondents returned the filled-in questionnaire. Out of these, the majority (21.8%) belonged to *Andhra Bhoomi*, followed by the *New Indian Express* and *Andhra Jyothi* (Table 1).

Among 37 respondents, majority (83.7%) are male journalists while the remaining are female journalists (16.3%).

Table 1  
Distribution of respondents by newspaper

Newspaper	No.	%
<i>The Hindu</i>	5	13.5
<i>The New Indian Express</i>	7	18.9
<i>Deccan Chronicle</i>	5	13.5
<i>Andhra Jyothi</i> *	6	16.2
<i>Eenadu</i> *	3	8.1
<i>Vaaritha</i> *	3	8.1
<i>Andhra Bhoomi</i> *	9	21.8
Total	37	100

\* These dailies are regional language newspapers published in Telugu

Most (35.2%) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 37-42, followed by considerable (29.7%) percentage of respondents were in the age group of 25-30. However, two respondents each in the age group belonged to 18-24, and 49-54 respectively. The minimum age of a respondent in the sample was 23 and the maximum age was 51. The mean age of the respondents was 34.4 years.

As regards the education of respondents, the majority (59.5%) of the respondents were post-graduates, followed by graduates (29.7%). However, three journalists working in Telugu newspapers were undergraduates and one journalist was a diploma holder.

In terms of income, a closely half (48.6%) of the respondents are in the income group of Rs 50,001-1,00,000 per annum, followed by the income groups of less than Rs 50,000 and 1,00,001-2,00,000 with 16.2%. Only 16.2% of the respondents representing Telugu newspapers earn less than Rs 50,000 per annum. In the sample, the minimum income per annum was Rs

36,000 while the maximum income was Rs 3,40,000. The mean income of the respondents was Rs 103379.

Out of 37 respondents, most (40.5%) of them have a length of service ranging from 11 years to 15 years, while 35.2% of them have less than 5 years. The criteria adopted for the respondent to be included in the sample was three years, and therefore journalists figured in the sample were having three years minimum service. One respondent working in *The Hindu* was having 31 years of service, more than the age of some of the respondents figured in the sample. The mean service of the respondents was 9.3 years. Interestingly, 48.6% respondents worked earlier in some newspapers before joining the present newspaper.

Out of 37 respondents 91.9% of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with the employment while 8.1% were not satisfied with the employment. Job satisfaction was measured on a four-point scale: Very good, good, bad and very bad. Four reasons were found in the data for job satisfaction. Prominently, 64.9% respondents reported that they were satisfied with the nature of the work, while 13.5% reported social status. 10.8% expressed satisfaction, because they were earning more salary as compared to their earlier service in other newspapers. These respondents belonged to *The Hindu*. In contrast, 10.8% respondents joined the profession for lack of opportunities. Out of these 37 respondents, only 3 (8.1%) expressed dissatisfaction with the employment. One each cited different reasons. One reported odd working hours for dissatisfaction, while the other cited no freedom to work whereas the third reported less salary. Out of these three two were women and only one was a male respondent.

## *Professional Obligations*

Like any other profession, journalism too has obligations related to the profession. Since, the newspapers serve the people with information needs; they act with responsibility in fulfilling their duty. However, journalists too have their own priorities in their profession, and hence an attempt is made to ascertain their views on their professional responsibilities as well as their role in society.

**People's issues.** Almost all the respondents in the sample reported that the profession of journalism is useful to society, primarily, to support the people's issues like public health, pollution, water crisis, municipal corporation, crime (nuisance to public), schools, sanitation, AIDS, street children, and so on (Table 2).

Table 2

People's issues frequently reported by the respondents in their respective newspapers

Issue	H	NIE	DC	E	V	AJ	AB
Health including AIDS	+	+	+	+		+	
Transport and Communication				+	+	+	+
Water crisis	+			+	+	+	+
Problems in industries	+			+			
Energy (problems of power cuts and street lights)				+	+		
Literacy (problems of schools)		+		+	+	+	+
Human rights violations	+	+		+	+		
Municipal corporation (Tax payments)			+	+	+	+	+
Crime (nuisance to public)				+	+	+	+
Stories on government hospitals				+	+		+
Pollution	+	+	+	+	+		
Corruption			+	+	+		
Street children	+	+		+			
Sanitation				+	+	+	+

H: The Hindu, NIE: The New Indian Express; DC: Deccan Chronicle; E: Eenadu; V: Vaartha; AJ: Andhra Jyothi; AB: Andhra Bhoomi

The respondents gave second priority to making the governments work. Only one respondent expressed that the profession would help the managements of newspapers. Nevertheless, about 89% of the respondents agreed that they could write frequently on people's issues while 10.9% of the respondents disagreed with this view. When the respondents were asked to cite the reasons for reporting on people's issues, most (42.4%) of them reported that they got an opportunity to report on people's issues while 39.4% said they were able to write good stories related to people's problems. About 18% of them said that their superiors had frequently encouraged them to report on people's issues (Table 3). Interestingly, 4(10.9%) respondents reported that they could not report on people's issues. One respondent cited the reason of lack of opportunity, while another said that his superiors had not encouraged him to report on these issues. The other two respondents said that they lacked time to pursue such issues relevant to people's causes.

Table 3  
Reasons cited by respondents to report on people's issues

Reason	% (n = 33)
An opportunity to report	42.4
Editors' encouragement to report	18.2
Ability to report on people's issues	39.4
Total	100

**Investigative stories.** When asked whether they can investigate stories, about 81% of the respondents said that they could investigate stories related to people's welfare while 19% reported that they could not do so. Specifically when they were asked to cite the chief reason for investigating stories, the majority (83.4%) of the respondents said that those stories had an impact on the people as well as the government. Further, 10% of the respondents reported that their editors asked them to file stories on people's issues while one respondent each said that the

stories reported by him were not reported by another newspaper earlier to him. Another respondent said that he could find reliable source to give him information (Table 4). Those seven (19%) respondents who could not report investigative stories cited two reasons. Four of them said that the investigative stories had no impact on society while three of them said that they could not find reliable sources for reporting such stories.

Table 4  
Chief reason cited by respondents to report investigative stories on people's issues

Reason	% (n =30 )
Stories have relevance to society	83.4
Editors showed interest on such issues	10.0
Stories were not reported by their peers	3.3
Able to find reliable sources	3.3
Total	100

***Problems in reporting.*** The profession of journalism involves considerable risk factors in dealing with sources of information as well as the people involved in the news reports. When asked, do journalists face any problems? About 70% reported that they face problems from the parties involved in the news reports while 10.8% of the respondents cited problems from the government as well as the managements respectively. Only 8.2% of them said problems from the editors in reporting such stories (Table 5).

Table 5  
Problems cited by respondents in reporting investigative stories

Reason	% (n =37 )
From the parties figured in news reports	70.2
From the government	10.8
From the management	10.8
From the editors occasionally	8.2
Total	100

**Source protection.** Despite problems, do journalists protect their sources of information? About 92% of journalists reported that journalists protect the source of information, while 8% of the respondents opined that journalists do not protect the source of information. Journalists were also asked what language they frequently use to protect the source of information. In the profession of journalism, use of passive voice is frequently adopted. But one respondent (2.7%) said that he would use “it is learnt” in news reports, while one respondent cited that he would use “authoritative sources” whereas 18.9% of the respondents would use “reliable sources” in news reports. However, more than half (54.1%) of them reported that they would use “all the three” to protect the source of information. About 21.6% said that they use “cannot say” on the protection of source (Table 6). In using such language, journalists think that they are protecting the source. In this connection, respondents were asked about reporting “off the record” information , about 91% of the respondents informed that they could not use that information in news reports , while 9% of the respondents said that they would use the information at a later date.

Table 6  
What language do you use to protect the source of information?

Language	% (n =37 )
It is learnt	2.7
Authoritative sources	2.7
Reliable sources	18.9
All the three cited above	54.1
Cannot say	21.6
Total	100

**Disclosure of source of information.** In using such language, 78.3% of respondents think that they are protecting the source of information while 21.6% disagreed with that view. They were asked one specific question that would they ever be compelled by the editor to disclose the source of information, the majority (67.6%) reported that they would not disclose the source of

information in spite of the editor’s insistence, while 32.4% reported that they would disclose information to the editor. These respondents said that they would request the editors to keep the information confidential (Table 7). About 10.8% reported that they would refuse to disclose information. Only one respondent (2.7%) said that he would give false information. But, more than half of them (54.1%) reported that they would evade an answer to the question of source of information. Almost all the respondents reported that they would not report the “off-the-record” statements given by the subjects, and similarly almost all of them informed that they would not cross-check the information given in the press notes.

Table 7  
Reason cited by respondent to protect the source information

Reason	% (n =37 )
By refusing to disclose the source of information	10.8
By giving false information	2.7
By requesting the editor to keep it confidential	32.4
By evading a direct answer	54.1
Total	100

### *Language*

Language is a tool of communication for journalists, and use of language in news reports plays a significant role in informing the public about an event. Though a journalist does not witness an event, he or she tries to construct it with the help of information given to him/her by a second party. For example, a demonstration or a protest or an accident may take place in the city, a journalist tries to report it by taking pieces of information from his/her peers working in other newspapers or from the police, depending on the event. Sometimes, a journalist may be present at the event; he or she constructs it by understanding it. In such a situation, is the journalist presenting facts to the public? Therefore, in the present study, an attempt is made to ascertain the perceptions of journalists on constructing reality.

In the study sample, out of 37 respondents, about 75% of them reported that journalists are “sometimes very close to reality” while 8.1% said that they are “sometimes partially close to reality” and 16.2% informed that they “cannot say” (Table 8). Ironically, more than half (54.1%) of the journalists reported that the journalists would come across a situation where they cannot express their thoughts in writing. About 30% reported that such situation would not arise frequently, while 16.2% informed that they “cannot say” (Table 9).

Table 8  
How do journalists express an event?

Expression of an event	% ( n =37 )
Sometimes very close to reality	75.7
Sometimes partially close to reality	16.2
Cannot say	8.1
Total	100

Table 9  
Can journalists face difficulty in reporting an event while writing?

Response	% ( n =37 )
Yes	54.1
No	29.7
Cannot say	16.2
Total	100

Do journalists make any efforts to improve the situation in improving their language skills?

About 43.2% reported that journalists would make efforts to improve the situation, while 40.6% said that journalists would not make efforts to improve the situation while 16.2% reported that they “cannot say”.

***Improving language skills.*** What methods do they follow in improving the situation?

About 43.2% of the respondents reported that they would make self-efforts to learn the language to improve the situation. Whereas 16.2% informed that they would learn from the senior journalists in the organisation. But, 8.1% of the respondents said they would use the language

known to them when 21.6% said that they imitate other newspapers. Only 10.8% of them said that they “cannot say” on improving the situation (Table 10).

Table 10

What methods do they adopt to improve the language skills?

Method	%
By making a self-effort to improve the language	43.2
By learning from seniors	16.2
By using the language known to them	8.1
By imitating other newspapers	21.6
Cannot say	10.8
Total	100

### ***Ethics***

Ethics in the profession are only guidelines, which are necessary in the process of information dissemination. These ethics relate to language use, and the means adopted in getting information for ensuring objectivity and fairness in presenting facts to the public. Therefore, the present study focuses on the perceptions of journalists on ethics in the profession as well as the Press Council of India, which is a statutory body to supervise the journalistic norms in the newspapers. The majority (83.8%) of the journalists reported that they believe in ethics within the profession while about 8% of them said that they do not believe in ethics. Whereas 8% of them informed that they “cannot say”.

To the specific question: how do they follow ethics? Nearly 60% of them said that journalists “frequently” follow ethics and 10.8% of them said that they follow ethics “less frequently”. Only one respondent said “not at all” journalists follow ethics. However, 27% said that they “cannot say” anything about professional ethics. The reason cited by them for not following ethics is simply “cannot say”. In such a situation, what can be done to implement ethics? The majority (83.8%) said ethics must be self-imposed, while 13.5% said editors must

enforce ethics. Only one respondent answered that they must be imposed by law. In fact, the Press Council of India is a body to implement ethics. Nearly one-fourth of them said that Press Council is implementing ethics effectively, while more than half (56.7%) reported that the Council is not implementing ethics effectively. Only 19% expressed that they “cannot say” anything about implementation of ethics by the Council.

### **Conclusion**

***Job satisfaction vis-à-vis nature of work.*** Job satisfaction plays a key role in discharging duties with responsibility regardless of any employment. Majority of journalists expressed job satisfaction because of nature of work. Journalism is a creative job in which a person can render a meaningful and purposeful service if the work environment is conducive for his/her discharging the functions effectively. In the study sample, the journalists are working in broadsheet newspapers, which are leading newspapers in Visakhapatnam. Since the sample has not included small or medium newspapers, job satisfaction of these journalists cannot be ascertained. However, more than half of the journalists expressed job satisfaction as very good and good, while 13.5% of the respondents reported social status for being satisfied with the job. These respondents attained senior positions within a short duration of service, and there is a lurking danger that they may isolate themselves from society. Because the profession of journalism requires constant interaction with the sources of information from the lower level, the new social status will distance them away from the people.

The other finding in the study is that journalists expressed that they are satisfied with the job on account of more salary. Though the nature of the job is similar irrespective of the newspaper,

more salary gives them security and stability in the profession. About 10.5% respondents who expressed job satisfaction on account of more salary belong to *The Hindu*. When journalists get more salary, they need not look for 'favours' from other sources. Nevertheless, more salary will make them accountable to the employer. At present, some newspapers are implementing contract system of service. A journalist is appointed on a contract system for a period of two years or so, and his/her salary is not increased. Sometimes, this may lead to dissatisfaction. Because of dissatisfaction in the service, the quality of work suffers, and the profession of journalism is increasingly becoming monotonous to the journalists. This apart, the roles of many personnel in the newspaper has been merged. For example, proofreading, composing and laying out of the pages or other allied services have to be carried out by a single journalist. This leaves him little time to concentrate on the job. The growth of technology has helped the profession of journalism in faster disseminating information to the readers, but the nature of the job has become burdensome to the journalists. Since the public expects a lot from the profession of journalism, the journalist is at the receiving end in not getting satisfaction from the profession, particularly in the regional newspapers the journalists are underpaid and improperly paid. Therefore, in the coverage of news, journalists search for hard news like coverage of day's events instead of soft news like features or public welfare items.

***Opportunity vis-à-vis investigation.*** The profession of journalism is able to help the society in highlighting the people's problems through the columns of the newspaper. Even in their interactions with the bureaucracy or the policy-maker like a politician, journalists can bring a problem to the notice of the administration. In fact, journalists have access to the administration, they can utilise it for the purpose of doing good to the society. For instance, one journalist informed the researcher that he brought to the notice of the district collector about the

dilapidated school buildings in the district, and made the district collector taking a prompt action in ordering an inquiry to study the state of the school buildings. Rivers (1973) described the press as an official broker of information, gathering it from the halls of government and disseminating it among the people, then carrying their reactions then takes them back to government.

However, in investigating the local issues, the regional papers are in a forward position as compared to the English dailies. Because the regional newspapers have a widened network of stringers and staff reporters, they are able to focus on civic issues like sanitation, water crisis, and corruption at the local level. Thus, respondents from the Telugu newspapers reported that health, transport & communications etc. obtain more coverage of news. Therefore, the role of investigative reports in Telugu newspapers is very significant.

The Telugu newspapers investigate stories at the local level, and they mostly depend on local sources for information. In protecting the source of information, journalists follow ethics. In the profession, journalists impose the professional norms of not disclosing the source identity.

However, some respondents disclose the source of information to the editor. Because the editor has to guard the credibility of the paper, he/she insists on knowing the reliable source. Thus, some of the journalists responded in saying that they use all the words such as “it is learnt”, “reliable sources” and “authoritative sources”. In most occasions, reporters by virtue of their contacts with the sources carry information for filing stories. Since editors do not have direct contacts with the sources, they validate the information by ensuring the credibility of information before publishing them.

***Social reality and language.*** How does a newspaper project social reality? Social reality can be projected only through the use of language. News is a representation of reality that happens in

the environment and the language facilitates the projection of reality. In the profession of journalism, use of value-free words is to be practised to be very objective in reporting an event without any bias. Since the use of language is not merely accidental, they carry the intentions of the writer. Often, the ideology of the writer can be understood through his/her writings. Fowler (1991:5) said the contents of newspapers are not facts about the world, but in very general sense ideas. Thus, the analyses of media discourses can assess the ideological practice of representation through language. For example, communal disputes or petty scuffles are described as “riots” instead of “disorders”. Narrating them as riots carry much impact on one section of the population, as being programmed, and the language use would attract certain sections of the Indian Penal Code. Hence, the respondents said that they would improve the language on their own and also learn from their seniors. However, in general, the journalists must adopt the use of language considerably and sincerely in constructing social reality.

***Values and ethics.*** The individual variables of the respondents come into play in adopting values in one’s life, which lead to acceptance of ethics in the profession. In the study sample, the majority of respondents reported that journalists would frequently follow ethics. However, they said ethics must be self-imposed. In the implementation of ethics, individual values would reflect in the professional aspects, and therefore considerable number of journalists reported that they “cannot say” anything about professional ethics.

The study found that a high salary would make the journalists satisfied with the nature of the job. In the study sample, it was found that half of the journalists were getting around less than Rs 7,000 per month. Therefore, it can be suggested that the wage board recommendations be implemented effectively for increasing job satisfaction among the journalists, which would in turn attract new recruits into the profession.

The respondents with longer duration of service expressed that source accountability is required in the profession. Journalists with lesser service must be imbued with the spirit of professionalism in which source accountability is a prerequisite for developing new sources. If reliable sources are cultivated, the respective newspapers will have credibility, which in turn, will enhance the prestige of the newspaper industry as an institution. The profession of journalism is expected to do good to the society. It is found in the study that the journalists can investigate the people's issues. It is suggested that editors very often can encourage the journalists to report on people's issues and to be more and more accountable to the public.

The study also found that journalists face problems from the parties affected in the investigative stories. Therefore, it is mandatory on the part of the state as well as the managements to provide security to the journalists. Even the Press Council of India often receives threats to journalists; therefore, necessary steps must be initiated to ensure freedom to work in a democratic country.

The study found that respondents reported that language skills must be improved. In order to project reality, language plays a crucial role, and therefore, adequate training must be given to the journalists in reporting the issues. In event reporting or news analysis, editors must ensure the copy sufficiently projects reality in order to be accountable to the subjects involved in the report. Misrepresentation will attract legal provisions, and hence the copy must not violate ethical values. Sensationalism and exaggeration will have an adverse impact on the newspaper in terms of losing the trust of the clients.

A printed word has a more lasting impact on the mind of a reader as compared to a spoken word. A reader can remember it for a long time, and he can refer to it at times. A news item printed in a newspaper or a magazine can be clipped and saved by a reader for his examination in the future. While disseminating information, journalists carry an additional responsibility that the language

they use must be truthful and objective. On most occasions, the language used by journalists has become a subject of controversy. Section 153-b of the Indian Penal Code deals with the use of language *inter alia* punishment. Although Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, reasonable restrictions under Article 19 (2) have been imposed on this freedom. These restrictions indirectly hint at the responsibility of the press. The use of language in the headlines, news reports and editorials should not be offending and occasionally newspapers incur in the wrath of the government, judiciary and people.

In essence, it can be inferred that the press has an obligation of accountability to attain a meaning, therefore, the profession of journalism must agree on a framework to enforce it.

Though accountability is essential for credibility, and with diminishing credibility will result in increasing demands for limiting the freedom of the press, which will be a threat to a democracy.

However, the press has a moral obligation to invite criticism, which in turn will promote accountability. The public will always expect more and more from the journalists when they start delivering it. Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987) said, "If the public will accept that journalists care enough about what they do and how well they do it to allow them to regularly pass judgement on their own errors, the enterprise of journalism will come closer to the public's legitimate expectation of accountability".

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