

NEWS WITHOUT VERIFICATION OF SOURCES IN BANGLADESHI MEDIA: CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The paper tends to depict how unverified or unattributed news affect people, society and the country. In general, reports are published or broadcast maintaining accuracy. But sometimes even some frontline media of Bangladesh publish or broadcast reports without verification of sources. The study reveals that lots of news on three issues was published in some prominent mainstream media without authentication of sources. In some cases, the media relied on Facebook and other social portals. In other cases, the analysis found some media only plagiarized and published or broadcast news from other media without verification of sources. In the first case study, the research found several TV channels and other online news portals just put their ears into rumors to publish the news. In the second case study, it found a prominent newspaper published a news in its online version translating from another reputed English daily without understanding the connotation and the other popular news portals mere plagiarized and published the news. And in the last case study a prominent TV channel and other media merely resorted to social media and rumor to publish the news.

Keywords: Accuracy, media ethics, news, objectivity, plagiarism

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1. Introduction

There is a strong correlation between the words accuracy, source attribution, objectivity, and ethics of journalism. Rumors, non-verification of source, fake news are also interrelated. While discussing the issue these said words may come in place of each other. Media ethics or journalism ethics is a branch of philosophy concerned with actions that are morally permissible and those that are not. Media ethics assists media workers in determining what is right and how to choose the best from several alternatives. Media ethics constitutes a normative science of conduct and must therefore be applied voluntarily (Hasan, 2010). Journalists are usually expected and required to go out to the scene of a story to gather information for their reports, and often may compose their reports in the field (Hasan, 2010). Use of original sources of information, including interviews with people directly involved in a story, original documents and other direct sources of

information, whenever possible, and cite the sources of this information in reports (Hasan, 2010). Use multiple original sources of information, especially if the subject of the report is controversial (Hasan, 2010). Patient vigilance is the first protection. Make legible notes of every fact, particularly of such specifics as names, ages, dates, times, addresses. Take nothing for granted. Was it really Smith? Or could it have been Schmidt, or Smeeth, or even Psmythe? When the secretary said the meeting would occur Friday, August 17, was he sure August 17 would be a Friday? And if you find it's a Thursday, which did he intend? Are you safe in calling the professor "Dr." Brown? Maybe she's not a Dr., but a Ms. or does she prefer some other title? If she does, she'll call you wrong even if you're right (Charnley & Charnley, 1979).

Although freedom of the press exists under constitutional guarantee, no paper is free to make false, malicious or derogatory statements about any individual, any group or any institution, either intentionally or through negligence or accident (Bond, 1954). Code of Conduct of Bangladesh Press Council 1993 (2002 as amended) for the Newspapers, News Agencies says in its codes 3, 4, 5, 12, 13 and 15 that it is the responsibility of a journalist to keep people informed of issues which influence or attract them. News and commentaries are to be prepared and published showing full respect to the sensitivity and individual rights of newspaper readers as well as the people. Truth and accuracy of information available are to be ensured as far as possible. Information received from reliable sources may be published in the public interest induced by honest intention and if facts presented therein are considered trustworthy by logical consideration, then a journalist is to be absolved from any adverse consequence for publication of such news. If the published news is damaging or improper, then withdrawal, corrigendum or explanation be made and in special cases, apology should be tendered. For the increase of circulation of newspaper no vulgar, derogatory, ghastly news and picture though attractive to the people, be published. As extent and durability of the influence of newspapers is greater than that of other media, a journalist writing for newspaper shall particularly be cautious about the credibility and truthfulness of sources and shall also preserve his source material in order to avoid risks. The code of ethics of the 'Society of Professional Journalists' says plagiarism is dishonest and unacceptable (Mencher, 1996). Journalists, like other professionals, abide by the rules and customs of their work. These essentials of their practice include accuracy, attribution to sources, use of background information, balance and fairness, brevity, clarity, completeness, human interest whenever possible, full identification of those in the material, a focus on theme or news point, novelty, objectivity and the verification of claims, and assertions (Mencher, 1996). Allah Almighty says in Quran: "O, you who believe, if a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertains the truth, lest you harm people unwillingly and afterwards become full of repentance for what you have done" (The Quran, Al-Hujrat, 49: 6).

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are to determine some countrywide influential news, which were published without authentication of sources, to find out the existing laws, ethics, and code of conducts to ensure ethics of journalism. The study will also offer some recommendations to overcome the anomalies.

3. Literature Review

Accuracy is one of facet of truth. The paper gets the facts straight. But accuracy refers to more than the news story. Headlines, photographs, and even editorials have an obligation to be truthful and accurate. The concept of objectivity is a part of accuracy as is the concept of balance. An accurate reflection of the community and the world includes good news as well as bad (Gilmore, 1983). Accuracy means literally that every element in a news story, every name and date and age and address, every definitive word or phrase or sentence, is an unequivocal statement of a verifiable reality. Not only that: it means fidelity in the general impression given by the way details are put together and by the emphasis put on them (Charnley & Charnley, 1979). The accuracy of information, which has been reported, needs to be ensured. If the information is not correct, the readers become confused. Accuracy begins with painstaking attention to every detail

when gathering information. Names, ages, addresses- check. The number of the fire trucks that answered the alarm-check. Check and double-check (Mencher, 1996). Being in favor of accuracy is like being for apple pie. Achieving it is not so straightforward. A reporter can depend on facts only when he *knows* they are facts. That means first of all a stubborn insistence on seeing them as they are. It means working for the unachievable ideal-objectivity: distinguishing between what the facts *really* are and what his prejudices might make him wish they were what biased witnesses *say* they are, or what public relations efforts might try to *make* them (Charnley & Charnley, 1979).

If any reporter accuses a person for anything in any news, his/her comments need to be accumulated in the report. Accused person or institution must be granted for self-defense though their offence so as high. The comments of the accused person should be incorporated as soon as possible the accusation arises. If the comments are not found, the readers need to be informed how often, when and how the reporters tried for getting the comments (Tahmina, 2013). Without injecting questions and verification nothing should be received. Anything should not be written from presumption merely (Tahmina, 2013). Anything should not be written just hearing from the source so far the source is verified. When a writer checks his or her information against some kind of objective source, we say that the material has been verified. The New York Times, "Don't trust anybody on anything that is checkable." This rule applies even to the most trustworthy sources (Mencher, 1996). Patience needs as partners skepticism and a passion for double-checking (Charnley & Charnley, 1979).

4. Methodology

Although case study methods remain a controversial approach to data collection, they are widely recognized in many social science studies especially when in-depth explanations of a social behavior are sought after. The nature of the present study is exclusively a case study which broadly falls under the exploratory study. Basically, only qualitative data were used in this study. Several news based on five issues were selected randomly as the sample size. This study was based on the news collected from different prominent media (print, electronic and online) i.e. www.thedailystar.net, www.newagebd.net, www.dhakatribune.com, Ekattor TV, SA TV, www.bdnews24.com, www.jagonews24.com, www.pbd.news, www.dhakatims24.com, www.rtvonline.com, www.thebarta.com, www.voiceofbd.com etc. of Bangladesh. As the present study is a case study so it is basically qualitative research in nature. The collected qualitative data has been analyzed in descriptive form.

5. Rationale of the Study

Media have an outstanding role in shaping people's mind, flourishing proper development of a country and ensuring human rights of people. Neutral, objective, positive and responsible journalism can not only increase development but also institutionalize the democracy of a country. On the contrary, partisan, negative and irresponsible journalism may imbalance a family, society and a country as well. The study on news without verification of sources has been conducted to find out the anomalies in reporting in Bangladesh. It emphasized basically on unattributed news which creates anarchy in society. Alongside, there are other rationalities to choose the topic for research. Especially, the findings of the study will help every stakeholder of news. More importantly, the study will help journalists, sub-editors, editors and others concerned to be more responsible and transparent in doing jobs.

6. Findings and Discussion

Case study-I

Subject matter: ATM Shamsuzzaman is a renowned film and television actor, director and screen playwright. He acted in over 300 films. He has been awarded Ekushey Padak by the Government of Bangladesh and won Bangladesh National Film Awards for five times.

Once several TV channels and web portals including Ekattor TV reported he passed away Monday night, much to his chagrin. Kill the rumor mills, veteran actor and national treasure ATM

Shamsuzzaman is not dead. Contrary to several reputed news channels and portals including Ekattor TV, he was reported to have passed away Monday night (Dhaka Tribune, June 12, 2018). On Monday midnight, a bizarre rumor tricked social media users into believing that eminent actor, director, and screen-playwright ATM Shamsuzzaman has passed away. Many well-known artistes even posted statuses on their social media pages, offering condolences to his family and close ones. At the time, Ekattor TV was also spreading the news about the death of the actor (The Daily Star, June 12, 2018). Actor ATM Shamsuzzaman said he was shocked and frustrated after a rumor spread following his death news broadcasted on a TV channel and social media. On Monday night a private television channel in the news ticker announced that Shamsuzzaman passed away, which left his family members devastated and panic-stricken. Following the report many actors and his fans posted reactions on their Facebook pages (The New Age, June 12, 2018).

The actor, alive and kicking, and a little angry at the rumormongers, appeared on Facebook live and directed his frustrations. "Channel Ekattor is an important channel. I cannot comprehend how someone like them could be so irresponsible about reporting my death without checking up with my family" as he proceeded to read out his phone number for future reference (Dhaka Tribune, June 12, 2018). However, this was not the first time that fake news about the death of a celebrity was reported by the electronic media. Earlier, false news about death of late legendary Dhallywood actor Razzak was reported by the electronic media. It is perhaps the eighth or ninth time that false news of ATM Shamsuzzaman's death has been reported. The actor has urged the media to evaluate news sources and before broadcasting such news (The New Age, June 12, 2018).

Case study-2

Subject matter: The Dhaka people are, by now, quite familiar with a graffiti character called Subodh since last February 2017, as he can be seen in the various walls of the city with a sun inside a cage or himself behind the bars. These graffiti of Subodh are often accompanied by some texts saying "*Subodh, run; time is not on your side*", or "*Subodh, run; humans have forgotten how to love*", or "*Subodh, run; your luck has run out*", and also "*Subodh is now in jail; a sense of guilt is ensconced in people's hearts*". Discussions about Subodh were published in different newspapers in the country and abroad. The mysterious artist behind the emergence of Subodh has started to be called 'Banksy of Bangladesh'.

'Subodh' artist arrested in Dhaka, Bangladesh: The police in Dhaka have arrested an artist who they say is the creator of the much-talked-about graffiti series 'Subodh', along with his two alleged collaborators. The suspect, whose identity has not yet been revealed by the police, faces a number of serious charges, including vandalism, sedition and conspiracy, which could award him many years of jail time. The prosecutor of the case, MA Jaal-il, also brought an additional charge against the suspect under section 57 of the ICT Act, alleging the suspect "create[d] possibility to deteriorate law and order (The Daily Star, November 03, 2017)." English daily 'The Daily Star' published a report in its Star Weekend magazine on Friday in the headline "Subodh artist arrested". The word 'Satire' was written over the headline in a short form. The main theme of the satire report was the clause 57 of ICT Act. To satire the act the writer adopted 'Subodh' in his writing. But no journalist could understand the meaning of the satire which became clear on Friday noon. The Jugantor published a report as lead news in its online edition in the headline "Three arrested including "Artist of 'Subodh's graffiti along with two". Bangladesh Pratidin made a headline in its online version "Subodh of much-talked-about graffiti series arrested". It was seen in the Facebook that Purboposchimbd, Dhaka Times and some other online portals did the same job. Sometimes in the name of online desk, sometimes in byline of own correspondent, all the reports were completely or mostly copy-paste of the Jugantor report along with graffiti of the artist in different walls of Dhaka City. bdnews24.com wanted to know the source of the report making a phone call to the Jugantor. But after sometime, they withdrew the news from the site without any announcement. Gradually, Bangladesh Pratidin and others removed the news (bdnews24.com, November 03, 2017).

Case study-3

Subject matter: Anisul Huq was the Mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation and the Chairman of Mohammadi Group, since 1986. He was the former president of ‘SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industries (SAARC CCI)’ in the period of 2010–2012. He was also the former president of ‘Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries’ (FBCCI) from 2008 to 2010. He was also a renowned television show host in the 1990s.

Anisul Huq passed away on 30 November, at 10:23 pm Bangladesh time. Many online news portals published the death news before his death. A private television channel kept broadcasting the scroll about his death news a day before. It is nothing else but our unscrupulous money-making competition with death and the news of death (jagonews24.com, December 03, 2017). Dr. Abdun Noor Tushar, CEO of Mayor-owned Nagorik TV, frequently requested not to spread rumors that Anisul Huq had died. Quoting Navidul Huq, son of the DNCC mayor, Tusher posted a status at Facebook at around 9:00pm on Tuesday today saying, “Navidul Huq told us so far that the mayor is in intensive care. He requested us not to spread rumors about him. The source of news should be mentioned while publishing such news about a prominent person like him and the news should be disclosed by verifying the credibility. The accuracy of news should be verified from more than one credible source. I pray for those people who are spreading rumors in such a way during the illness of a devoted person like him so that they can realize at a point of their life what harm they have done today; how much sorrow and pain they have given to the relatives, family members and well-wishers. May Allah bless you (rtvonline.com, November 28, 2017)?”

7. Comparative Analysis

Generally, reporters ignore material they know to be untrue, or they hold it until it can be verified (Mencher, 1996). Some news reporters may have something in common with the person in a shooting accident who “didn’t know the gun was loaded.” News stories sometimes take unexpected turns or have consequences that event the reporter finds surprising, shocking, or distressing (Strentz, 1979). The central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society (Hasan, 2010).

“Channel Ekattor is an important channel. I cannot comprehend how someone like them could be so irresponsible about reporting my death without checking up with my family” as he proceeded to read out his phone number for future reference (Dhaka Tribune, June 12, 2018). Gloomy veteran actor ATM Shamsuzzaman was telling live on Facebook. How, where and when he died! It was a great wonder. The recognized channels should be free from such irresponsible journalism. The news of a legendary actor shocked his family members, relatives and hundreds of thousands fans and many well-known artistes even posted statuses on their social media pages, offering condolences to his family and close ones. To prepare such report, there are lots of ways to verify sources i.e. family members, relatives, close friends, neighbor, hospital etc. But reporter, news editor or chief news editor just put ear on rumor what case study-1 emphasized.

Case study-2 revealed the plagiarism or copy-paste tendency of the journalists of Bangladesh which is a straight violation of copyright act. It reminds us of the well-known Bangla folklore in which a man tells another that a bird has taken away one of his ears and the latter immediately starts running after the bird without putting hands over his ears to check whether it is actually the case. First, the Jugantor committed the blunder and then the other portals followed it blindly. No newspaper, online portals felt the necessity of verifying the sources of news or contacting the police, family members and other identifiable sources. This sort of tendency also shows the skills of the journalists of Bangladesh.

Case study-3 showed the most disappointing picture of journalism prevailing in Bangladesh. Only to increase Television Rating Point (TRP) and viewer a private television channel and a lot of online portals kept broadcasting and publishing the news of death of Mayor Anisul Huq a day before his death. Any journalist of that media did not communicate with the

mayor's spokesperson, family members, relatives, close friends or government authority to ensure the accurate sources.

8. Recommendation

How can reporters hope to approach accuracy? First, they pay scrupulous attention to detail and impose a self-discipline that most people don't have. Second, they are compulsive note takers-memory rarely is good enough. Third, they check and recheck, ask questions relentlessly. One of the Washington Post reporters who developed the Watergate story said, "We never accepted a statement of fact as true until we had at least two sources we could trust without vestige of doubt (V. Charnley & Charnley, 1979). Following the remark mentioned above some suggestion are given below to ensure accuracy in reporting and broadcasting:

- a. Verification of sources of news from minimum more than one source is a fundamental ethics of journalism. Media, therefore, must not publish or broadcast any news without verification of sources.
- b. Plagiarism is another serious crime in publishing news. Stealing news from other media or copy-paste tendency in reporting should be avoided and laws in this regard should be applied rigorously to prevent plagiarism.
- c. Training, workshops, seminars on laws, ethics, principles, customs should be arranged time to time for journalists, sub-editors etc. Such programs will help them to be responsible, accountable and credible indeed.
- d. The role of Bangladesh Press Council (BPC) should be boost up to prevent irregularities in journalism since they are authorized authority in this regard.

9. Conclusion

News means information. This information is not the imaginative words of a journalist. The sources of information must be mentioned in the report. News without sources is not trustworthy at all. In general, it's a principle to gather information from more than one source. However, a careful reporter will always double-check the facts with at least a second source (Harriss, Kelly & Johnson, 1981). The research based on three case studies showed the basic violation of journalism or media ethics in reporting, publishing and broadcasting news in Bangladesh. The study found that even some mainstream media put their ears in rumor, social media to boost up their audience and TRP rating. Therefore, some recommendations are made to prevent the prevailing anomalies in reporting.

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