



Social and Ethical Issues in Communication

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Abstract

Individuals with significant speech and communication challenges struggle to express themselves effectively in both daily interactions and broader society. Despite the positive outcomes resulting from the advancement of non-vocal communication methods, this group risks being excluded from social engagement and facing isolation. It's crucial to understand that what one can achieve in a professional context can not substitute for what one should achieve ethically. Without a foundation of ethical consideration in both social interactions and interventions for individuals with severe communication difficulties, the moral standards applied to this group may fall short compared to those for others. Ethical and social issues in communication involve the spread of misinformation, the erosion of privacy, the proliferation of hate speech, the societal effects of the digital divide, and the ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence. These issues are intensified by the rapid speed, wide reach and anonymity of digital platforms. Ethical communication is based on principles like honesty, transparency, and respect. When these principles are violated, it can significantly damage trust in both personal and institutional relationships. The collection of personal data by government and corporation is a major concern. Surveillance through phone taps and internet monitoring can infringe on an individual's right to privacy, as highlighted in cases like the Pegasus spyware incident in India.

Keywords- Ethical, Social, Communication, Proliferation, Outcome

Introduction

In its current form, communication includes everything from talking to people in person to using digital platforms like social media, messaging apps, and online forums. It has changed how people connect with each other, but it also brings up serious moral and social issues, such as the spread of false information, privacy violations, hate speech, and unequal access to information. These problems not only make people less trusting of each other, but they can also cause real harm, like violence or discrimination. These problems are even worse in India, which has over 1.4 billion people and a wide range of cultures, languages, and economic situations. Bihar, one of India's most populous and economically troubled states, is a clear example of how these issues play out on a regional level, often affecting local politics, poverty, and social hierarchies. This article talks about important issues and uses real-life examples to show how they affect people.

The Dangers of False Information and Fake News

One of the most important ethical issues in communication is how quickly false information can spread. This can change people's minds, cause panic, or even lead to violence. This is not ethical because it goes against the rules of honesty and responsibility. Communicators, whether they are people, media, or platforms, have a duty to check facts before sharing them. It hurts democratic processes and community harmony in a social way. Misinformation has been a big problem in India for a long time, especially on sites like Facebook and WhatsApp. Fake news often causes division during elections, with made-up stories about candidates or tensions between communities going viral. A study found that almost half of the fake news stories in the country are about politics. This makes people even more worried about the rise of deepfake technology. The COVID-19 pandemic made this even clearer, as false claims about cures or origins led to harmful behaviours and stigma.

These problems are especially severe in Bihar because of the state's high rates of illiteracy and dependence on mobile messaging. The Election Commission issued a social media warning against fake news during assembly elections and pledged to take strong action to stop disinformation that could sway voters. One

prominent instance was a fake festival holiday list that claimed Hindu holidays were cancelled in favor of Muslim ones. This stoked tensions between communities and was later disproved as part of a wider campaign of misinformation. The state is also rife with health misinformation; for example, initiatives like BIMLI are designed to help Bihar's youth recognize bogus health claims, addressing how rural youth are susceptible to unreliable information about illnesses or vaccines. In a state already struggling with poverty and underdevelopment, these examples show how unethical communication can take advantage of social vulnerabilities, fostering mistrust and possibly sparking unrest.

In the Digital Age, Privacy Violations

A fundamental ethical concern in communication, privacy is based on the right to control personal data. The proliferation of data-driven technologies raises the possibility of social stigma, identity theft, and exploitation due to improper sharing or surveillance. Socially, it disproportionately impacts underprivileged groups, who might not have the knowledge or means to defend themselves.

Significant privacy discussions have surrounded India's digital landscape, particularly in light of programs like Aadhaar, the biggest biometric identification system in the world. Although it makes services easier, it brings up moral questions regarding data ownership, consent, and possible abuse in surveillance or health settings. Critics contend that previous regulations, such as the 2021 Intermediary Guidelines, jeopardize user privacy by requiring platforms to trace messages, potentially permitting government overreach. In contrast, the 2023 Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP Act) represents progress by requiring compliances for data collection and processing. Additionally, privacy in India is culturally complex and viewed differently by different communities, making it more difficult to establish consistent ethical standards.

Privacy concerns surface in community communication and research in Bihar. Common in rural areas, phone-based interviews for health studies present ethical issues such as maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed consent, particularly when women might not have independent access to phones. Researchers face challenges like striking a balance between transparency and shielding vulnerable participants from stigma, which have been brought to light by community-based research in isolated villages. These cases highlight how social development initiatives in underprivileged areas like Bihar can be hampered by ethical privacy lapses in communication.

Online harassment and hate speech

Since hate speech incites harm and dehumanizes groups, it is a serious ethical transgression in communication that goes against the principles of equality and respect. Socially, it widens gaps based on caste, religion, or geography, which are frequently exacerbated by social media algorithms. To prevent hate speech that incites animosity between groups, India has laws such as Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code. However, enforcement is uneven, as evidenced by the 74.4% increase in hate speech in 2024, which was fuelled by social media and political rhetoric. Recent Supreme Court rulings have urged stricter regulation, pointing out that the abuse of free speech results in disinformation and viral videos. A BJP video in Assam that denigrated Muslims sparked legal investigation for possible hate speech.

Bihar is a prime example of regional hate. Muslims in the state have been accused of being "Bangladeshi infiltrators," a story that has been circulated online to incite xenophobia and fear ahead of elections. Stereotyping and hatred toward Biharis, known as "Biharophobia," have become commonplace on social media, with incidents unrelated to Bihar being falsely attributed to its citizens. Derogatory remarks made about national leaders during political rallies have gone viral, further dividing communities. These incidents demonstrate how social exclusion in Bihar, where caste and religious tensions are already high, is sustained by unethical online communication.

The Digital Divide: An Equity Concern

Beyond content, unequal access to communication tools leads to ethical problems by excluding groups from opportunities and information, a phenomenon known as the "digital divide." Since communication should ideally close rather than widen societal divides, this calls into question fairness and inclusion.

The gap between rural and urban areas is noticeable in India, where services and education are impacted by low internet penetration. Social media reinforces body image problems and exclusion for people offline, even as it supports movements like #MeToo.

Bihar has severe problems because of its high rate of poverty and low literacy. Through approachable communication, programs like comic-based education on social issues—like gender inequality and child marriage—strive to close this gap. However, since rural populations rely on unreliable sources or word-of-mouth during emergencies like floods or elections, the lack of dependable digital access increases the risk of misinformation. In states like Bihar, this ethical divide emphasizes the necessity of inclusive communication techniques.

Conclusion:

A multifaceted strategy is needed to address social and ethical issues in communication, including strong legislation, platform accountability, media literacy, and cultural sensitivity. Though implementation is still crucial, ongoing reforms in India, such as data protection laws and hate speech guidelines, are positive steps. Local initiatives in Bihar, like ethical research practices and anti-misinformation campaigns, can act as templates for other areas. In the end, promoting ethical communication is about creating a society in which knowledge empowers rather than divides, not just about technology. India and Bihar can set an example for more responsible discourse in a globalized world by taking note of these examples.

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