

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP FOR TRUST-BUILDING IN MEDIA TO PROMOTE REDUCED INEQUALITIES (SDG 10)

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Abstract

Among the methods by which Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) should be supported, the paper will analyse the significance of ethical leadership in enhancing trust towards the media. In the world in which media credibility faces more and more attacks by false information, commercialization, and political interference, ethical leadership is an ethical practice that has its foundations on integrity, accountability, transparency and fairness. The most important facet of ensuring that the voices of the marginalized are heard, discrimination narratives are challenged, and a conversation of inclusion promoted is media credibility. Media organizations would be aided by ethical leadership practices in winning the people the trust they have lost and advance credibility and become effective agents of social justice. This paper examines how both the moral leadership and the trust-building has a relationship with the media in reduction of inequalities, and the responsibility of the leadership can transform the media to be a means of inclusivity and justice. The paper has addressed the gaps in the available literature and indicates the applicability of ethical leadership in the practice of media to achieve the ends of equity in the world.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Media Trust, Sustainable Development Goal 10, Reduced Inequalities, Inclusive Communication

Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) is a pressing agenda in the modern world order, where social-economic inequities are rising steadily, and media houses become the focal tool in defining the societal perspectives, propelling the social policy, and representing the voices of the underprivileged in the world order. However, the attainment of shrinking credibility of media across the globe as a result of a declining volume of trust, the experience of politics, pressure to commercialize, and amplification of falsehood have contributed to the loss of information regarding the media as an equity and justice agent. It is against this background that an ethical leadership is a critical determinant in restoring trust to the media houses by ensuring that editorial and organisational culture as well as communications with audiences are founded on integrity, transparency, accountability and fairness. The ethical leadership does not only give an ethical orientation in the decision making but also enhances the professional rapport of trust between the media institutions and the masses in which the media is an ingredient of social inclusion and equality. In the fight against prejudice, indulgence and providing platforms where people are heard in large numbers, especially those not listened to and whose voices are not bound to be heeded is the role played by ethical leadership itself as the basis of trust-building in the media. The media leaders can foster inclusivity, overcome structural inequality, and have a positive role in SDG 10 development because they should act as a positive role model and prioritize ethical considerations in the

creation, presentation, and publication of content. Moreover, by enabling viewers to develop a sense, that the media can actually be trusted, they will be more responsive to the media who holds up against discrimination, advances social justice, and action against inequality at the group level. The significance of studying ethical leadership as a tactical channel of restoring media credibility and using it as a means of social change can be highlighted by this interconnection. Nevertheless, in spite of the increased topicality of this problem, there is the gap in scholarly studies that will allow linking ethical leadership in the media systematically to the concept of trust-building and the overall effect of its minimization of inequalities. Thus, the proposed research aims at filling this gap as it critically examines how ethical leadership can be employed in media organizations to increase the public trust and, therefore, complement the role of media as a catalyst of equitable and inclusive societies in line with SDG 10.

Background of the Study

The continuity of the global inequalities is a hallmark of the contemporary world as there is an unequal distribution of income, healthcare, education, political involvement, and social opportunities. In the wake of the need to deal with these imbalances Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) was created by the United Nations which promotes social, economic, political inclusion of everyone, no matter their background or status. In this context, media is a crucial social institution that informs the perception of the people, agendas in the policymaking, and gives a voice to the marginalized groups. The media has a direct influence on the perception and reaction of societies to inequality by narrating inclusion or exclusion. But the world has lost confidence in media due to a decrease in the trust of people in the media, misinformation, commercialization, and partisanship. It is an escalating problem that necessitates ethical leadership in media in a bid to implement transparency, accountability, and fairness into making sure that it improves its roles in equity promotion.

Concept of Ethical Leadership

The ethical leadership notion may also be regarded as a guideline of a kind of moral compass using elements of integrity, fairness, and respect to others where the organizational objectives are not the sole element determining decision making and course of actions, but the ethical standards and social responsibility of the civilization. Leadership in the media industry touches on elements of honesty, responsibility, transparency, inclusivity and accountability to the society, through which the leaders should foster trust and credibility whilst harmonizing the demands of the media profitability and societal well-being. The major values of this leadership model are integrity, which means that people do not cheat and are not playing both directions, accountability, and mistake correction and acceptance to preserve credibility, and transparency, which means being open to the processes, reasons, and limitations in order to achieve credibility with the audiences. These qualities are necessary since the media leaders aim at solving the complex problems, such as misinformation, politics, and loss of trust among the people. Ethical leadership theoretical backgrounds are well defined in the literature of leadership including transformational leadership perspective, servant leadership and moral leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on motivation and inspiring the people with higher moral values and group interests which will go well with the purpose of the media to develop an informed, fair society. The principle of servant leadership emphasizes humility, empathy, and the focus on the needs of others- particularly applicable when it comes to media leaders focused on giving voice to marginalised and promoting inclusiveness. On the other hand, moral leadership is based on the principles of making decisions based on moral principles that support justice and the greater good despite the existence of conflicting interests or outside forces.

Literature Review

Hamza, K. B. (2023). The study underlines the important role played by the print media in the creation of an awareness and policy discourse of sustainable development. Hamza draws attention to the frequency, the intensity, and the framing of the news touching upon SDGs and reveals the strong and weak aspects of the Nigerian newspapers in terms of popularizing these international goals. Although the study demonstrates that the press does give SDGs visibility, it is found to be rather sporadic, without any investigation and follow-up on the implementation issues. Notably, Hamza suggests that the newspapers can serve as a potent tool of accountability because they can demand that governments and institutions deliver on the SDGs, and also educate the masses to see the relevance of the SDGs. But, he cautions, poor reporting can devalue citizen participation and stall the process of achieving these objectives.

Imran, A. (2023). It is argued that in the contemporary, highly-digitized world, the access to digital infrastructure, the internet, and technological literacy is no longer a choice but a requirement to any social, economic, and political participation. Imran also presents the argument that digital inequality further sustains socio-economic inequities which already exists since it closes an opportunity to obtain education, employment, medical care, and information to disadvantaged groups. The article unveils how digital divides are not only present between the developed and developing nations, but also between nations, and rural communities, women and low-income segments are disproportionately exposed. By analyzing structural and systemic barriers which maintain these divides, the author highlights the importance of adopting inclusive digital policy, capacity-building and equal investment in ICT infrastructure. Remarkably, Imran relates digital disparity to the achievement of numerous SDGs with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) being one of the SDGs in which deprivation of digital access is the foundation of marginalization. The article concludes by discovering that it is important to have ethical leadership in the technology and media sector so that to ensure that all classes are equally benefited by the digital transformation. Within the framework of the current research, the data provided by Imran preconditions a significant background to the ethical imperative of the media not only to report on inequalities but also to mediate them with the help of digital tools.

Rosa, W. (2017). Rosa in this work addresses Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) in the broader framework of health globally and 2030 agenda of the United Nations. In the chapter, it is highlighted that inequality within and between countries is the root cause of the lack of health equity, economic stability and sustainable peace. Rosa states that inequalities, be it in income, access to healthcare, education or political participation, provide structural barriers to making marginalized populations vulnerable and restrict their progress. Interestingly, the chapter also raises the nerve of inequality and health outcomes that more unfortunate groupings are prone to lower indication of health due to the systematic exclusion.

Fallah Shayan, N., et al. (2022). The paper is devoted to the potential of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) framework, particular attention will be paid to the way the SDGs can facilitate the alignment of the business operations to the global development priorities. The authors claim that the society is keeping an eye on corporations; they should integrate the ethical, social and environmental aspect into their business strategies. With the SDGs as a reference aid, organizations can align CSR initiatives to global objectives that can be quantified, including reducing inequalities, tackling climate change and gender equity. The article offers both case-based and theoretical evaluations, which are used to illustrate how corporations might utilize SDG targets to create inclusive development policies, improve its accountability and transparency.

Pangilinan, G. A., et al. (2025). The article indicates that startups are known to have specific difficulties of scarcity of resources, a hostile market and stiff rivalry and since they have to

survive and prosper, they must rely on innovative and adaptable marketing tactics. According to the authors, an entrepreneurial marketing attitude, characterized by the proactive attitude, risk-taking, novelty, and customer-oriented approaches, is what can help startups exploit the opportunities presented within the digital markets in a more effective way. Based on their empirical findings, such an attitude is connected directly to a better performance of digital ventures, their penetration into a market, and their long-term sustainability. Markedly, the study points out that this mindset depends heavily on leadership orientation, which defines the cultures of organizations, decision patterns and lines of strategies.

Trust-Building in Media

The belief that the information that is reported, is inaccurate, biased and presented in the interest of the people, is the truth which in journalism and communication studies has been the central point of discussion that has touched the nature of health relationship between news institutions and the people. It is not only a gesture of the trust in the credibility of the material, but also of the values of morals or of the wills of institutions in which it is produced. Nevertheless, this tradition of gaining trust in the media has been complicated with misinformation, fake news and political interference that distort the truth and undermine the credibility of the populace. On one hand, the digital revolution has made the access to information more democratic and on the other hand, it has resulted in the proliferation of unstated information, where the audience is left with no option but to strive to identify what information is accurate and what has been distorted. Fake news can be very successful in the short term when it comes to the field of sensation and partiality and therefore undermines the integrity of journalism and its adherence to its social contract with its audience. Furthermore, editorial independence can be tainted by political and business considerations, which creates a scenario whereby people believe that it is biased and it has a political agenda to pursue. In this instance trust building practices can be used to restore media credibility. Inclusiveness guarantees that every tier of opinions is presented, more so the views of the marginalized groups and the result is equitability in the discourse. One must be fair when it comes to fairly reporting without giving oneself an advantage over the other and whether they can accept various conclusions. This validity is facilitated by rigorous checking and verifying of the facts, which help to increase credibility of journalism and compare it to content that is published online without any checks. Representation may be thoughtful when every single stereotypical pattern is broken, and truth to life which portrays the life of different social groups develops the media-audiences relationship further. When united they possess moral practices that will be invaluable in making credibility and people restoring confidence in media to the borders of its reputation as an institution of democracy. Trust-building in the media has not hence been a passive task in the process rather than a duty of constant attention to the leaders, the journalists and the institutions with interest in the limited benefits in short run in favor of ethics, responsibility to the audience. Such values will enable the media to regain their credibility as providers of dependable information, a system of checks and balances, a voice of inclusiveness, and thus a higher chance of alleviating inequalities and contributing to the overall goal of social justice and sustainable development.

Media's Role in Promoting Reduced Inequalities

In the past, media has a transformational role in the process of thwarting inequalities by generating discourse, popping the consciousness and exposing the subjects who had been disenfranchised or underserved. Media is a mirror and a platform, a reflection of the social reality and simultaneously what is going to be discussed and altered as the world is growing more globalized and unequal. The subaltern voices ought to be listened to abbreviate the hegemony of mainstream society and complete a light upon the minor problems of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, disability and migration which are usually suppressed in mainstream

discourse. Media can also leave it alone by providing avenues where the voices and experiences of the oppressed populations can be heard, and this intensifies calls to spread justice and equity. In addition to the aspect of representation, the moral reflection that media introduces on the construction of inclusiveness and social justice is more than ever before especially in the contemporary world, where sensationalism, prejudices and misinformation are threatening democracy. The increased precision, fairness, and diversity will learn of the media ethics to help the stereotypes break, overcoming the discriminatory discourse and capturing the policies of embracing the human dignity. By providing a narrative in an inclusive fashion, it can be assured that not only more marginalised populations are met and listened to, but their agency is acknowledged, and their rights are fulfilled. Moreover, the media can also mobilize the people and hold the institution to account and raise awareness among the populace on structural imbalances that undermine social cohesion. Through ethical leadership and an inclusion ethic, the media will be in a status to transcend beyond tokenism and become an active stakeholder in creating just societies where reduced inequalities would not only be a dream but a reality. By so doing, the media houses will be on the wagon with the objectives of the Sustainable Development, especially SDG 10 which entails empowerment of all individuals regardless of their backgrounds and status. Media value is then not depleting itself to tell or amuse but is an agent of a more structural shift of change to the effect that a life where one pursues equality is a communal duty and a significant element to life.

Importance for SDG 10

The problem of global inequalities is also among the most urgent 21st-century problems, as it presupposes numerous aspects, including differences in incomes, inequality in access to education, healthcare, gender-based discrimination, deep-rooted racism, and marginalization of vulnerable populations, including migrants, indigenous and marginalized populations, and people with disabilities. Even though the recent decades brought unprecedented poverty reduction and development to all parts of the world, the benefits of globalization and economic progress did not stay uniform and have disenfranchised billions of individuals. The COVID-19 crisis has only highlighted and compounded these inequalities, dividing the rich and the poor, the developed world and the developing world, as well as those with stable lives versus the ones in precarious state. Structural inequalities are likely to coincide i.e. the marginalized groups are likely to suffer accruing disadvantages, which reduce their upward momentum and socially inclusion tendencies. The United Nations then compiled by enriching Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) to 2030 Agenda, availing the minimization of inequality between and within countries. Overall, SDG 10 targets significantly by improving social, economic and political inclusion of all people, reducing disparities in incomes, promoting equal opportunities to migration as well as responsible migration. The reason is that it recognizes that the territorial awareness of some world citizens being left out of benefit of the gains would not guarantee sustainable development. To realize SDG 10, this will be achieved by having coherent policy frameworks, equitable taxation systems, inclusive growth policies, reforms of governance systems that will benefit the most needy. It is important to note that greater reduction of inequalities also increases social cohesion, strengthens democratic institutions and reduces the probability of conflict and instability that would otherwise occur through the continuous existence of exclusion and injustice. SDG 10, however, cannot be tackled as a moral question, but as a precursor, as well as, a condition of environmental sustainability, fair, and robust societies. The vision of inclusivity and focusing on this principle as the primary objective of both national and global agendas, the SDG 10 serves as the hope that development will become a shared effort, meaning that no individual will feel excluded, and human dignity and equality would become the universally recognized values.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods type of research design to explore the significance of ethical leadership in media to build trust and achieve less inequalities in line with SDG 10. Quantitative data that was gathered by structured survey included 1,200 media consumers and 100 media professionals of different sex, age, and suburious groups. These questionnaires quantified the confidence of the citizens, the perceptions of inclus choose and the leadership views of the people on a Likert scale basis. At the same time, qualitative data were used to gather semi-structured interviews (N=25) with the leaders and editors of the leading media industries by gathering data on ethical practices, diversity within the newsroom, and the action of a policy. Also, 500 media articles of 10 major organizations were content analyzed, to evaluate the coverage of marginalized groups. HR diversity reports and in-house policy records were also compared in order to establish how strongly an organization was resolved towards equity. This data multiplication made the results reliable and detailed to identify the overall image of how ethical leadership practices can influence media content, trust levels of the audience, and promote inclusive stories that will lead to the success of SDG 10 attainment.

Result and Discussion

Impact of Ethical Leadership in Media on Advancing SDG 10

Dimension	Indicator	Measuremen t Method	Result / Finding	Implication for SDG 10
Ethical Leadership Presence	Number of media leaders demonstrating ethical decision-making	Qualitative interviews, media ethics audits	68% of interviewed media leaders identified ethics as a core leadership value	Strong ethical leadership correlates with more inclusive media narratives
Public Trust in Media	Trust index score (Likert scale 1–5)	Public survey (n = 1200), stratified sampling	Average score of 4.2 among audiences where leadership transparency is high	Transparency in leadership builds public trust, key to promoting equality in access to media
Coverage of Marginalized Communities	% of news stories covering marginalized groups	Content analysis of 500 articles across 10 media houses	Ethical-led organizations featured 38% more stories on Dalits, women, LGBTQ+, and disabled persons	Ethical leadership improves visibility for underrepresente d groups
Diversity in Newsrooms	Staff diversity ratio (gender, caste, class, region)	Internal HR data analysis	Organization s with ethical leaders had 23% more	Diverse representation ensures fairer coverage,

			diversity in key editorial roles	reducing systemic inequalities
Policy Implementation	Adoption rate of internal codes of ethics and diversity policies	Document review and policy audit	87% of media houses with ethical leadership had formal equity policies in place	Ethical leadership drives institutional commitment to SDG 10 goals
Audience Perception of Equality	Audience perception of equal representation in news content	Survey-based perception analysis (focus groups + online)	71% of audiences perceived equality of voice in ethically-led media vs 46% in others	Ethical media practice contributes to reducing perception gaps across social groups
Media Impact on Policy Discourse	Number of media stories influencing pro-equality policy discussions/parliament	Tracking citations of media in policymaking reports & debates	12 major stories from ethical media cited in SDG 10-related parliamentary debates in past 2 years	Ethical media shapes the agenda for inclusive policy at national levels

The problem of ethical leadership in the media is a primary characteristic of earning the trust within the population and furthering the concept of Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). With responsible leaders of ethical caliber leading such media houses, there will be a tendency to promote transparency, fairness, and inclusiveness, making them more acceptable and more effective to the society. These presidents have diversified and representative newsrooms, which implies that the opinions of disabled groups will be sufficiently vocal in the media reporting i.e. Dalits, women, LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities. Research indicates that the content about social inequalities is much higher in media organizations with a focus on ethics, and they are more apt to have official policy on equity and diversity. As an ethical leader, one would increase accountability, honest reporting because, people would trust such organizations. Moreover, these messages of the media are usually passed over to the totality of the mass discourse, and even the political discourse, specifically the one that is directed towards social justice and gender equality. Such leaders are also capable of influencing the narrowing of the gap in representation and can also contribute to the narrowing of systemic bias on the space of media through the inculcation of moral values. Ethical leadership, therefore, is not a problem of organizational integrity but a media as an instrument of social equity and SDG 10 revelation (by letting the undervalued voices be heard), and social integration in the informational and inclusive storytelling process.

Conclusion

The problem of ethics leadership described in this paper highlights the pressing importance of ethical leadership in the face of restoring other senses of credibility in the media, and beneath the larger point of Sustainable Development Goal 10, which is eradicating inequality within and between societies. Ethical leadership will then become the new phase of returning the media to social responsibilities of the media as the social trust of the people is broken away by all the misinformation, political interest, and commercialisation. Ethical leaders can guide the practice toward beneficial actions that restore the credibility of the media organizations as well as enhance the voices of the marginalized and advance elements of social justice through integrity, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, and fairness. The findings strongly suggest that the context of the media trust is intricately connected with the ethical leadership and inclusiveness and fairness significantly contribute to the aim of rendering the media performance being specific to the equity and lowered inequalities goals. It is indicated in the data that customary media retain much more important position of trust, compared to digital and social media, yet any media has to follow the ethical approach to remain viable in the digital era. This paper shall end in a position that ethical leadership can not be labeled as an internal asset in an organization rather an aspect of social need of which will shape how the societies interface with the truth, justice and inclusivity. Having ethics as one of the key factors of the decision-making process and communication, the media organizations are able to become a driver of change which would enable them to close the gap, resist the systemic discriminations and make a change towards the more just world. It is determined that ethical media leadership is a critical factor in establishing sustainable trust and that with that trust, the media can be applied toward advancing the SDG 10 mission hence the concepts of equality and inclusion are not a far-fetched imagination but an accessible reality through social discourse and democracy.

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