

A portrait of Iftikhar Ahmad, a middle-aged man with dark, wavy hair, a mustache, and glasses. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a light blue dress shirt, and a blue and white plaid tie. The background is a solid red color.

Iftikhar Ahmad

Senior Journalist &
Political Analyst

What are your views about ethics in media in Pakistan, and how these have evolved over time?

Media has lost its ethical principles over time. Every person has a smartphone and internet access available, hence people portray their views without hesitation on digital media. If we look at electronic media and prime-time shows that are shown on television, it is sad to see different news anchors exploiting the same news in many ways. It is very surprising to see that different news channels have a total of 80 people working for their channel. Among them, only a few people are qualified for the job.

Sir, you have been associated with print media as well. Senior editors in Dawn news and other newspapers always presented a very apt analysis that included both criticism and commendation. The news was published keeping the rules and regulations in mind. Do you think that news channels and newspapers still follow the ethics and principles of broadcasting?

I think our values and morals have been shadowed by ratings. If a comedy show receives maximum ratings and its host is considered as a benchmark for other hosts, then sadly we cannot expect the public to engage in shows talking about serious issues like inflation. We are to be blamed here as well.

If we look at Gallup's surveys, Pakistan prime time shows focus a lot less on critical issues that are prevalent in the country. Most senior journalists blame society for this negligence as they claim that society is not interested in such issues. What do you have to say about that?

It is the sad truth of the media industry that shows are broadcasted based on ratings only. If irrelevant topics are of interest to the public, then they will be broadcasted. I do not think that anybody is to be blamed here. Primetime shows focus on only the news of the day, and they do not engage in issues that are prevalent in our country like rape, theft, early marriages, etc. If I talk about myself, I have been part of media and journalism for more than 20 years, I believe I am to be blamed as well for not highlighting critical issues during my journalism days.

If we talk about democratic systems in general and compare them with capitalism and socialism, was there a policy devised to promote media ethics, and were there any positive aspects of such a policy?

As far as ethics is concerned, I believe that we start learning mannerisms and ethics from school life. Ethics is an extremely broad term, and we cannot confine it only to media. I believe that the ethics portrayed by society are a spitting image of the ethics shown by the media industry. No media owner has signed a charter that focuses on ethics and limitations on what is shown by media. The only concern that I have with the media is that it fails to acknowledge and highlight the needs of the people of Pakistan. Pakistan is a society that is divided into classes. The media fails to highlight the needs of people belonging to the middle/lower class.