

Effect Of Commercialization On News Reporting

Hemangi Shinde

Research Scholar Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune-37

hemangi.shinde80@gmail.com

Abstract:

In India, the media not only serves as a communication channel but also holds significant influence over public opinion. However, the evolving dynamics of the media landscape, particularly the increasing commercialization, have raised concerns regarding its role and responsibilities. This study explores the impact of commercialization on Indian media, examining how the pursuit of profit has affected journalistic integrity and independence. With media entities now operating as profit-driven businesses, there is a delicate balance between serving commercial interests and upholding journalistic ethics. This paper analyses the challenges posed by commercialization, including the influence of wealthy businesses and politicians, the prevalence of sensationalized content, and the erosion of public trust. By examining the intersection of commerce and responsibility in Indian media, this study aims to shed light on the complexities of modern journalism in a rapidly changing socio-economic scenario.

Keywords: Indian media, commercialization, journalistic integrity, profit-driven, public trust.

Introduction:

The Oxford's learners dictionary defines commercialization as the act of using something to try to make profit. Over the years, commercialization in India has helped the nation bloom its economy. Commercialization has indeed propelled India's economy forward, and its impact on the media sector is significant. From an eagle's eye view, it is just a simple concept which people will bring to use for earning money in the way of profit. But the question which arises here is, what is the cost that the country and its citizens are paying to make this profit. According to a report published in Ethical Journalism Network, in the India chapter, A S Paneerselvan (author of The Hindu newspaper) mentioned that since the time of globalization (1990), Indian news content has started to take the way heading towards paid news. BBC in one of its research projects found that along with other countries in the world, the trend of paid news is rising in India.

If we talk specifically about the paid news culture or commercialization of Indian media, it is definitely something which has helped the sector gain visibility and grow multifold. However, the intertwining of commercialization and media ownership raises important questions about the cost to society and the implications for democracy. The commercialization of Indian media has become a topic of increasing concern, as media entities navigate the complex interplay between profit and responsibility. While commercialization has led to the growth of the media sector, it has also raised questions about the quality and independence of media content. This paper aims to delve into the challenges posed by commercialization, examining its impact on journalistic ethics, public trust, and the overall integrity of the media in India. By exploring these issues, we can gain a deeper understanding of the evolving role of media in society and the importance of maintaining a balance between profit-driven motives and the public interest.

Review of Literature:

The topic commercialization of Indian media is not new to the writers and readers. There a pool of published articles already available on the web.

Anand Vardhan, in his article, Looking back: How liberalization shaped the Hindi press talks about how commercialization played a significant role in the transformation of the Hindi press post-liberalization. It mentions that leading Hindi print publications were quick to understand the importance of expanding their readership to attract potential advertisers. The commercialization of

the Hindi press was instrumental in turning the print media from an elite medium to a mass medium, reaching ordinary people in small towns and villages and making them both news consumers and newsmakers.

Dr. Soumya Dutta, in her paper Social Responsibility of Media and Indian Democracy talks about the impact of commercialization on the media industry, highlights concern about rampant commercialization and sensationalism. She is trying to focus on the dangerous trends pointing towards monopolistic practices. It also mentions the role of big multinational corporations in the Indian media market post-liberalization, with concerns about manipulation of ideas by a powerful few detrimental to the democratic fabric.

Objective:

This research paper aims to scrutinize the influence of commercialization on the substance of Indian media, assess its ramifications on public trust in media institutions, and explore the pattern of consolidating ownership of media houses within distinct corporate entities.

Research Methodology:

This study underlines the transformations within the Indian media, particularly focusing on the ownership and control of media houses by private entities. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, drawing insights from various published research materials. Additionally, interviews were conducted with newspaper editors, and their perspectives were meticulously recorded. These interviews provided valuable insights into the real-world implications of commercialization on the media industry, enriching the findings presented in this paper.

Findings and Analysis of the Role of Indian Media and Commercialization:

In India, the media plays a critical role in reflecting cultural diversity, fostering social awareness, and contributing to the nation's overall development. However, the media is influenced by factors such as ownership structures, commercialization, and the evolving digital communication environment. The commercialization of news and journalism is primarily motivated by profit-seeking endeavours. This entails tailoring news stories to cater to the interests of advertisers and owners, leading to corporate infiltration of professional journalism through marketing, commercial messages, and advertising.

As per the insights shared by the editors from different newspapers from Raipur, Chhattisgarh, commercialization impacts various aspects of Indian media, including:

Profitability and Survival: Media outlets must be financially viable to sustain themselves. However, this profitability should not compromise journalistic integrity and public trust. Striking a delicate balance between profitability and these ethical considerations is crucial for the long-term success of media organizations. Such equilibrium ensures not only their survival but also their effectiveness in serving the public interest and upholding credibility.

Balancing Commerce and Responsibility: Similar to media sectors globally, Indian media faces challenges in reconciling its responsibilities with the imperative to generate profits for sustainability. While operating as a viable business is essential, prioritizing social responsibility over mere profit motives is imperative. Overemphasizing profitability at the expense of societal welfare could undermine the media's credibility and its role in promoting a socially responsible information environment.

Social Responsibility and Commitment: The essence of the media's role lies in its dedication to society through informing, educating, and empowering citizens. However, when media outlets neglect this responsibility, they risk compromising their integrity and eroding public trust. Upholding a commitment to serve the public interest remains paramount for maintaining the credibility and effectiveness of the media.

Media as Trade and Culture: Media is often viewed through the lens of trade and culture by its proprietors, who integrate it with their other business endeavours. This integration underscores the significance of prioritizing commercial principles in their management approach. Such a perspective

can significantly shape decision-making processes within the media sector, potentially affecting the symmetry between commercial imperatives and the ethical responsibilities inherent in journalism. Commerce and Responsibility: The Indian media grapples to maintain an intricate balance between commerce and responsibility amidst its diverse landscape. Traditionally, media outlets relied on selling attention for advertising revenue, but the rise of internet giants has disrupted this model. The shift to online consumption has further challenged traditional print media, prompting new approaches like subscription-based models and philanthropic support.

While television remains a dominant source of news, credibility issues have arisen, particularly with the surge in mobile-based news consumption via platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. Despite these challenges, Indian media must navigate this landscape while maintaining economic sustainability and social responsibility.

To achieve this equilibrium, media entities must continuously adapt by exploring innovative business models and effectively leveraging digital platforms. Addressing credibility concerns is vital to fostering trust among audiences. Proactively engaging with emerging trends, such as mobile-focused news access, is essential for remaining relevant and responsible. By aligning economic objectives with societal obligations, Indian media can establish a sustainable equilibrium that serves both commercial interests and the greater good.

Exploring the success factors within the Indian media reveals several critical determinants. Credibility and impartiality serve as foundational principles, demanding unwavering perseverance from media entities to maintain their reputation for accurate reporting, thereby developing public trust. Striking a harmonious balance between commercial viability and societal responsibility is paramount, acknowledging the inevitable commercialization while ensuring that it does not compromise the media's duty towards society. A robust democracy relies heavily on the media's role in providing information and ensuring transparency, with a free press being indispensable for effective governance.

Furthermore, the media plays a crucial role in facilitating public engagement by conveying citizens' concerns and aspirations to the government, thereby creating a platform for governance participation. However, the pervasive influence of commercial pressures poses significant challenges, potentially diverting the media from its primary objectives. Therefore, it is imperative to safeguard against profit-driven motives overshadowing the broader public interest.

In the broader context, credibility remains indispensable for the proper functioning of democracy. A transparent and trustworthy media serves as a vital link between the government and citizens, offering essential information and education. Together, these factors highlight the intricate dynamics that influence the success and societal impact of Indian media across its multifaceted roles.

It is very evident that when it comes to Indian media houses, the pattern of ownership which can be seen today is very dangerous. The string of impactful media houses is in the hands of rich and dominant corporate houses. Such a scenario is breeding the risk of captured media in the country (Corneo, 2005).

Indian media confronts a myriad of challenges on various fronts, with state interference and censorship standing out prominently. The government has been accused of stifling independent media outlets and critical journalists through both legal and extra-legal means, including documentary bans, office raids, journalist arrests, and the enforcement of draconian laws. Additionally, a significant hurdle lies in the concentration of ownership within Indian media conglomerates, which are often controlled by politically affiliated individuals or corporate entities. This dominance leads to editorial biases that fail to adequately represent the diverse opinions and perspectives within the nation. Furthermore, existing media ownership laws are criticized for their fragmentation, incoherence, and lack of effectiveness.

Moreover, India grapples with a troubling trend of assaults on journalists and press freedom, particularly in rural areas or when reporting on sensitive issues. The country ranks poorly on global press freedom indexes, with journalists frequently facing violence, intimidation, harassment, and legal threats while carrying out their duties. Since the year 2017, India is facing a declining pattern on

the graph of Press Freedom Rank. As per the report from 2023 World Press Freedom Index, India's rank has dropped to 161 out of 180 countries.

The substantial influence of media ownership creates the challenges of shaping editorial policies, content, and overall quality. This influence also compromises the independence, accountability, and credibility of media outlets, as well as public trust and access to information.

Addressing these issues requires urgent attention and action from policymakers, regulators, media professionals, and civil society. Perpetrators often evade accountability, enjoying impunity for their actions, while victims find themselves subjected to legal harassment or defamation suits. This discrepancy in treatment between wrongdoers and victims highlights the uphill battle faced by journalists in India, particularly when seeking justice and protection following attacks or threats. Regulating media ownership is paramount in addressing these challenges and safeguarding press freedom and democratic principles.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Commercialization, the process of making media more profitable, has significantly shaped the Indian media, with both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, it has led to increased diversity and higher-quality content by introducing new genres, formats, and technologies. For instance, the liberalization of Indian media in the 1990s brought forth satellite TV, FM radio, online media, and specialized channels, enriching the media offerings available to audiences.

Furthermore, commercialization has fuelled competitiveness and innovation within the industry, presenting new opportunities and challenges for media professionals and entrepreneurs. Foreign direct investment, talent influx, and collaborative ventures have contributed to the growth of India's media and entertainment sector. Moreover, commercialization has facilitated a more participatory media culture, with the rise of social media enabling increased citizen journalism, user-generated content, and public engagement.

However, there are also adverse effects associated with commercialization. One concern is the potential compromise of media independence and credibility, as corporate and political interests may exert undue influence. Media ownership concentration and paid news practices have raised apprehensions about bias, sensationalism, and propaganda in Indian media. Additionally, commercialization may lead to a neglect of important societal issues like rural development, social justice, and environmental protection, as profit often takes precedence over public interest.

Overall, the impact of media commercialization on the Indian media landscape is complex, showcasing a mix of positive advancements and challenges across various dimensions.

Commercialization has led to divergent outcomes for media houses, particularly those catering to the mass market and urban crowd. Some have thrived due to the expansion of the media and entertainment sector, heightened foreign investment, and augmented advertising revenue. However, for media platforms focusing on public matters and problems of the common, commercialization poses a very high risk. These outlets face dwindling readership, resource limitations, and intensified competition, jeopardizing their financial stability and long-term viability.

The delicate balance between commerce and the responsibility of the Indian media has been disrupted by commercialization. Numerous outlets now prioritize profit over public interest, resulting in a decline in media's social responsibility, accountability, and credibility. Many platforms have succumbed to corporate and political influences, engaging in practices like paid news, sensationalism, and propaganda. Despite this trend, some media outlets remain committed to preserving this equilibrium by upholding ethical standards and professional journalism norms. Their focus is on delivering high-quality and diverse content to their audience, striving to reconcile commercial interests with media responsibility.

Commercialization has played a key role in propelling the success of certain media outlets, enabling them to amass popularity, wield influence, and attain recognition. Leveraging market dynamics and technological advancements, these platforms have innovatively introduced diverse genres, formats,

and distribution channels for media content. Moreover, they have demonstrated agility in responding to evolving audience preferences, thereby offering a wider spectrum of choices and content variety. Conversely, the commercialization of media has presented challenges for some entities, hindering their ability to maintain relevance, distinctiveness, and intrinsic value within the media sphere. Such outlets have faced scrutiny and public censure, as well as regulatory and civil society backlash, stemming from allegations of unethical behaviour and lapses in professionalism. Some of the challenges standing tall in front of the India media include, threats to editorial autonomy, a decline in journalistic standards, the sidelining of critical issues, the homogenization and westernization of media content, and breaches of media regulations. Certain media establishments have grappled with these challenges, facing consequences such as diminished credibility, tarnished reputation, and eroded trust from their audience and stakeholders. However, amidst these difficulties, some media organizations have demonstrated resilience and ingenuity in overcoming market and governmental pressures. They have embraced innovative approaches and adaptive measures to confront the ever-changing media landscape and meet the evolving expectations of their audience. The era of commercialization, post globalization has wielded a dual-edged sword upon the fabric of Indian media culture. On one hand, it has invigorated the media by infusing it with fresh doses of creativity, diversity, and inclusivity. This injection of novel elements has played a pivotal role in fostering a more dynamic, interactive, and democratic media ethos. However, on the flip side, commercialization has chipped away at the foundational values, traditions, and customs that once defined Indian media. Moreover, it casts a shadow over the cultural richness and distinctiveness of media outlets, ushering in a trend towards uniformity and the sway of Western influences.

References:

1. Law, T. (2018, November 22). *Journalism in the time of hate*. Ethical Journalism Network. <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/journalism-in-the-time-of-hate>
2. Biswas, S. (2021, February 4). Why journalists in India are under attack. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55906345>
3. Vardhan, A. (n.d.). *Looking back: How liberalisation shaped the Hindi press*. NewsLaundry. <https://www.newsLaundry.com/2021/07/29/looking-back-how-liberalisation-shaped-the-hindi-press>
4. Dutta, D. S. (n.d.). SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDIA AND INDIAN DEMOCRACY. *Www.academia.edu*. Retrieved March 4, 2024, from https://www.academia.edu/12399823/SOCIAL_RESPONSIBILITY_OF_MEDIA_AND_INDIAN_DEMOCRACY
5. Coronel, S. (n.d.). *THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN DEEPENING DEMOCRACY*. <https://changecommunications.org/web/docs/dibengunpan010194.pdf>
6. *India: Press Freedom Ranking 2022*. (n.d.). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1364514/india-press-freedom-ranking/>