

## How Indian media is facing credibility crisis owing to media ownership by political parties

Arukshita Chauhan

5th year Student, BA, LL.B(H), Amity Law School, Noida, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, India

### Abstract

The Indian media prospect has been altered significantly in the course of last decade. With the progresses in innovation, the media industry has been flourishing more than ever and prolonged its extent, regarding the quantity of outlets, be it television, radio or newspaper. Whilst this has established a remarkable inclination aimed at market growth, the underlying consequences of this swiftly mounting media prospect has occasioned in a few challenges as well. The individuals possessing access to the passages of power have been efficacious in swaying dissemination of information across media houses by partially owning these outlets, and tangentially swaying the way news is presented. Evidently, media ownership considerably influences the perspectives presented in the reporting and bias become inevitable in such settings. This article epitomizes the politicized media regulation that has negative repercussions for news media operations.

**Keywords:** credibility, operations, ownership, political

### Introduction: The Politics of Indian Media Houses

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) being a significant agency took around two and a half years in order to publish the public data officially called for through TheHoot.org in the year 2015 which is a website representing media ownership in India. The Ministry said that the requested data was restricted since it was third party information. The disagreement by the Ministry did not make any sense since the media companies have to disclose ownership data so as to be eligible for a license to function. It has come into knowledge that as many as ten media owners have either direct or indirect links whilst some even represent a political party. There are numerous others however, who have declined to pronounce their political affiliations, but yet own media companies. Concerning them, media owners with political relations control a significant segment of viewership/readership.

The executive powers in matters linked to the Indian media are influenced with politics, conflicts over jurisdiction and regulatory parallelism encompassing not only decision-making authorities but industry players as well.

Not doing anything inflicts more damage. Determinations to not make regulatory decisions have a correspondingly substantial impact as prejudiced regulatory decisions. Intimidations to media independence in India are many, nonetheless two of many stand out, one being the concentration of ownership and another, the widespread paid news phenomenon (cases of media houses that are provided equity in a company in swap for prearranged advertising space). Absence of authoritarian interference to resolve these issues is extremely damaging for media independence.

The decision-making entitlement in the Indian media regulation is objectively consolidated with the Central Government and ministries making the judgment calls when its concerning new policies and appointments.

Politicians tend to develop a keen interest in news media regulation due to high extent of political ownership in the sector. Consequently, political and electoral judgment

shapes media regulation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is at the top of the decision-making list. He pursues a unified decision-making model with significant power allotted to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which comprises of his secretaries and advisors. He has been a vocal supporter of the usage of online media for political enlistment, contribution and publicity.

Major influencers in the Indian media regulation include Mukesh Ambani, chairman of the Reliance Group of Industries through Independent Media Trust, of which RIL is the sole beneficiary by funding of up to Rs. 40 billion for acquisition of control in Network18 and its subsidiaries. Mukesh Amabani is close to Mr. Modi & BJP's highest leadership, Amit Shah, an MHA and Jagat Prakash Nadda, current president of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Subhash Chandra, the chairman of Essel Group and a politician from the state of Haryana backed by the BJP, Republic TV owned by ARG Outlier Asianet News (BJP MP Rajeev Chandrashekar), a company whose managing director is Arnab Goswami, Rajat Sharma, a former ABVP General Secretary on India TV, News 24 — Anuradha Prasad, managing director of BAG films and wife of Congress Rajya Sabha MP Rajeev Shukla and sister of MP Ravi Shankar Prasad of BJP who is current Union Minister of Communications and Information Technology, India News is owned by Karthikeya Sharma, who owns the ITV Media group that functions numerous news channels counting News X. Karthikeya Sharma and Manu Sharma (Convicted in Jessica Lal murder case) are sons of Congress leader Venod Sharma and finally, Vineet Jain, the managing director of the largest media group in India, Bennett Coleman & Co. Ltd (BCCL), which owns The Times of India <sup>[1]</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> "The Politics of Indian Media Houses" available at <https://medium.com/@vikrammalla/the-politics-of-indian-media-houses-by-ownership-82ecbe2dafab> (last visited at July 9,2020)

### Reliance of Media on Government Advertising

Aside from the direct ownership, advertising imparts another mode of potential control over editorial content since more and more media show greater dependence on advertisement revenues. Hence, it is possibly reasonable to say that Indian media is relatively profit than conviction driven these days.

This reliance turns out to be extremely challenging, when media houses make additional money through carrying, in particular, government advertisements precisely this contributes to the spread of their agenda. Through the media houses' financial dependency on state advertisements to toe the line of producing a favorable coverage for the government.

A clear and liberated reporting of content gets bargained a great deal by way of such 'soft pressure'. Frequently, there is an invisible coercion for a newspaper or a television channel to enunciate the perspective of the government in an argumentative issue.

According to 2017 figures, the Department of Audio-Visual Publicity, the administration office that distributes government ads to print outlets, spends as much as INR 21.34 million/USD 0.32 million for Hindi and INR 14.09 million/USD 0.202 million in case of English print advertising. Government advertising in this manner is the bread and butter for some however specifically for littler Hindi papers permitting the legislature to misuse its advertisement expenditure and the ensuing money related reliance of news sources as a method for control. The money related battles of a few media organizations to support with their plan of action makes them gradually defenseless against such conditions and control mechanisms.

Possibly, if desired, the government of the day can offer advertising to those whom they might want to remunerate. What's more, on the other hand, those papers, which have earned their rage, can without much of a stretch be rebuffed by the administration by eliminating the advertising being given to them. Scope for influencing public advertising distributions result from the practice however which it is resolved and which absences liability. It depends upon dissemination information affirmed by the DAVP (Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity). These figures rely upon an authorized Chartered Accountant's declaration, which builds up the official number of duplicates printed. Nonetheless, there is no possibility for a physical check of the quantity of newspapers imprinted in India as the quantities of newspapers and TV channels have hugely expanded consistently. According to the most recent figures, there are 380 or more TV news stations and 118,239 distributions, which incorporate 17,239 dailies.

Additionally in Television, as the dissemination of government advertising depends on ratings, there is scope for uncertainty on the grounds that these ratings are set up with no transparency or liability by an industry owned affiliation. Additionally, the spectators' shares of the topmost four television channels are very close to one another and opponents affirm that the distribution of government advertising on television is arbitrary.

Of the top of official state advertising comes the one of political parties and it is nothing unexpected that BJP, the ruling party, is the greatest advertiser in the last five years. As per the Broadcast Audience Research Council

(BARC), the same party had 22,099 supplements <sup>[2]</sup> in less than a week between November 12 to 16, 2018, which was twice as much as the second biggest leading advertiser in the nation— Netflix. BJP ads and promotions positioned number one across all channels in the five states that went into assembly elections towards the conclusion of 2018 — Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram and Telangana. BJP positioned number two for the former week, whilst the Congress party did not even highlight in the top-ten list.

As an undeniable outcome, media proprietors being mindful of the political influence through advertising, toe the official government's and BJP's line both in TV and print. There is evidently less reporting of the opposition.

### Need to regulate political apprehension of the media

The intensifying leverage of the media by the government and the ruling party is an omnipresent phenomenon that has proved to be useful to have a grasp on the public. Aside from smothering the discourse and restricting the freedom of opinion, it has correspondingly blinded the individuals from knowing their actual welfares. The political apprehension of mass media ensues by governments, political parties and enormous enterprises and makes a deteriorating setting for the ones who are at the society margins. It drives one to the most substantial query of whether there should be a regulation outlawing big corporations and politicians to own media. As the space for analytical interpretation is shrinking at a fast rate there is sought a critical need to address the issue. This demonstrates how much of a requirement individuals and societies have for diverse as well as pluralistic media provisions as concentrations of media ownership confines the scope of opinions that prevail in the media and subsequently pose a threat to the interests of society.

Because it is predominantly imperceptible to the public's eye, media ownership is one of the least esteemed factors adding to the peril of freedom of press and compromising of journalism ethics. As indicated by the Free Press Unlimited, the ownership of media by people who possess vested interests has authorized the governments and corporations "to develop a centralized information approach that sums to a modern practice of publicity whereby all important media are communicating a similar terminology, demonizing the same nemeses, and imparting the same contentions in favor of the leadership's actions".

The fundamental strategies operated by the BJP to influence media coverage are not unprecedented. The Indian National Congress has itself involved in such behavior. Certainly, between 1975 and 1978, the Congress government directed by Indira Gandhi systematically suppressed critical media as part of a countrywide emergency. Yet today, the BJP has amplified down and transformed previously independent media outlets into state mouthpieces for the sake of diminishing criticism and propagating their own narrative.

Today, there are no governing safeguards in contradiction of political control over media in India. The Indian laws do not limit political ownership in TV or print media with the exception of radio, where political parties or fellows thereof are ineligible for applying for an authorization to operate a radio station. Conversely, radio is obstructed from broadcasting independent news. There is no obligatory

<sup>2</sup> supplements- number of times an ad is aired on TV

prerequisite to unveil political affiliations of the owners or of their family members.

Nevertheless, CMDS is running Media Influence Matrix as fragment of a worldwide research and advocacy coalition, the Media and Power Research Consortium, entailing around 50 organizations, incorporating academic institutions, advocacy groups, journalist networks and NGOs. The core objective of the research project is to examine the profound influence that fast swings in policy, bases of funding and technology companies are partaking on journalism today. Report of each country contains three studies, wrapping up politics and policy, journalism funding and technology.

### **Conclusion**

Media is one of the most effective means for presentation of a vigorous political narrative in any society. The information that is conveyed and afterward devoured by the spectators has a direct influence on the public opinion. This information is significant for a democracy to endure and dissension to flourish. Yet, in India, there has been an upsetting inclination contemporarily, when media has usually, come under inspection for drifting away from its purpose to transmit information and desist from satisfying any specific interests.

The connotation of influence and control with media goes back a long way. Control of media has been instrumental in engineering public consent and controlling dissension. This information space control can ensue through a variation of channels. Direct control by the execution of stringent laws and legislation that limit the extent of what can be reported, impact through state funding for instance, for advertisement or secretively by the way of owning the media. The second one is a subtle and inoffensive way of controlling the political discourse and limiting critical reportage. Moreover, driving media outlets to perform self-censorship owing to several pressure strategies transpires to be an instrument for control.

### **References**

1. "The Politics of Indian Media Houses" available at <https://medium.com/@vikrammalla/the-politics-of-indian-media-houses-by-ownership-82ecbe2dafab> (last visited at July 9), 2020.
2. Supplements- number of times an ad is aired on TV