



The Credibility Landscape: Examining Media Authenticity and Accountability in Contemporary India

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ABSTRACT

There has been a sharp decline in accountability and credibility along with the media's unparalleled development in India, including the unregulated social media market. India's media, particularly the broadcast media, is going through an unheard-of crisis of credibility. Its exponential growth and declining accountability have highlighted the pressing necessity for the media to create an agenda in the current situation in order to uphold its constitutional duties.

Media plays an important role in promoting democratic and social values, raising a strong voice against political upheavals and malpractices and ensuring the spread of democracy, strengthening and good governance. But today its credibility has been questioned in front of the Indian media. With over 400 news channels, India is undoubtedly the world's most well-served news market. In this vast market, there has also been an alarming rise in phenomena like paid news, fake news, biased news and unreliable news. Most news television channels in India can be easily identified as pro-government or anti-government.

Additionally, the majority of news networks, broadcast discussion shows, comedies, and music shows as part of their regular schedule. Following the viewing of these shows, it appears that they are attempting to turn the news channel into an entertainment station. Whether it was the TRP scandal, sensational reports about the Sushant Singh Rajput case, or the alleged persecution of a community because they belong to the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, India's electronic media has been in the headlines a lot this year for all the wrong reasons. As a result, when such occurrences are brought to light, the public begins to question not just one.

Article 19(1)(A) of the Constitution, guarantees freedom of speech and expression, media is empowered to serve the people in a civilized manner with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate and sober manner. But the basic question in today's context is who will define public interest and whether the media can be known to follow any selective interpretation of the phrase. The solution perhaps lies in setting up a new Media Commission.



Objective of the Research

The field of media in India is continuously expanding. Freedom of expression has become a means of personal interest today. Media which was once the most reliable source of information, news is losing its credibility today. Questions have been raised not only on the Indian media but also on the foreign media for many reasons like TRP scam, Sushant Singh Rajput case be it sensational stories or alleged harassment of any community regarding the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. As a result, when such incidents come to the fore, the question does not arise in the audience on any one medium of the media, but the credibility of each and every medium is questioned. So the basic question in today's context is who will define public interest and whether the media can be known to follow any selective interpretation of the phrase.

Introduction

The unparalleled growth of media in India, including the unregulated sector of social media, has resulted in a significant decline in credibility. Media in India is facing an unmatched crisis of credibility. The current scenario underlines the urgent need for devising an agenda for the attacking media to meet its constitutional obligations with diminishing accountability.

The media has a significant role in upholding democratic and social values and speaking out against the shortcomings of politicians. Additionally, to ensuring excellent government, it also strengthens democracy. The freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution requires the media to report news, opinions, and information on topics of public importance in a fair, accurate, unbiased, and sober manner. But in today's setting, the fundamental question is who will define public interest and if the media can be held accountable for adopting any particular, biased interpretation of the term.

This is a Yaksha question this research paper is an attempt to find the answer to this question. The Press Council of India (PCI) and the regulatory apparatus find it imperative that the media learn to differentiate between matters of public interest and those in the public interest, and be impartial in covering not only the latest happenings but political, social and economic spheres. Social issues such as inequality, social discrimination, gender inequality, child abuse, sanitation, environment, poverty, unemployment, education and healthcare were brought to the public.

The Article 19(1)(a) right to freedom of speech and expression is subject to reasonable restrictions on eight significant grounds for the creation of law. In this era of liberalization, the Supreme Court noted in *Bennett, Coleman & Co. v. Union of India* that freedom of the press



entitles the media to achieve any degree of dissemination and independence, both in its coverage and content. However, Article 19(2) in no way limits the right of media to promote their interests within these reasonable restrictions. Allows the placement of reasonable limits based on specified justifications.

The state's security is one of these. A statute that violates the right to freedom of speech and expression and does not meet these criteria, according to the Supreme Court, may be deemed void. The renowned British judge Lord Denning stated that the press is the watchdog and that the watchdogs can occasionally be lax and should be penalized for their bad behavior in his well-known book, *Road to Justice*. The Indian media frequently looks for dramatic news stories when politicians and activists use derogatory language to express their bias against certain communities and genders.

Corporate media firms have consistently pushed for the creation of a media commission to examine the whole media industry similar to the first and second press commissions. Print, electronic, and internet social media may all fall under the purview of the proposed media council. But in the face of fierce industry opposition, the concept has failed. Some of the phrases frequently used to describe the role of the media in an effective democracy include the fourth pillar of democracy, *chowkidar*, and voice of the people.

With the emergence of new forms, particularly social media, modern times have witnessed significant success in the reach of media. People may obtain news updates from all over the world at their fingertips faster than ever before. As a result, it is imperative that the media report properly and give its viewers accurate information. The Indian Newspapers Society (INS), which represents the print media sector, and the News Broadcasters Association (NBA), a private organization of several current affairs and news television broadcasters in India, have long quarreled in the halls of power.

Together, they have been making a strong case against the creation of a media commission that could examine the operation of all media sectors and address important issues like cross-media ownership, paid news syndrome, relations between the press and politicians, and monopoly TV rating points, among others. The first Press Commission was established by the Nehru government in 1952 and examined various areas of the newspaper industry, including ownership, management, and financial structure. It suggested, among other things, that the Working Journalists Act be passed, that the Press Council of India (RNI) be appointed, and that a Press Council of India be established.

Under the leadership of Morarji Desai, the Janata Party administration established the second Press Commission in 1978. The commission urged the media to participate responsibly in the



development process in its report. In accordance with the Second Press Commission's recommendations, the Press Council of India was restructured. The media, both electronic and print, must concentrate on its immense strength and provide the public with accurate information through sensitive reporting on positive news and developmental issues.

The governing body of Indian television broadcasters is the Indian Broadcasting Foundation. It serves as a single forum for the redress and resolution of grievances and advances the interests of the Indian television industry. A programme code has been adopted by the IBF. The Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCC) has been given authority to fine the TV Code. The BCCC often encourages TV networks to exercise caution when it comes to their programming, particularly when it comes to how minorities are portrayed on women and girls and how often rape and acid attack victims are depicted.

Any legislative framework would be rejected by the media industry as infringing on the right to freedom of speech and expression, and self-regulation without statutory binding would be a feeble attempt to hold TV stations accountable to the public. To improve Indian democracy, a means must be devised for the media to operate efficiently and effectively. Additionally, the uncontrollable expansion of disorganized social media can result in privacy violations, social unrest, and a threat to national security. Therefore, it is necessary to hold this disorganized social media platform accountable as well.

In fact, Indian media can be saved from the crisis of credibility only by creating control and accountability on the functioning of media in India. For this, there is a need to set up a media commission afresh (another press commission).

This is the need of the hour. The proposed media council may include the media in all its dimensions with adequate provisions to enforce vigilance and compliance. It is undeniable that the media has the greatest influence on public opinion. Thus, it is the responsibility of the media to inform the citizens about the state of governance.

As also mentioned in the News Broadcasters Association's Code of Conduct and Broadcasting Standards, the media is meant to expose the flaws in the government and give the public a sense of involvement in the process of governance. Traditionally, successive governments have attempted to control the media. Such efforts have been supported by politicians who use substantial resources to advance their own interests at the expense of the larger concept of public interest. As can be seen in the farmer's movement nowadays. As a result, a lack of quality can be seen in the media of India. This is adding to the credibility crisis in the Indian media.

Paid news, abuse of government-controlled broadcasting, among many others defamation lawsuits filed against journalists in recent years, can be seen as attempts to control, manipulate



and even intimidate the media. Recently, Republic Bharat and Times Now were accused of increasing TRPs in Mumbai. Somewhere such cases put the credibility of the media in the dock in front of the audience.

Evolution of Indian Media

The media was initially created as a tool to organize people against feudal rule. Print media was crucial in modernizing feudal culture in Europe. During the French and American Revolutions, print media played a significant role in educating and mobilizing the populace. The public can access the ideas and teachings of great minds from all over the world through the media. Other leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Jawaharlal Nehru made great use of the media even throughout India's war for independence. Radio broadcasting has always been a very popular medium in rural areas since it can reach far-flung parts of the nation and is relatively simple to use.

The government broadcasts meteorological information through radio channels, which is very important for farmers and fishermen. Government also uses radio medium to popularize its schemes related to rural areas. At present, Prime Minister Narendra Modi through the program "Mann Ki Baat" informs about various schemes and development to the people of the country through All India Radio and Doordarshan. Print and television media have deep penetration among people in urban areas. However, the Internet has made it possible to transmit information and ideas virtually in real time around the world.

The media has undoubtedly evolved and become more active in recent years. At present, mass communication has a great influence on human life. Media has provided information and entertainment to the people. The current social media has a democratizing effect on government and institutions. It is used frequently to solicit feedback, announce public policy, issue-based and general discussion, and brand. It has given citizens a new platform to express their views about various policies affecting public life. Social media is being used extensively by the governments of various countries.

Media and Good Governance In A Democracy

One must first understand the concept of governance in order to comprehend the function of the media as the voice of the people in good government. The idea of government is not new, given the age of human civilization. The process of making decisions and the method by which those decisions are carried out—or not—are collectively referred to as governance. Other governmental actors, both organized and unorganized, include multinational businesses, non-governmental organizations, labor unions and the media, etc.

Possibly also directly participate in or have an impact on how the government makes decisions. Depending on the level of government—local, regional, or national—the number of leaders active in governance varies. So what exactly is good governance? Good governance consists



of eight key components. It upholds the principles of inclusive, equitable, accountable, transparent, responsive, and consensus-oriented participation in advertising. It guarantees that corruption will be kept to a minimum, that minorities' opinions won't be ignored, and that the voices of the most vulnerable members of society will be heard and taken into consideration when making decisions.

Analysis of the aforementioned attributes of good governance reveals that the media is crucial in advancing good governance. According to our constitution, the media has no specific place in governance and is powerless to overturn any decisions made by the legislature, the executive branch, or the court system, despite the fact that the media is crucial to any society's ability to function. Play a significant part in. It serves as a crucial conduit between the populace and the government and holds them responsible for their deeds.

It assists in gathering viewpoints and assisting the most vulnerable members of society in speaking out to those in charge of

their governance. The media plays a significant influence in administration and democracy. It is essential that the media be unrestricted and free from governmental influence. Freedom of speech and expression, which is protected by our Constitution as a basic right under Article 19(1)(a), benefits from having a free and independent media.

Citizens must have access to accurate, reputable, and balanced information from the media in order to exercise this right. The media is also supposed to offer a stage where a diverse range of voices—opposition parties, members of civil society, unaffiliated experts, and regular people—can express opposing viewpoints. Additionally, there have been recent attempts to coerce, manipulate, and even intimidate the media. In direct opposition to its purpose, the media has lowered the standard of public discourse in India. Much-needed space for dissent has now been created thanks to the expansionist process.

A developing and potentially dangerous crisis of credibility is being caused by this. Numerous factors highlight the appalling quality of Indian media, most notably the dearth of coverage of social issues including poverty, unemployment, political bias, and inadequate coverage of global problems. The world's largest democracy is found in India. In a nation that upholds democratic ideals, a dynamic, independent, and pluralistic media is a crucial foundation of democracy.

The production and distribution of media programs and goods require infrastructure and content that are free from governmental, political, or commercial influence. Monopoly in whatever form must end. On May 3, 2005, World Press Freedom Day, the Director-General of UNESCO acknowledged the critical role that free, independent, and pluralistic media play in the growth of democratic societies. He made this statement in recognition of the media's crucial



role in supporting good governance. By fostering participation and the rule of law, ensuring transparency and accountability, and supporting the fight against poverty, good governance is achieved.

UNESCO has decided to pay tribute to the important role played by the media in promoting democracy and good governance by choosing media and good governance as its main theme for this year's celebration. It is pertinent to note that media is largely depended on to receive information from all over the world. It is not possible to eliminate all types of media dependence. What needs to be done is to identify what dependencies remove those that can be eliminated and minimize the impact of those that remain. However, the question still remains - should the media be free from the influence of the government. Will the credibility crisis in the media end after being freed from the influence of the government? Will the media be able to build its credibility among the audience?

Freedom of Press

While press freedom is crucial to the seriousness of "good" government, freedom of speech and expression are under constant threat in India. Information or news that is biased, disruptive, or disinformation that is given to the audience through the media is a threat to democracy. Such instances also call into doubt the media's trustworthiness, which declines. The right to communicate information and receive it, as well as the freedom to develop opinions, is all included in the freedom of speech and expression. the media is in the democratic apparatus. The courts have a responsibility to preserve press freedom and to strike down any laws or government policies that restrict it. Press freedom consists of three components. access to all information sources without restriction freedom of expression liberation of movement The right to freedom of the press should not be limited to the ability of journalists to report and make statements. Instead, it places a high priority on the general populace's right to knowledge and information.

Given the important role the media play in disseminating knowledge and information, it is important that media organizations and media professional associations encourage accurate and ethical reporting.

Misuse of government owned media

Allegations of misuse of state-owned media are nothing new. The Internal Emergency was imposed from June 25, 1975 to March 21, 1977 by the late Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The Emergency period imposed during this period is called the **darkest period of** independent India as all civil rights were suspended and rights to freedom of speech and expression were curtailed.

The Emergency dealt the nation's democratic values, which it had cherished since gaining independence, a severe blow. In addition to declaring a state of emergency, the government



had also imposed press restrictions. because Mrs. Gandhi's administration at the time sought to stifle the public by controlling the press. Radio and television were under government control at the time, leaving only the press as an independent mass medium in India. With the establishment of Prasar Bharati, the country's main public broadcasting organization, the plea for an independent public service broadcasting system in India was eventually made in 1997. In 1990, it was established as an independent body.

But it could be implemented from 15 September 1997. Despite being given autonomy, the state media machinery has been misused by successive governments. In 2014, the first live telecast of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's address from Nagpur on Dussehra by Doordarshan and All India Radio was also condemned by the Congress and termed as a violation of norms by the Congress. Meanwhile, the then Director General of Doordarshan, Archana Dutta, defended the coverage by calling it a 'speech' and said that the 'speech' was on social reform issues which are very relevant in today's times, hence telecast.

The fact of the matter is that a ruling government wants to keep powerful media like the media under its control so that the ruling government can broadcast information in its own way through official media. This is the misuse of government owned media, that is why Doordarshan is called Government Bhopu.

Leaning Fourth Pillar of Democracy

The media, which is called the fourth pillar of education, has now reached almost every household. People are aware and curious to know what is happening in the country and the world, that is why people's interference is also increasing. That's why people have started trolling media persons including news channels.

There is a split in the media on almost every issue. If seen, news channels run different agendas on the same issue. If there is a healthy debate on any issue then it is a good thing, but today the level of debate on TV channels is going down. In today's era, indecent behavior is also practiced by all the politicians who appear on TV channels, they are seen sparring at each other and also do not miss using abusive words for each other. Due to this, the viewers start feeling cheated and remain confused, on the other hand, the credibility of TV channels also decreases. At present, the lack of issues related to common people on TV channels is clearly visible.

On the contrary, nationalism, patriotism, religiousism and other unnecessary issues are definitely shown, due to which the credibility of the media is continuously decreasing among the common people. The biggest reason for the decline in the field of media is the control of industrialists on the media. Those who are not concerned with information and news. They have to increase the TRP of their channels. For this, they try to bring such news and information so that they can have a deep penetration among the people.



Therefore, in today's time, instead of giving information and news, TV channels have been converted into business mediums, due to which the credibility of this fourth pillar of democracy is continuously declining.

Credibility Issues on Social Media

The way communication is going on among all of us through social media, a new revolution has come in the dissemination of information. Now it is also changing the flow of discourse between government bodies and the public. According to a report by two leading social media marketing companies, in the year 2016 alone, around 55 million new users have joined social media in India alone.

India has overtaken the US to become the second largest user country of Facebook after China. Social media users in India are on the rise and hence the way Indians communicate with each other is changing. Instant and transparent, social media has given the public the freedom to take initiative on government issues, to express their views on various issues. Due to this freedom, the credibility of the information and news communicated by the new media is also continuously decreasing. The use of new media has provided the effect of greater public participation and control over government systems.

The use of social media by the government has facilitated the consultation process, as seen by recent consultations shared on social media by Telecom. However, some people have doubts about the new media's reliability. Press Information Bureau is the central government agency responsible for informing the print, electronic, and new media about initiatives, policies, and accomplishments of the government. Social media has a tendency to spread misleading information about some situations, even while the information spread has nothing to do with truth. So that the veracity of the information can be preserved, accountability should also apply to new media.

Rajasthan Government's Attempt To Ban the Media

The Vasundhara Raje-led government in Rajasthan on 6 September 2017 promulgated an ordinance prohibiting investigations against judicial officers and public servants without prior approval. The said Ordinance also imposes a ban on the media, which curbs free speech and expression and has been used as a dangerous tool to harass the media.

The media is prohibited from reporting or publishing news about an indictment against such a person under the new law unless the matter has been approved for prosecution by the sanctioning body. It could take this process up to six months.

Analyzing this procedure reveals how a government uses such ordinances to block the dissemination of information. And neither the readers nor the viewer's receive these details. This is a clear violation of the right to press freedom, which the Indian Constitution guarantees,



by an elected administration. This is the reason why these attempts are causing the media's credibility to steadily decline.

CONCLUSION

Media is facing problems like credibility, and the only way to overcome it is to be transparent. In order to be an effective voice of the people in governance, the media in India must be administratively and financially autonomous. What is expected from a responsible media is that it should report any information or news in depth with facts so that information or news can be available to people with facts. Additionally, there should be data-driven journalism with the use of verifiable data and a plurality and diversity of voices should be provided.

Along with this, it should be the responsibility and accountability of the editor that the story or news which is being shown on the channels or is being published in the print media, is being shown or published keeping in mind the sentiments of the public. Only then the credibility of the media can be maintained among the audience and the crisis of credibility can be avoided.

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