

MEDIA AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TELEVISION

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ABSTRACT

For healthy, meaningful, harmless, non-interfering and contributive functioning with maximized benefits, every media theory has reiterated that the intricacies of media practices should essentially be compatible with the social structure, cultural ethos and psycho-social ramifications of the land and the region. However, the practices currently adopted are more often borrowed or imitative of the extraneous, foreign and strange to be deciphered and accepted, especially in a nation like India. In such a context, mass media has constantly been lured into overstepping the fire line of informing, educating or entertaining the public. The habits and practices of media have time and again often resulted in sensationalizing, misleading, instigating or giving ulterior ideas leading to mistakes, triggering catastrophe or toppling governance established by law. The trend is also trickling down to the domestic media. The study looks into many such deviations in compatible practices, instances and case studies and their repercussions on society as well as on media itself. The study analyses and tries to provide for alternative healthy practices, at least put them into theory to begin with, with a hope that the stakeholders will introspect and imbibe the essence of a disciplined approach to the functioning of media. This study has its significance as more and more types of media are joining the train of existing media while the relationship between them and the people has got entangled and often conflicting to each other as the fundamentals of media functioning seems to have got blurred in this convergence era. The methodology is of theoretical type with Critical Study along with case studies and observations. The findings of the study reveal the relationship between the commercial aspects of media, theoretical model, ethical lines and the psycho-social aberrations resulting out of wrongly treaded paths by the media. The inferences concentrate on treating the culture of mass media with innovative penicillin. The conclusions of the study are derived purely for the intentions of bridging the gap of understanding between the common masses and the specialized sector called mass communication.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Democracy, Domestic Media, Commercialisation, healthy practices, opinion leaders

INTRODUCTION

The subject of mass media is incomplete without the study of the topic 'Media and Society'. The stalwarts of communication studies including Wilbur Schramm also used to define communication only entwined with the relevance of society in it. Schramm says¹, 'Communication is that part of social activity wherein there is dissemination of information, entertainment and educative exchanges intended for positive development of the society'. In fact, all the texts declare that socialization is one of the functions of communication. Also, as the study of mass communication is classified under Social Sciences, and aptly so, the responsibility to society adjoins.

According to theorist Simmel² –

“Individuals interact with one another at a social level and therefore mutually influence one another. As this interaction and influence carries on, society is created.”

Also as one of the definitions of society goes,

“A system of human organizations generating distinctive cultural patterns and institutions and usually providing protection, security, continuity and a national identity for its members”.

Communication which is an act of interaction and interplay of emotions and information between individuals is an intrinsic and integral part of society. Every societal activity is based on communication. Both society and communication are intertwined. No society can exist without communication. Mass media are the important and chief carriers of mass communication. The factor of responsibility is closely related to society. Societies anywhere in the world consist of individuals of varied kind- the less responsible, the average kind and the highly responsible. While the less responsible constitute a huge chunk of the societies, the average lots are few and the highly responsible are meager. In fact, sociological studies have proved that the highly responsible individuals who constitute a minority are indeed responsible in nation-building and developmental activities.

Mass media at the outset, looks like composed of large number of people involved in it, however, its proportion compared to the masses, particularly in less developed nations like India is miniscule. Opinion Leaders, those individuals who attend more to the mass media than do those whom they influence, pass on information gained from the media along with their own interpretations of the media content. Only if this minor set of *vocationaries* [and not occasionaries] can be truly professional in their functioning and genuinely concerned with the societal progress and upliftment of the downtrodden, then the letter and spirit of democracy will acquire complete meaning.

The philosophy of Social Responsibility:- It is an extension of the libertarian philosophy in that the media recognize their responsibility to resolve conflict through discussion and to promote public opinion, consumer action, private rights, and important social interests. This theory has its major premise that freedom carries concomitant obligations. The press has an obligation to be responsible to the public. If it is not so, then some agency of the public should enforce it. Public opinion and consumer action can guarantee that the press behaves. This theory led to the establishment of Press Councils, drawing up of Codes of Ethics and anti-monopoly laws in many countries.

One of the foremost Communication scholars Denis McQuail³ summarized the basic principles of Social Responsibility Theory as the following:

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society.
- These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance.
- In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions.
- The media should avoid offensive content triggering crime, violence, or civil disorder or harm to minority groups.
- The media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and rights of reply.
- Society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance, and intervention can be justified to secure the, or a, public good.
- Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

In that sense, this study is on a long debated but all the more contemporarily relevant topic ‘Media & Social Responsibility’. The study assumes different dimension every time it is touched upon as it gives fresher insights into the understanding and significance of the problem and at the same time some leads towards the possible solutions, at least synchronous to the times.

Society expects journalism to serve the interests of the people. Towards this it is expected that journalism not only informs, educates but also entertains. In the recent past the expectations of the society has grown to include a forum for discussion, watchdog function, leadership to the community, empowerment and many emerging functions of the press. In fact, one of the added cannons of Journalistic functioning after the famous report by the Commission on Freedom of the Press headed by Robert Hutchins⁴ in 1947. The immediate conflicting point however is that 'who is the journalist responsible to?' Is it the media-house owners, editors or people? Man is subject to manipulation at the hands of media owners. Due to the emergence of big businesses in the field of media, there is a threat of monopoly which may lead to control on information. Journalists are obligated to the same society that gives them freedom of expression- provides the laws that bring about a free press. They function as the trustees of the public- promote public interest.

Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung⁵ says,

'There is more elitism, personism and negativism than ever before' [...in the media contents throughout the world]... 'The front page of a newspaper degrades itself, its journalists, its readers and all those concerned, when it represents rape and murder as the major constituents of world society. And this is sometimes called the personal touch!'

The Indian mass media, like media in many rich countries of the world love controversy and indulge in 'statement journalism'. They print or broadcast opposing statements without attempting to investigate and bring out the truth. Statements from various self-styled 'spokespersons' create a smokescreen and confuse media users who do not have the will or the time to sort out all the statements. The main issues are thus forgotten; side issues, unwanted arguments, unimportant sidelights and even trivia appear centre-stage.

The media report or cover mostly politics and government activities. Their surveillance of the political and socioeconomic environment is quite useful to the business and industrial sectors. Their interest is restructuring Indian society in accordance with the goal set out in the Constitution is purely incidental. Priorities change according to the agenda set elsewhere by global financial institutions.

Thriving of Mass Media: A relevant peep into the background

On a glance at the panoramic scene of the different media unto the current scene, we can find that the Indian media is just coming out of its sheen, out of the incubation period, however ridden with all its conflicts and confusions.

The overall E&M [Entertainment & Media] sector of the world is on a rampant growth with 13.2 percent CAGR at \$ 903.13 billion during the projected 2010-2015 time. The CAGR ⁶ of different regions of the world are Latin America- 10.5 percent; Asia Pacific- 6.5 percent; North America- 4.7 percent; and Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA) - 5.2 percent.

The earlier statistics projected for 2009-2013 by the PwC Analysis of Media Outlook also pointed towards the growing and enhanced importance of E&M among the BRIC nations the emerging powered economies of the world. India was predicted to emerge with highest CAGR in next five years with 10.7 percent growth among the four nations. It is established by the world trade analysis that the BRIC nations will dominate the top GDP slots by the mid of 21st Century⁷.

Table 1. World Media Segments

Segment	2008 (\$ billions)	2013 (\$ billions)	Per cent CAGR
Television	4.81	9.45	14.5 per cent
Print	3.45	5.32	9.0 per cent
Film	2.18	3.37	9.1 per cent
Animation	0.35	0.79	17.8 per cent
OOH	0.32	0.59	12.8 per cent
Gaming	0.13	0.55	33.3 per cent
Internet	0.12	0.43	27.9 per cent
Radio	0.16	0.33	14.2 per cent
Music	0.14	0.21	8 per cent

(Source: KPMG-FICCI Report)⁸

THE INDIA SCENE: the India's E&M Industry percentage growth for 2006-2013.

Table 2. Indian Media and Entertainment Industry

Year	Size (\$ billions)	Per cent Growth
2006	8.9	15.28 Per cent
2007	10.4	16.85 Per cent
2008	11.68	12.31 Per cent
2009	12.56	7.53 Per cent
2010	13.94	10.89 Per cent
2011	15.82	13.49 Per cent
2012	18.22	15.17 Per cent
2013	21.04	15.45 Per cent

(Source: KPMG-FICCI Report)

The scene of E&M industry in India for 2006-10 has shown encouraging symptoms of growth and progress in activities.

Table 3. Growth of E&M industry in 2006-10

INR billion	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	CAGR
Television	191.2	223.9	244.7	265.5	306.5	12.5
% change		17.1	9.3	8.5	15.4	
Film	84.5	96.0	107.0	95.0	87.5	0.9
% change		13.6	11.5	-11.2	-7.9	
Print	128.0	149.0	162.0	161.5	178.7	8.7
% change		16.4	8.7	-0.3	10.7	
Radio	5.0	6.9	8.3	9.0	10.8	21.2
% change		38.0	20.3	8.4	20.0	
Internet	1.6	2.7	5.0	6.0	7.7	48.1
% change		68.8	85.2	20.0	28.3	
OOH	10.0	12.5	15.0	12.5	14.0	8.8
% change		25.0	20.0	-16.7	12.0	
Animation, gaming & VFX	12.6	15.7	19.6	23.8	31.3	25.6
% change		24.6	24.6	21.8	31.4	
Music	7.3	7.6	6.9	7.5	9.5	6.8
% change		3.8	-8.2	8.5	25.7	
Total	440.2	514.3	568.5	580.8	646.0	10.1
% change		16.8	10.5	2.2	11.2	

Source: PwC Analysis and Industry Estimates^{8a}

The India's Budget-2011 indicates specific proposals for E&M Sector in terms of Income Tax, technology, safety measures, profits and others. India's current FDI policy is also very conducive to the development of media sector.

Table 4: Projected growth of the Indian E&M industry in 2010-15

INR billion	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	CAGR
Television	306.5	353.0	404.0	465.0	532.5	602.5	14.5%
% change		15.2	14.4	15.1	14.5	13.1	
Film	87.5	96.5	104.5	115.3	125.0	136.5	9.3%
% change		10.3	8.3	10.3	8.4	9.2	
Print	178.7	196.2	214.4	235.6	256.5	282.0	9.6%
% change		9.8	9.3	9.9	8.9	9.9	
Radio	10.8	13.5	16.5	19.0	22.0	26.0	19.2%
% change		25.0	22.2	15.2	15.8	18.2	
Internet advertising	7.7	10.0	12.5	15.5	19.5	24.0	25.5%
% change		29.9	25.0	24.0	25.8	23.1	
OOH	14.0	15.5	17.0	19.0	21.5	24.0	11.4%
% change		10.7	9.7	11.8	13.2	11.6	
Animation, gaming & VFX	31.3	38.6	47.8	57.7	69.4	82.6	21.4%
% change		23.4	23.8	20.6	20.3	19.0	
Music	9.5	11.9	13.9	16.1	18.4	21.4	17.6%
% change		25.0	17.5	15.6	14.2	16.0	
Total	646.0	735.2	830.7	943.2	1064.8	1198.9	13.2%
% change		13.8	13.0	13.5	12.9	12.6	

Source: PwC Analysis and Industry Estimates

The overall Indian Print Media scenario brief reflects ever-increasing Average Issue Readership [AIR] both in national and international languages. The top Hindi Group, the *Dainik Jagaran* group has [2010 IRS4] 16.0 Million readership, the top English daily *The Times of India* group has [2010 IRS4] 7.4 Million readership. The growth of Indian Print Media Industry has seen an average 9 percent in the last five years & is projected as 9.6 percent in the next five years.

The Radio medium has got a fresh lease from the proliferation of FM stations in many more languages other than English. Even the competition is stiff between the public and private broadcasters. The same competition has brought in defacing of language, particularly regional, in the name of colloquialism and local jargons, however only adding the lewd and the loud. All these have not augured well for being socially responsible.

TV: Mighty among Mass Media

Among the media, television in India is fast growing and its reach is gradually increasing year after year. According to several studies conducted in this field, like IRS and NRS, etc. Among the electronic media, now, there are 467 million television viewers compared to 325 million radio listeners, out of the total population of one Billion citizens speaking different languages. It is interesting to note that the television content is seen to be the top changing growth rate of 13.8 percent which reflects the demand of consumers for variety and change. This also goes to show that it is important for this mighty media to keep up social responsibility factor.

Table 5. Growth of Indian television industry 2010-15

INR billion	2010	2011F	2012F	2013F	2014F	2015F	CAGR
Television distribution	192.0	222.0	254.0	293.0	334.5	376.5	14.4%
% change		15.6	14.4	15.4	14.2	12.6	
Television advertising	101.5	116.0	133.0	152.0	175.0	200.0	14.5%
% change		14.3	14.7	14.3	15.1	14.3	
Television content	13.0	15.0	17.0	20.0	23.0	26.0	14.9%
% change		15.4	13.3	17.6	15.0	13.0	
Total	306.5	353.0	404.0	465.5	532.5	602.5	14.5%

Source: PwC Analysis and Industry Estimates, 2010

Our newspapers may pay a lot of lip service to Gandhiji but it is the advertising agencies to which they look for their bread and butter. The advertising men and women are the virtual new messiahs for the press and the beautiful women models sponsored by the advertisement agencies make front page news in the dailies and are featured prominently in the periodicals which go all out to tell us about what they eat and wear, or what they do not eat and wear since the need for slimness dictates a highly regimented diet and the models would rather discard clothes than wear them. If some model is photographed in the nude there is wide coverage, often through a story in which the model would be shown as a helpless victim. The readers have to swallow all that. This may be an example of the lopsided nature of our journalism or an aberration; but the fact remains that the advertisement revenue has grown enormous and yet the press is not satisfied.

The study assumes its significance as more and more types of media are joining the train of existing media while the relationship between them and the people has got entwined, entangled and often conflicting to each other as the fundamentals of media functioning has got blurred in this convergence era.

Many studies on the topic in the past, yet as the societies are becoming more and more complex along with media's ramifications coupled with technological implications; the study attracts renewed attention among the academicians and practitioners alike.

For genuine, healthy, meaningful, fructifying, harmless, non-interfering, vibrant, sensible and contributive functioning with maximized benefits, every media theories in the books anywhere in the world have reiterated that the intricacies of media practices should essentially be very much compatible with the social structure, cultural ethos and psycho-social ramifications of the land and region. However, the practices currently adopted are more often borrowed or imitative of the extraneous, more often external [foreign or even alien kind], strange to be deciphered, less, even accepted by the people in the subcontinent, especially of nation like India. It all sounds archaic but is true to the letter and spirit of every media theories, classic or modern.

Because of the watchdog function, the press often is criticized as a purveyor of only bad news. Yet without this 'bad' news, how would the public get warned? How could the average person acquire the information he needs to act with enlightened self-interest? The thoughtful editor realizes that 'bad' news is one of his more important commodities, that somehow he must keep the reader informed without becoming a chronic alarmist.

In such a context, mass media, without exception to any kind, has constantly been lured into being overstepping in the fire line of informing/educating/entertaining the public. Innumerable instances point to this fact. Not to bring media to book through this study, however the habits and practices of

media have again and again been leading towards or often resulted in sensationalizing, misleading, instigating, being insensitive or making the consumers insensitive to issues or havocs or irregularities, giving ulterior ideas, leading to commit mistakes, triggering catastrophe, toppling governance established by law, titillating, enhancing anxiety, decreasing enthusiasm and such other disturbing consequences. The trend is trickling down to the regional as well as local media practices, habits and its culture.

Camera can be hero or villain!

In making the news or at least a side bar to the news, the camera itself is a hero or a villain in the television business. Once a late night interview programme was watched featuring a guest who came to the studio equipped with his German shepherd dog and a midnight snack. After the dog had been properly admired on the air, he was waved off and the interview began. A whimsical cameraman let his idle camera follow the dog, and suddenly the director of the programme perceived on his picture monitor that, unnoticed by his master, doggy was quietly beginning to demolish the midnight snack. The director let the home audience in on the fun by punching the shot up on the air, and at that moment, that was where the news was. The audience could not have cared less what the host and his guest were talking about.

Medium as part of the News Story

A much more fundamental matter, one fraught with ramifications, is the point at which the medium becomes a participant in the news story- where the story takes a different turn because the medium is present- and here television outdistances all other news media for better or for worse, depending on the kind of event being covered.

However television seems to be uncommitted to ideology. There is an honest disagreement on many questions among broadcasters, which may be summarized in the views of two eminent spokesmen, both newsmen by background. Media critic Howard K. Smith says⁹, "Truth is where you find it". He maintains that if the facts show that a position is called for by the journalist, a position should be presented to the audience. Former NBC President Kitner¹⁰ says, "It is not our job to take sides. We should present the story objectively and let the public decide for themselves."

The Metamorphosis of Indian Media

The entry of television saw a phenomenal transformation of Indian media as a whole. It could be termed as a metamorphosis of Indian Media. There was drastic change in content and marketing of the print media products, the radio programs and advertisements, storyline, direction, technology and investment in the films sector and so on. In print media, specialized magazines and pickle magazines are all the result of the pressure from the competition posed by television media.

There were some criticisms of the introduction of television in India and other developing countries, especially because of the heavy infrastructural expenditure involved, the poverty of the large majority of the population and the lack of media literacy and general education prevailing in those countries. But eminent scientists such as Vikram Sarabhai and others saw in television a great scope for reaching the rural population with educational and scientific messages. Visuals spoke louder than letters, they argued.

A Birds' View

Between 1959 and 1975, television was a steady but limping activity in India except for some stations in metro cities during the early 70's. A rare opening of a station at Poona in 1973 is also worth recognizing here. It was only after the successful SITE experiment of 1975-76, that the activities of television were increased, especially with the rechristening of Indian monopolistic TV station 'Doordarshan'- DD for short. Later, there are eleven regional centers till date. There is a need to increase LPTs even to date as to reach to the rural lots. There was invasion from the skies by the Television media onto Indian soil in the 1980's with proliferating LPTs and HPT's, till then, there

was no up-linking from the land.

Between 1980–1990, the DD-, DD-2, DD-3 and host of regional centers opened. During the Asiad live telecast of 1982, international media barons like Murdoch who had adopted a wait and watch policy towards Indian media sent investment signals for entry to India. By then, the cable enthusiasts predicted a capacity of 40 to 80 channels, in addition to providing the public access and also allow for the receiver to develop two-way communication, receive banking information, dial-up films, super market information, facsimile of news and wire report, medical date and a variety of other material. However, the then PM of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi [1983] declared that the time was not right and then the electronic media in India was meant for development purposes only. In fact, later in 1984, it was only Doordarshan which broadcast the live commentary of the funeral ceremony of Mrs. Gandhi on her assassination on 31st Oct. Later, Doordarshan was the first to also show the swearing in of Rajiv Gandhi as the incumbent Prime Minister.

In 1985, the EXIM policy of India changed in leaps and bounds. Relaxation in hardware imports, especially those related to telecommunications paved way for increased activity in electronic media. Very soon after 1986, Tax was relaxed on Colour TV tubes, and many such other policies paved way for bombardment of the TV e-waves from the skies.

During 1990-1995, the Governments had asked the scientific body ISRO to suggest techniques to jam those waves, but only to get a genuine request of huge investments and a projected decade to accomplish the target by the ISRO. The starting of DD-International in 1995 with 19 hours a day telecast time is an added feather in the cap. Today, Doordarshan has completed its golden jubilee in the market. Its contribution in the last 50 years is worth reckoning.

As social scientist Smith¹¹ puts it, “Television has, insistently, touched the audience at the most superficial levels but without seeming to accept responsibility for its own consequences’ (1991:8). Almost a century ago, Mahatma Gandhi expressed his fear of cultural imperialism when he said¹²:

‘I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any’.

‘Social Change is not even of secondary importance to the media’- feels J.V. Vilanilam, media educationist¹³.

J.V. Vilanilam, authentic in media studies in one of his book argues that the TV medium has only reached its ultimate, real goal namely, the marketing of products affordable only to the urban or rural rich.

Vilanilam continues,

‘To look at the programme content is a futile exercise, because the most significant content so far is advertising. Therefore, the social effects of television will depend on the philosophy of life, attitude to social objectives and views about what will interest the maximum number of viewers prevalent among programme producers and media users’ ‘India has already let foreign media into the country will this lead to cultural imperialism once again?’

From decade to decade, old paradigms were packaged in new bottles under new labels and presented by the developed world for the consumption of the elite in poor countries, who made vital decisions on communication and media planning. In the 1950’s, it was ‘growth through psychic mobility’, in the 1960’s, it was ‘education for development’; in the 1970’s, it was ‘satellite communication for development’; and in the 1980’s and 1990’s it was ‘computerized communication systems’. The process continues today, in the 21st century, under the banner of ‘information technology’ or IT. Today, liberalization, privatization and globalization are thriving everywhere, but the old problems of

poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and poor health persist. The story of Autonomy through PBC is now only to books, as the governments have now permitted foreign and indigenous private companies to compete with DD and AIR.

On another facet, the reality shows gushing across the channels of any kind has become a huge wave of 21st century TV programming. The Big Boss, Big Brother, etc., have made the TV both intimate to the masses as well as the Idiot Box for the critics.

The scope of this Study primarily lies in the argument whether the television channels should be socially responsible or not. It assumes proportionate dimensions because of the commercial frenzy that the channels get into as a competition. The Public Service Broadcasters shun the private channels as those following unethical practices and digressing on the responsibility to society by resorting to any gimmick on content and revenue generating practices where commerciality becomes the top priority. This competition among the different TV channels jams the coherent public opinion building on crucial issues of national or regional importance, development gets a back seat and reality of content becomes secondary and becomes what the media critics call as 'constructed reality' over electronic media.

Social Responsibility is only in the books, a section of critics argue. Society decides the fate of programs and acceptance levels and they are reflected in the TRPs [TAM], they believe. Hence, one of the objectives of this study was to distinguish Entertainment from Media practices. The E&M concepts have been set up by the media tycoons who mess up the two concepts only for enhancing businesses.

Under the blur of E&M a host of sedative or opium induced program contents such as- packaged graphormation [graphics + information] in the form of glorification of money-lashing public figures and celebrities, sensationalism in portrayal of trivial news or simple solvable issues, undue commoditization of women, misuse of children in the aired programme content, particularly in advertisements, exploiting viewership by addressing the voyeuristic attitudes of the subconscious minds of viewers through portrayal and projection of violence of varied forms in program content.

These are highly misleading content for the life-living idea seekers among viewers. It has the tendency to increase stress, indifference, insensitivity, apathy, cynicism, pessimism, fear, paranoid and voyeurism among the viewers, directly or indirectly, sooner or later.

The unhealthy competitions for listings under the TRPs are a big issue haunting the media industry, particularly the TV. The TAMs of many standards have become the main scientific(?) measuring scales for the media market today. Even the public and viewers agree to these numerals and ratings and so the hype is invincible. Little does the common viewer know that the measuring electronic equipments can be engineered and far from being foolproof and sometimes even the vouching authorities can be bought!

Limitation of this study is that it confines to Indian Media scenario even as it reflects best about the influence of media on a society. Also this study does not go to question the profit making aspect of the industry but only to ask ethical sense in its practices. Perhaps one of the high potent yet lowly explored media with balanced social responsibility in its functioning is the folk media, especially in India. Yet this study does a pass-off in taking up instances of societal chemistry of folk media. Over and above, internet and such other new media are in the domain of convergent and technologically complex domain and are not touched under this study.

The delimitation is that different dimensions of ethics are taken up through different kinds of case studies throughout the study.

The methodology here is through the analysis of case studies and observations through critical view point of the subject expert who is also the research scholar for this study. The cross sections of various media have been picked randomly and validly for the study purpose.

The study looks into many deviations from the compatible practices, instances and case studies and their repercussions on society as well as media itself. The study analyses and tries to provide for alternative healthy practices, at least put them into theory to begin with, with a hope that the stakeholders will introspect, ponder over and imbibe the spirit and essence of a disciplined approach to the business of mass media, much more so in a democratic situation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The programs and content drawn as examples and instances are chosen from different media with focus on the study topic. There is sincere effort on the part of the researcher to bring about balance in observations of the consonance and digressions of social responsibility from various media content. It is difficult to arrive at the intensity of deviation from the responsibility factor however at least on two scales falling on either side, the rightness or wrongness can be measured here.

The frequency of deviation from responsibility from a particular channel or station or media-house is one of the chief concern areas. It could be the number of times per unit period, say 'n' times per year per channel. It could be 'm' times per year per another channel and so on.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It reveals the relationship between the business aspect of media, the theoretical model, the ethical lines and the psycho-social aberrations resulting out of wrongly treaded paths by the media.

While a section of critics argue that social responsibility is a myth for media practices, the academicians and some sections of media practitioners also observe that instances like the behaviour of TV channels during elections is shameful. On the recent strictures by the Election Commission about restrictions on advertisements by political parties on TV, the channels have resorted to ratify the same through virtual tactics like news time getting literally sold to political parties. The fundamental question here is- 'Is it profit making or social health engineering?' Social health is very critical to the survival of civilization and nations' peace.

CASE STUDIES

CS#1:

An exclusive report with a headline read:-

Swathes of advertising dolled up as news stories. Is 'paid news' getting institutionalized?

[The same exclusive report, with different bylines, in three rival dailies; P.Sainath, development journalist writes in The Hindu NEWS Analysis¹⁴]

News item about the "Young dynamic leadership of Ashokrao Chavan" appeared in three rival dailies – the Marathi daily Lokmat, a ditto item in the Maharashtra Times, three days earlier in the Marathi daily Pudhari. Only the designs of news story like the source, byline, staff report or special correspondence were among the changes for very similar story content.

There is no mention of the word advertisement or sponsored feature next to the item in any of the newspapers. The appearance of the same piece verbatim in the three rival newspapers does seem odd. Mr. Chavan seems to have gained greatly from what is now called 'package journalism' or 'coverage packages.' In strict terms, the unprecedented coverage the CM received during the poll campaign cannot be called advertising. If those had been ads, they would have cost crores of rupees. More so given the

large newspapers they featured in. The practice has moved from petty corruption of a few journalists to a media-run game worth hundreds of millions of rupees. It also becomes difficult as to 'how to calculate ad. rates the value of what is nowhere marked as advertising?' Section 123(6) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951 makes it clear about such a corrupt practice, which can form the matter of an election petition.

If this was advertising, many candidates- not only Mr. Chavan - would be found way beyond the election expense limit. If it was not advertising, then it was 'paid news,' a term now firmly embedded in the media lexicon. If it was advertising, why was it not clearly marked as such? That's a question media owner and journalists would have to answer.

The Debate¹⁵:

"The phenomena of 'paid news' is one of increasing concern for the EC, especially during polls run-up."....."If readers lose faith in the printed word, especially at election time, then an important pillar of democracy will stand compromised."

—Navin Chawla, CEC

"The rot has set in the system... unfortunately, language papers emulated the leading ones, which started the trend.....that peak during the elections".

—Justice G.N. Ray, Press Council of India

"Ultimately, the superintendence of the elections rests with the Election Commission and it should look into 'paid news'."

—Rajdeep Sardesai, Editors Guild

"How does one prove that a monetary transaction has taken place? All such transactions are clandestine and one can only go by circumstantial evidence."

- Paranjay Guha Thakurta, member,
2-man inquiry committee set up by the PCI to examine paid news

April 2010, general elections, politicians pay a premium for favourable reports to flattering interviews on TV even during an economic recession. The trend started during General Elections 2004, notable proportions of paid news in 2009 made many wake up and take notice. This has now forced statutory bodies like the Press Council of India and the Election Commission of India to take note and try to set in place 'guidelines' to rein in the practice.

The CEC has considered things seriously. The PCI has called for a meeting with editors of leading national dailies on January 11-12, 2010 to put in place a mechanism of check and balances. The Editors Guild is in touch with CEC on the matter.

The 'paid news' syndrome, or the sale of editorial space is lucrative business even though it compromises on objectivity. It is difficult to ensure that the news in the day's papers is not paid for. It is equally challenging to persuade the editors and managements to keep a distinction between news, advertising and marketing supplements.

The PCI's writ has no legal standing even if it identifies an unhealthy trend in the media. The EC has directed the PCI to determine 'what is paid news', so that the expenditure on such news becomes accountable.

During the assembly elections in AP, politicians complained bitterly that the Election Commission did not give adequate importance to the issue. Sri Navin Chawla admits that he awaits the proceedings of the Press Council of India's recent meeting in this regard.

CS #2: Coverage of Attacks

The media coverage on attacks of any kind, via., Maoists, Naxalites, terrorists, etc., is both a story of success and of wrong approaches. The live coverage of such attacks are claimed as daredevilry act of media sleuths by media houses. Many a times, encounters on gangs are given ulterior message as terrorism. Such intentions are questionable. By beaming the attacks live and showing innocent being killed, media is increasing promiscuity of encouraging antisocial elements to get ideas; here, not to forget that the Indian audience by and large are like wet cement and are still tender to magic bullet content of TV kind. Here, the ethics are thrown to the wind. Also, by extending ideas of violence in the name of TRPs and retaining viewers in their channels, the program producers lose sight of futuristic wisdom of spilling terror into a peaceful nation, affecting lifestyle too. Even the law and order of the nation as a whole is also questioned by such portrayals, which are digressing on the bestowed media freedom by the constitution.

CS#3: Programs instilling Fear Psychosis

Almost all channels without exception, for a substantial number of seasons in the last decade, had resorted to the themes of 'Bhooth'[Hindi for ghost/devil] and the Voodoo content programmes relating to black magic, witchcraft, tantriks, etc., etc. It is more surprising that even English channels were no exception to these. These programmes hit the air late in the evening into the midnight. It appeases the subdued irrational emotions of most viewer sections of any class of society. The danger of it is obvious. It adds to the superstitious, bad beliefs and strange emotions of viewers spoiling their life-style, living and life as a whole. In the course of time, it makes them ineffective in the society and non-contributive to the land or mankind.

Fear psychosis is the trump card of such program producers; the contents are highly misleading. Viewers are grossly and consciously cheated, even as they know that there is nothing serious in the content matter; it has resulted only in the increased mad rush of people before temples and such many other similar, different spots. Not to forget the increasing icon making of sadhus, sanyasins and swamijis including black magic people- at least these are not for public opinion building, responsible mass media exercises, moreover a powerful media like television.

CS#4: The Myths

A very parallel however altogether a dominant, different domain and dimension of program content on TV are those related to Astrology; It is unquestionable that Hindu Mythology has a very strong and scientific base of astrology and numerology and India is known for it. But evidently on TV programs, every other *quack* is projected as authentic and is a pure publicity stunt. More dangerous are the marketing of astro-based medicines! Not to ignore the gems lobby. All these are to be simply dubbed as the attack by the tele-channels on the subconscious minds, especially of couch potatoes and the zombies making them liable for the society sooner or later.

CS #5: The proliferation of 24 hr. new channels is an added dimension to the discussion of responsibility of the media towards society. While the TV gets a pat on the back for handling the Jessical Lal's case well to the hilt, the portrayal of news and views on Aarushi Murder Case was with the slipping critical approach and led to the wrong angles in terms of father-daughter relationship and thus spoil the credibility of channels.

CS#6: The programs Big Boss in the channel 'Colours', Sach ka Samna in Star Plus, Pathi- Pathni aur Woh in NDTV Imagine and Perfect Bride in Star Plus are all examples of the cultural upheavals and shifts far away from the roots and tradition of the land. Only time can tell whether the enculturation will win or lose to the customs of the soil.

CS#7: Even in the hard core parts of TV programs like the news, current affairs and interviews, cheap gimmicks have set in. National channels do it with subtleness while the regional, moreover vernacular channels display it bluntly and crudely in the portrayal of such programmes. A case in point is that of an Interview by an anchor in the program with high TRP with a former Minister of

Karnataka where a very non-approvable question asking what the minister had to say or tell about CMs relationship with her. Such cheap approaches will never augur well for the academic or professional growth of a mass media like television, more so in a growingly intellectual society like India.

CS#8: A typical ENG or EFP blemish oft repeated over the years by different TV channels is the magic bullet portrayal of an immediate crisis after the death of a celebrity or icon- regional or national in India, which has time and again led to mass suicides of common citizens. A recent example is that of the death of a CM of Andhra Pradesh in air mishap, where mass media sensationalized the happening so much that each time the masses viewed it on TV, it carried them to a new high and into frenzy. The accumulation of excited mindsets resulted in irrational suicides within a short span of time.

CS#9: A parallel fallacy is about the coverage of Farmer's suicides in Karnataka. Where the reason of a farmer's death might be something else, the repeat shots of such a death case, often interpreting with a *question tag* if it could be a suicide, etc., gave ideas to the poor rural folks to genuinely commit suicide. It also gave clues to the cunning sharks to twist the tale into a suicidal episode only for the media hype. The result was the cascading effects like occurring of several deaths while the compensation was being granted by the government. One fine day the govt. announces cancellation of compensation and puts enquiry into such deaths, only the TV media remained to take another victim the previous night before such an announcement!

CS#10: Even in the coverage of the district of Karnataka- Haveri's crop stock episode, the TV channel completely forgot the Gatekeeper function of what and when to give. *What happened there was this-* Crowd had thronged in huge numbers near a fertilizer shop. A reputed news TV channel camera smelt news had appeared on the scene. People resorted to get the attention of the camera by throwing stones at anything including at the shop they stood by. The police got the news and the CRPF arrived. The mob wanted more attention through gimmick and so set fire to flowing petrol tapped from a nearby hero Honda motor vehicle pulling the pipe. The police started firing. The cameramen, as though it is their duty, were covering the set fire and the bullet shot too. The news producer sitting inside the news room of the reputed news TV channel gets a kick for airing such visuals [again the TrP intoxication] even after sharing the matter with media academicians straight from the newsroom about such footages in his kitty. This is one of the highly condemnable stories of ignoring of the social responsibility factor completely.

CS#11: It is very sad that the television media until date has a phenomenally defeating dependence on Movies and related industry. The music, songs, videos, montages, actresses, directors, artists, producers, production workers and any other involver of the movie has become fast food for the program content on TV. The professionals in the tele-production houses or even branded channels have demonstrated open laziness and slacking in their attitude and delivery about creativity, indigenouness and innovativeness. The reason for such unprofessionalism among those involved in production is their corrupt mindsets which hanker only on easy money, lazy money and quick bucks without much sweat, hard work or honest intentions. Else why would one need to depend on Raakhi Sawant for a fad-full of production like the NDTV's- Swayamwara?

CS#12: During the Karnataka Assembly Elections: 2008, a leading Kannada daily and one of the reputed English dailies too evidently adopted the practice of selling print space for money. News for sale is very successfully implemented through these top press players. It rather looks a bit alien to the business of journalism in Indian nation or in its states. However, these dailies typically adopt western content management principles discarding the framed policies of a sovereign State like India, and this is questionable.

CS#13: The bombardment of news on several TV channels about a Kannada cine icon's death later made the law and order situation uncontrollable in the capital city as well as in some parts of Karnataka. Restraint of some kind was the need of the hour then. No code can issue guidelines in these matters and it is only some common sense and wisdom among the program producers that will do well for the health of TV media.

CS#14: The two TV networks of the state of Tamil Nadu are best examples of cat-dog fight of channels compromising with the primary factor of social responsibility. Political players into the media business have done enough damage in the country than any good.

The Silver Lining

Not to snub the television of being only sensational and titillating in approach to lure the audiences towards it, there are umpteen amount of positive portrayals and efforts of TV programmes in India to boast of. At the regional level of some of the states, some well-known channels have healthy sting operative stories & anticorruption stories. They have started altogether a trend of socially responsible exercises; however ethical approach is always debatable. The coverage of the recent floods and flood relief stories in southern states are real laudable efforts of television media.

Also on the other end, most of the channels churn out quite an amount of Public Service Messages through advertisements or as CSR activity. Some of the PSMs like the Monkey stopping the tap of flowing water left out by man, asking voters to vote compulsorily, encouraging use of solar power, harvest of rain water and so on are indeed real commendable efforts of television media.

Inferences and Suggestions

The inferences here concentrate on treating the culture of mass media with innovative penicillin. First, it is the values that are simply misunderstood or not understood at all. The values behind the actions—whether it is positive or negative— in the coverage, decisions to cover, unplanned coverage, forced rushes, the motives & intentions to cover, extent or intensity of sensationalizing, balance in the edited versions, fair play in portrayal, decency in the manner of portrayal,.....all summarizing to the social responsibility aspect.

Do the EC and the Press Council have the teeth to act against the 'paid news' scourge? Perhaps newspapers and TV channels may become more careful in selling editorial space. But business will continue. The ECI can of course conduct a study of, or hold a workshop on, the misuse of media in various States during the 2009 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. So can the Press Council of India.

The Indian media do not oppose social reform movements in different parts of the country, but when policies which will bring about meaningful structural changes, such as land reforms in particular, are discussed, their enthusiasm diminishes. The media generally try to please all caste groups and political groups by publicizing even unimportant activities. Their attitude to religious revivalism and traditional practices is also ambivalent, to say the least. They give high visibility to social ceremonies to please individuals and leaders of social groups who have an axe to grind. Even when some space in the print media or time in the electronic media is given to social problems, there is no attempt to bring media users' attention to harmful social practices in a sustained manner.

Serious issues such as the rehabilitation of people displaced by development projects, the improvement of primary and secondary education, developing a scientific attitude to religious and social practices, discovering the underlying causes of communal clashes, and so on, do not receive substantial attention in the media. What seems to be more important for the media is often a series of spicy reports and pictures, advertisements and interesting or entertaining titbits.

The Indian media are of, by and for the urban (more specifically, metropolitan) people. They are owned by the affluent and run by people whose major interest is in capturing the advertisement market. They turn to the countryside and the rural poor only during elections and when something sensational or something that challenges the established order occurs.

If a media camera is out there, the public feel that it has come to cover something sensational and will coax a perverted mind or two in a crowd to resort to instant violence. Often the public get into such a taste and these will make democracy simply dysfunctional.

Television as it exists today suppresses the Indian reality. It creates a world of fantasy for the rich and the poor, but the rich have access to at least some of the ingredients that construct that fantasy. This world of fantasy does not deal with the pressing problems faced by the majority. A comparatively new genre of media studies is needed in Indian media practices and it is called Media Criticism. Under the new concept, it is stated that all television programs do not portray actual reality of events but only 'Constructed Reality'. The argument that goes in favour to this is that if an event is caught onto a camera of limited view- with a rectangular region, limit being about 72° to 80° angle, while at that instant second of time, out of the camera scene could be a more important action that misses out for the viewer thus depriving him/her of full reality. The same does not happen to the normal eye-witness of the same event where nearly 210° is visible. Now, on such half truths or constructed realities.

Then it is about the professionalism. The etiquettes, mannerisms, the sensitiveness, polished behaviour that the profession calls for- should all be trained among the employees as well as employers of the media profession. Every media house seldom invests time, money and expert man power to impart training to the practicing journalists and mass communicators. The owners always look out for quick profits, less and less recurring investment for more and more incoming profits and least incurring expenses.

All these happen because of the so called professionals inside production houses who operate with senseless minds and without values in their work culture. These values are not engrained in any media practitioner by default but will have to be instilled through advanced literacy and formal education, both during their formative years as well as in their stints with higher education. Not to count on the eyewash exercises of media enterprises towards media education like *Newspapers in Education*, etc., in the name of CSR. In fact, it is perhaps possible only through media education leading to a graduate diploma, degree or a post graduation that such value based journalism practices can be set in, not just for the immediate time to come, but for a long, sustained media functioning intended towards sustained development and progress of a nation or society.

CONCLUSION

In the current times, there is a tendency on the part of the press to set an agenda. Not that the press is biased in India but it has imposed trends according to certain specifications. The present over indulgence in lifestyle stories, celebrity-centered writings and the like can be seen in the context of the economics of newspapers- trying to promote products, services and people with an eye on increasing advertising revenue. Unless there is revulsion from the readers this trend will continue and may get worse in the days to come.

Professional ethics are on the decline. Journalists themselves should indulge in ethical practices; else face the wrath of government or owner control, let alone regulations. Along with Press Freedom adjoins what media analyst John C. Merrill¹⁶ calls as 'social-determinism of the press'. Since India is an amalgamation of the traditional, transitional, modern and affluent societies, media should address all these strata in complete proportions without compromise.

Renowned scholar, media researcher and educationist Dr. H.S. Eswara, in his recent article¹⁷ writes on an issue under the title 'The Mirages called Independent Media, Responsibility & Objectivity'. The relevant extract is as under.

'Actual media independence could be meaningful and realized only when the three terms- Independence, Responsibility and Objectivity- work as integral parts of each other in a gestalt form. But there are detrimental factors against genuine independent working of the press. Apart from Govt. pressure against media independence, many

other pressures from different sources are those which come from the laws, ownership monopoly, internal pressures, self-instilled pressures, advertisers' pressures and public pressures.... So, the integral component of a responsible media, particularly social responsibility is of paramount importance.

The supposition justifying media independence is that media function as the mirror for the aberrations of the society and work compatible to the political, social, cultural progress of a nation. Also, the aim of media is that of the gatekeeper of acquiring knowledge, education, entertainment and the happenings of the society. In satisfying these objectives, it is doubtful as to how comprehensive are these media working. In fact, they are defeated to a great extent. 'Smargas Board*' is rampant in today's media, resulting in devaluing of the news values. The media does not even worry about the bad effects of such matters on the readers or viewers. Psychologists have come to specific conclusions on the portrayal of violence, crime, etc. Such portrayals create a sort of 'models' and give leads to do criminal acts and its techniques and modus operandi.

As a whole, the media independence is confiscated if social responsibility is not considered by even sections of mass media.'

It all looks like a jigsaw puzzle, a crystal maze, a chicken or the egg phenomena, a catch-22 situation whatever the situation could be called, the truth about the media industry functioning in India has a long way to go to be professional, effective, meaningful and fruitful towards society, its own well being and for the well-being of the mankind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An official commission is the need of the hour to take care of grievances of media professionals. It could be as a broadcast commission or a media commission like agency that needs to address the deviations by practitioners. This suggested body should not just be like the currently instituted communication commission which is just a licensing authority. The representatives of such a body should necessarily include the people from the profession, from the media and other related academics and responsible citizens, over and above with judicial powers to punish the violators of the norms laid down by such an envisaged body.

Another strengthening aspect is the promulgation of a comprehensive Broadcast Bill or a Telecast Bill that will soon become an Act that could monitor content over the electronic media catering to social responsibility.

Also, a comprehensive policy on Mass Media Education in India is the need of the hour. Ethics, values and serious view of healthy practices of mass media can only be taught, portrayed, projected and imbibed in the aspirants of media careers only when their mind is wet cement and receptive. These can easily be achieved inside the class rooms and the training environs and not in the rougher, tougher, often brutal, merciless field out there. A sensible body has to be constituted towards achieving the objective. Teachers and Academicians involved in teaching journalism, mass communication and such pure social science subjects, along with genuinely interested media practitioners should be involved in framing of the policy.

Media Education should not be akin to media practicing alone but equally weighed with media watch, media analysis, media criticism, media consultancy and last but not the least, media research.

The industry people should not be given chance to snub media education, nor should there be lenient approach or free allowances to them in involving in teaching exercises in the education domain. It is simply because what is actually practiced in the industry cannot be told in the class rooms. A simple reason is that the holy exercise of teaching gets maligned if a teacher on the platform motivates the aspiring and budding journalists to accept gifts, go to parties, take bribes, enter into a nexus with politicians, make sites, ignore murder and mayhem, sensationalize, be indifferent to the event and be only a covering geek, as a whole ignore the principles of journalism, and so on.

End NotesOn some Abbreviations and Terms

- BRIC** - Brazil, Russia, India, China
CAGR- Cumulative Average Growth Rate
CRPF - Central Reserve Police Force
CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility
ECI - Election Commission of India
EXIM - Export-Import; acronym for the policy of export-import adopted in India
Fear psychosis - The phrase under Psychology, to describe the state of mind of individuals, TV viewers in this study, whose behaviour in life becomes fully shrunken and of unusually alarmed state, more out of fear and less based on facts of their exposure to circumstances and life situations.
- IRS** - Indian Readership Survey
ISRO- Indian Space Research Organization
NRS - National Readership Survey
Opinion Leaders - Individuals capable of disseminating media information effectively, as they have perceived the messages, and playing a key role in moulding public opinion.
- PCI** - Press Council of India
PBCI- Prasar Bharati Corporation of India
PSMs- Public Service Messages
Smorgas Board- A Buffet of news or views cuisine filled with Cheat, Fraud, Crime, Murder, Swindle, Accident, Illicit relations, Corruption, Jovial naked girls, mutual aspersions among politicians and fake assurances.
- TAM** - Target Audience Measurement
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He has held many positions as chairman/ member/ Secretary/ Trustee, etc. of several commissions or committees in active or advisory capacities. He was nominated for two terms as Member, Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes, Govt. of Karnataka.

He is currently the Editor-in-chief of Indian Journal of Media Studies. He has been nominated for several Central Govt., State Govt., University level, academic and administrative bodies. He has received five Awards from recognized bodies including Chanakya award for best teaching faculty from Public Relations Council of India. He has produced more than 20 programmes for TV and nearly 20 productions for radio, besides 30 talks on radio. He has nearly 25 books and articles published in different national and international journals, worked in film productions, conducted research studies and training courses. He was also on five committees of media relations. Currently he is the Executive President of Karnataka State Backward Classes, Dalits and Minorities Federation, striving for the welfare of the downtrodden. He is also working on several projects including e-content production for Education Television NME-ICT, Govt. of India and EMMRC, University of Mysore and also a Major Research Project on 'Role of Television in Rural Development' granted by UGC.

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