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Crisis of Credibility and Objectivity in Journalism: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The core values of journalism, objectivity and fairness, have been continuously threatened by various factors present in today's media, whether it be print or electronic. As the Fourth Estate, the media plays the important role of a watchdog in a democracy. Therefore, credibility and objectivity among the people are significant parameters for the smooth functioning of a vibrant democratic country. However, the question that has been troubling the intelligentsia for a long time is: Is the Indian media objective in its functioning and holding credibility among the masses? This study aims to answer such questions by discussing some of the factors responsible for influencing objectivity and fairness in journalism. The discussion will refer to studies, reports, literature, etc., in relation to the functioning of newspapers and television news channels in India.

Keywords: Credibility of news, Objectivity, Commercialization of media, Corporatization

1. Introduction

Objectivity and fairness, which are the core values of journalism, have constantly been threatened by different factors that have arisen in today's media, be it print or electronic. The media is considered the Fourth Estate and plays the role of a watchdog in a democracy. Hence, its credibility and objectivity among the people hold significant parameters in regard to the smooth functioning of a vibrant democratic country. However, the question that has been plaguing the minds of the intelligentsia for a long time is: Is Indian media objective in its functioning and does it hold credibility among the masses? This study endeavours to find an answer to such questions by discussing some of the factors that influence objectivity and fairness in journalism, referring to studies, reports, literature, etc. in relation to the functioning of newspapers and television news channels in India.

2. Factors Influencing Objectivity and Fairness in Journalism

2.1. Commercialization and Corporatization of Media

The commercialization of media and concomitant deviation from its role as a watchdog has been witnessed worldwide. Many communication scholars and social scientists including Herman & Chomsky (1988), and McChesney (2008) have dealt with this phenomenon at length in their seminal works. These works provide details of the chain of events and factors, which make 'objectivity' fall victim to commercialization and the corporate houses

exercising control over media and its content. In our country India, private media seem to borrow heavily from the commercial model of the West, bringing along with it all the incumbent issues and concerns including the phenomenon of 'paid news'. In India, the increasing corporatization of media is a consequence of the inclusion of representatives of big corporate entities that are advertisers on boards of directors (Thakurta 2012). Thakurta says:

"Jagran Publications has headed the managing director (MD) of Pantaloon Retail, Kishore Biyani, McDonald India's MD Vikram Bakshi, and leather-maker Mirza International's MD Rashid Mirza; besides the CEO of media consulting firm Lodestar Universal India, Shashidhar Singha, and the chairman of the real estate firm JLL Meghraj, Anuj Puri. The board of directions of HT Media, publishers of Hindustan Times and Hindustan, has included the former chairman of Ernst & Young K. N. Memani and the chairman of ITC Ltd Y. C. Deveshwar. Joint MD of Bharti Enterprise Rajan Bharti and MD of Anika International Anil Vig are a part of the TV Today's Board of Directors. The directors of DB Corp (that publishes Dainik Bhaskar) include the head of Piramal Enterprises Group, Ajay Piramal, the MD of Warburg Pincus, Nitin Malhan, and the executive chairman of advertising firm Ogilvy & Mather, & CEO of the country's biggest BPO company GenPact as a member of its board of directors. (Thakurta, 2012)."

On one hand corporatization of media has changed the priorities of news media and on the other, it has also changed the way in which corporate entities use media for

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