

The Evolution of Indian Print Media Industry and its Ownership Pattern

Dr. Renu Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication
Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha, India
Email- renumcj@gmail.com

Abstract: *The chapter analyses the overview and status of the print media industry. The study also analyses the major features of the Indian media industry, ownership pattern and how it has flourished and expanded. The study also tries to understand the influences of globalisation on the print industry and major developments in the industry.*

Key Words: *Print Media, Newspaper, Ownership, Newspaper Industry.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Indian print media has played an important and powerful role in the country's politics, democracy, society and culture. While the global media market is showing decline, Indian print industry is growing strongly due to rising literacy and income levels across the country. James Augustus Hickey is considered the "Father of Indian Press" as he started the first Indian newspaper from Calcutta, the "Bengal Gazette" in Jan, 1780 which was a weekly publication. In India newspapers are seen as an institution working for society and raising its voice against injustice. Newspapers played an important role in the Indian independence movement. The ideas and voices of various political leaders and freedom fighters were propagated through the newspapers. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi wrote continuously for various newspapers to disseminate his ideas about the contemporary politics and social issues. The British government was quite aware of the power and effect of newspapers in igniting the fire of freedom among people. Many newspapers were censored due to their bold statements and expression of opinion against the interest of British Empire. The Indian press owners and editors didn't give up and they used to continue to publish their newspapers secretly or used to change the name or language of their newspapers. For the editors and people who worked in newspapers, journalism was a mission. Even corporate houses who published newspapers treated it as their contribution to the struggle for freedom. Wages for journalists were poor and there was no security. Newspaper publication was not profitable and journalism was not paying as compared to other professions but things changed after Independence and each year saw acceleration in change (Patil, 2001).

Thus in the era when there were no mobile phones, internet or television- newspapers played a tremendous role in communicating with people and in formation of public opinion. A balanced and healthy media symbolizes a progressive and democratic society. Media is called the fourth pillar of democracy as it deals with the basic human rights- Freedom of Expression. It is very important for a society to be vocal about its views and opinions. Media is responsible to disseminate the information and decisions of the government, political parties, corporate, legal, etc powerful sectors, but equally its responsibility is also to publish the views of common man and the impact of decision and its acceptance by them.

2. PRINT MEDIA AND GLOBALISATION:

The era of 1990s saw a change in economic policy of the country that resulted in Indian public involved with latest technology devices to communicate and entertain themselves. The print media also had to compete, update and survive its identity in the modern era. The print media faced the challenges like- "change of political economy of the press, fierce competition from the satellite television channels, increase of advertising revenue, more purchasing power of the people, better literacy status, market driven economy, corporatization of the press, growth of vernacular press and so on". Television proved to be a major threat for the print media. The audio-visual medium gained instant popularity among audience. Corporate sector rushed for television to advertise its product. But the newspaper and magazines still occupied their special space in the Indian homes. But the real threat was seen with the growth of internet. The youth became addicted to social media and internet. Internet soon became easily accessible and handy. Mobile internet applications are a popular form of internet access. People started reading newspapers online as almost all the national newspapers started their web portals.

After independence the advertisement industry started overpowering the print industry. As the newspapers are dependent mostly on advertisements, the corporate sector started interfering in the space and treatment provided to the news. Moreover, the international media has been predicting about the downfall of the print industry due to the advent of internet, computers and mobile technologies. Now the advertisers are more interested in placing advertisements at electronic media and internet. The advertisement revenue of the newspapers has declined in the US since 2000 as most

of the readers have started accessing internet and they prefer news online. Indian “English dailies tend to be hit harder in a slowdown, in part, because they thrive in the metros which feel the effects of an economic reverse the most”. The Hindi and other regional language newspapers are showing a progressive trend in their circulation and economy.

3. PRINT MEDIA INDUSTRY:

Newspaper as defined in 58th Annual Report, RNI (Press in India, 2013-14) “any printed periodical work containing public news.” The total number of registered publications as on 31st March, 2014 is 99,660, among which in the newspaper category there are 13,761 and in the periodicals category there are 85,899. The largest number of publications registered in Indian language is 40,159 in Hindi. The second largest number of publications registered in any language other than Hindi is 13,138 in English. The total circulation of publications during 2013-14 was 45,05,86,212 among which Hindi publications is 22,64,75,517 and English publications is 6,44,05,643.

4. OWNERSHIP PATTERN OF PRINT INDUSTRY:

The Second Press Commission report declared that “there was high degree of concentration in the industry” and “during the past one decade the degree of concentration has further increased”. According to Thomas (2010: 61) the private ownership of print media started with the exit of the British in 1947 when the British owners of newspapers sold their interests to Indian business houses. In the words of Bhaskar (2005: 20-21):

Seth Ramakrishna Dalmiya, a leading industrialist, took over the Times of India group, a Chennai businessman acquired The Mail....The Pioneer of Allahabad, which too was under British ownership went to another industrial house.... The Statesman's foreign owners also pulled out, They turned their shares to a consortium of Indian industrialists, including the Tatas and the Mafatlals... Towards the end of the colonial period, G.P. Birla, a leading industrialist had obtained controlling shares in the Hindustan Times... Ram Nath Goenka.. picked up shares of the Madras edition of the Free Press Journal and used it as a launching pad to begin building a newspaper empire under the banner of the Indian Express.

Soon these big business houses started consolidating a number of printing and publishing firms along with their investments in telecommunications, software, cement, shipping, chemicals, real estate etc. The Second Press Commission report brought out the fact that the Indian Press is “dominated by a few national monopoly Houses.....The most important newspaper complex is that of the R.N. Goenka House followed by “Jain House” and Birlas. It needs to be underlined that the top three monopoly House newspaper establishments have close associations. For instance, the Goenkas and the Jains are not only related to each-other, there also exist inter-corporate investments and interlocking of Directorships..... Even within the newspaper world, there may happen to be some competition between the monopoly House newspaper establishments....the overall interests of the monopoly Houses do not appears to come in conflict”.

Moreover, big business houses had advantage over the smaller firms due to their access to financial resources and political connections. “The Birlas’ ownership of the Hindustan Times which was the largest circulation English newspaper in North India was complemented with their ownership of pulp estates, pulp-mills, press printing houses and distribution outlets. This multilayered ownership of the entire process and product chain- from raw material to finished product to the distribution channels, gave the Birlas a competitive advantage over other firms” (Thomas, 2010: 62). Thus media critics have criticized the media ownership pattern and demanded for a socially accountable regulatory and governance mechanism for media in India. The Indian media focuses on the entertainment and advertisement priorities which undermines the education and development news aspect.

5. DEVELOPMENT IN NEWSPAPERS:

When the newspapers from different parts of the world were showing a sharp decline in their sales and marketing hindi newspapers were revolutionizing their marketing strategy. Hindi journalism flowered and flourished across villages from Bihar to Rajasthan. The national newspapers became more localized and started focusing on local news, local corruption and local politics. The decentralized form of reporting attracted the rural readers towards the hindi newspapers. Moreover literacy spread in the hindi speaking states quite late in respect to southern states. “The National Readership Survey 2005 showed that the rural markets of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh achieved ‘tremendous growth’ in their readership of language publication” (Ninan, 2009). Newspapers have also used their brand name and strength to successfully establish their own websites. The online editions form an important source of ad revenue. Newspapers have also partnered with their new media to share resources and coverage on stories. The online form of newspapers has successfully attracted the youths and readers who have migrated from their villages and states.

6. CONCLUSION:

Thus the growth and demand of language newspapers in India clearly indicates that the emergence of television, new media and social media didn't strangulate the older forms of media. The emergence of television has also promoted the sales of newspapers in rural areas. People are more politically aware and want to be a part of

political decision making. People read about their regional politics, news, updates from the language newspapers. Thus the newspaper owners in India have known their market and understood its demand. The newspapers have become more decentralised, concentrating on each district and village. Thus the future of newspaper seems bright and quite not affected by the advent of latest technologies.

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Author's Biography:

Dr. Renu Singh is Assistant Professor at Department of Mass Communication, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya. She has post graduate teaching experience of seven years. Her specialization is in the area of Development Communication, New Media and Research Methodology. She has completed her Ph.D. with title "Digital Divide in Higher Education" from Osmania University, Hyderabad.