



## The Asian Thinker

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# 1. Media ownership pattern and political interference in Television news channels

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the concerning relationship between media ownership patterns and political interference in Indian television news channels. It explores the growing concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few corporate houses, raising questions about media objectivity and public interest. The research highlights a trend towards media consolidation, with a few large corporations controlling a significant share of the news market. This raises concerns about diverse viewpoints and potential bias in news coverage. The paper explores the potential for political actors to exert influence on news content due to ownership ties between media houses and corporations with political connections. The paper examines how ownership structures and political interference can negatively impact journalistic ethics and professionalism, potentially leading to biased reporting and manufactured consent. The paper provides examples of media ownership structures in India, including CNN News18 and Aaj Tak.*

**Keywords-** Media ownership, political interference, news channels, Media Giants

### 1.1 A Brief Introduction to Ownership and Political Interference

Almost 12 years after independence, the only medium of television as audio-visual medium was 'Doordarshan' in 1959. In other words, till about 30 years before liberalization in India, Doordarshan was the only audio-visual medium which used to disseminate information to the common people. Democratization of information became possible when hundreds of private television news channels emerged in the era of globalization and privatization after 1992 and onwards. Information began to expand rapidly and competition between private TV channels began because of which a considerable change was seen in the news presentation methods and formats of these television news channels. After this, the introduction of Internet in India in the year 1995, helped the media industry to grow rapidly. In the changing environment of the times, the big industrialists and politicians themselves running these private news channels, in the role of managing editors, got involved in manufacturing consent of the common people through news or news-based programs.

Due to their business and political interests, these managing editors seem to be giving least importance to social, farming and development related news. Now, it is the managing editor



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and not the editor who takes the decisions in deciding the news, that is, the news is now being published and broadcast less on the basis of news value and more on the basis of professionalism. To a great extent, the panel of editors is also responsible for this because it is the editor who takes the final decision on the news. Senior TV journalist Rajdeep Sardesai says that the unnecessary pressure being created by the owners of media houses, should be opposed. On the demise of famous writer and journalist Khushwant Singh, Shobha De says, “An era has ended. Only he could say that there is no condom for the pen. Khushwant Singh also proved his point.” If we spend some time in the newsroom and criticize it properly, a lot of truth can come out. Former Editor-in-Chief of Network18 and famous TV personality Journalist Rajdeep Sardesai says that journalists will have to look at themselves and the news media will have to be accountable, otherwise they will have power but they will lose their respect. Political parties and leaders have always accused the media of being sold out. In social media, which has become the ultimate platform for the outrage industry, mainstream media journalists are often accused of being associated with ‘paid media’. In such a situation, is the news media going in the right direction?<sup>1</sup> This should also be investigated through research.

### 1.2 Huge Markets Controlled by a Few as Media Giants

A survey by Media Ownership Monitor (MOM) in India was carried out in partnership with the Delhi-based digital media company Data LEADS from November 2018 to May 2019. In the survey, 58 leading media outlets with the largest audience shares were analysed. The research revealed that the country’s print media market is highly concentrated. Four outlets – Dainik Jagran, Hindustan, Amar Ujala and Dainik Bhaskar – capture three out of every four readers (76.45% of readership share) within the national Hindi language market. This is too surprising data and a threat to our democracy.

Similarly, regional language media markets are highly concentrated. The findings show that, in each of those media market segments, the respective top two newspapers concentrate more than half of readership shares or more leading to a kind of market capturing. For example, out of five Tamil newspapers, the top two titles combine a readership share of Two Thirds. Similarly, the newspapers Eanadu and Sakshi manage to reach 71.13% of readers in the Telugu language market. This trend has been observed and validated across all regional markets including Bengali, Oriya, Punjabi, Kannada, Gujarati, Urdu, Marathi and Assamese.

According to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB), there are over 550 FM radio stations in the country and over 880 satellite TV channels, including over 380 which claim to be television channels broadcasting “news and current affairs”. The number of news websites

<sup>1</sup> सरदेसाई, राजदीप (2014, मार्च 21). आत्म परीक्षण करे भारतीय मीडिया. *दैनिक भास्कर*, पृ. 5



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operating in India is simply unfathomable and it will be surprising to know that most of them are being owned and run by renowned media houses such as NDTV, Network18, etc.

However, this vast amount of media outlets and the country's cultural and ethnic richness does not automatically translate into a variety in supply. The Media Ownership Monitor (MoM) indicates rather the opposite – a significant trend towards concentration and, ultimately, control of content and public opinion.

In the radio sector, India's state-controlled only broadcaster All India Radio (AIR) has a nationwide monopoly on radio news. AIR is the largest radio network in the world covering a wide spectrum of languages and social-economic groups. In India, private broadcasters who run FM radio stations, have the license to provide music and entertainment content, but are barred from producing news. They sometimes offer news headlines in the form of infotainment.

CNN News18 (earlier CNN IBN) is an Indian English language news channel. It started its transmission in 2005. CNN News18 channel specializes in broadcasting national and international news. It was started in collaboration with CNN, TV 18 and Global Broadcasters News. At present the channel is owned by Network18 Media and Investment Limited whose control is with Reliance Industries Limited. Network18 is one of India's biggest media conglomerates with 53 channels out of which 20 are news channels and remaining 33 are entertainment channels.

The channel telecasts news segments such as Viewpoint, Breakfast with India, The Morning News, 8am Express, Bottomline, The Right Stand, The Nation @5, India Business News and Face off tonight.

### Ownership Structure

CNN News18 is a 24x7 news channel controlled by TV18 Broadcast Limited where 37.89% of its shares are publicly traded in the National Stock exchange. The remaining 62.11% shares of TV18 Broadcast Limited are owned by Network18 Media and Investment Limited (51.16%), Teesta Retail Private Limited (4.97%), RB Mediasoft Private Limited (1.52%), RB Media Holdings Private Limited (0.61%), Watermark Infratech Private Limited (0.61%), Colorful Media Private Limited (0.61%), Adventure Marketing Private Limited (0.61%), Independent Media Trust (0.32%), RRB Investment Private Limited (0.1%) and others(1.71%). RB Media Holdings Private Limited, Watermark Infratech Private Limited, Colourful Media Private Limited, Adventure Marketing Private Limited, Independent Media Trust, RRB Investment Private Limited are all 100% subsidiaries of Reliance Industries. Same companies also appear in the ownership structure of the Network 18 Media and Investment Limited where they collectively hold 73.16% of shares. 25% of shares of Network 18 Media and Investment Limited are publicly traded in the National Stock Exchange. In detail the shares of Network 18



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Media and Investment Limited are divided as follows: RB Mediasoft Private Limited (12.18%), RB Media Holdings Private Limited (12.18%), Adventure Marketing Private Limited (12.18%), Colorful Media Private Limited (12.18%), Watermark Infratech Private Limited (12.18%), RRB Mediasoft Private Limited (10.36%), Independent Media Trust holds (1.88%), Teesta Retail Private Limited (1.85%).

Aaj Tak is one of the most watched Hindi news channels, according to BARC viewership data of 2019. Between 1995 and 2000, Aaj Tak was a news show on one of the country's public service broadcaster's channels – Doordarshan Metro. The name "Aaj Tak" ("Till Today") became a popular name and TV Today Network, a listed company and the broadcasting arm of Living Media India Limited, went on to launch a news channel with the same name on 31st December 2000. According to the TV Today Network's Annual Report 2017-18, Aaj Tak has crossed average weekly 112 million viewers touching a maximum of 160.93 million in 2017-18. On 14 December 2018, Aaj Tak launched its HD version called Aaj Tak HD.

Aaj Tak news channel is owned by TV Today Network Ltd (Listed in National Stock Exchange and Bombay Stock Exchange) which is a subsidiary of Living Media India Ltd. Living Media India holds 56.92% stake in TV Today Network Ltd, Aroon Purie holds 0.49% stake, the remaining 42.58% shares are owned by public. The shareholders of Living Media India Limited are the World Media private Limited (48.15%), IGH holding Private Limited (41.50%) and Aroon Purie and family (10.35%). Purie family through Living Media India Limited holds 5.94% share of TV Today Network Ltd.

This is also to mention that 100% share of World Media Private Limited is owned by Purie Family: Aroon Purie (52.97%) his wife Rekha Purie (24.17%), Kalli Purie, daughter of Aroon Purie (7.62%), Koel Purie the daughter of Aroon Purie (7.62%) and Ankoor Purie the son of Aroon Purie (7.63%) and through this company Purie family owns 27.4% of TV Today Network Ltd of which Aroon Purie (14.32%), Rekha Purie (6.53%), Kalli Purie (2.04%), Koel Purie (2.04%) and Ankoor Purie, the son of Aroon Purie (2.06%). So, the total the stake of Aroon Purie and family in TV Today Network Ltd is 33.83%.

This is also to mention that 100% share of IGH holding Private Limited is owned by Essel Mining and Industries Limited. Shares of Essel Mining and Industries Limited is split between 12 companies: Manav Investment and Trading Co. Ltd (10.19%), Gwalior Finance Corporation Ltd. (2.03%), Central India Industries Ltd (2.03%), Rameshwara Jute Mills Ltd (0.77%), Bharat Arogya and Gyan Mandir (1.46%), Birla Holdings Pvt Ltd (3.75%), Umang Commercial Company Pvt. Ltd (12.00%), Meenakshi Steel Industries (2.89%), Mansoon Trading Co. Ltd (3.08%), Jatayu Textiles and Industries Ltd (2.89%), TGS Investments and Trade Pvt Ltd (12.65%), Surya Abha Investments Pvt Ltd (Singapore) 44.30% and 3 Individuals Kumar Mangalam Birla (0.96%), Rajshree Birla (0.45%), Neerja Birla (0.50%).

According to an article by Dr. Mukesh Kumar published online in Samachar4media, the history of media was seen changing in a recent incident. This is probably the first time in the Indian



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media that a journalist or editor is saying to send jail to those journalists who are not nationalists as per the definition of that media institution. This incident is raising questions on the credibility of the journalism profession. Journalists used to disagree but did not insist on opposing each other. Perhaps this is justified in the 21st century because it is a time of market competition. Senior journalists are not following media ethics because they have to keep the government happy. We may say that censorship is being imposed automatically and there is no need to impose it. On the other side, journalists should not promote any ideology and this should not happen anymore when democracy is alert.<sup>2</sup> Television media is running on technical strength. It is easy for the channels to gather a huge audience in the name of nationalism and these viewers raise the TRP by shouting in debates hosted by different news channel. In such a situation, the nature of idealistic journalism is deteriorating. According to Jagdishwar Chaturvedi (2012), SC Mallik Committee for Doordarshan was formed. According to the Mallik Committee report, stress has been given on 'How to increase more income by showing more advertisements through TV channel?' It is also written in this report that, 'Television is a medium of advertising.' If economic policies of liberalization are to be implemented and foreign direct investment (FDI) is to be increased, then television will have to create a fundamental change in its thinking. The committee has also recommended changes in the television advertising code. In such a situation, what is wrong if private news channels are fighting in the race of TRP to get maximum and costly advertisements? On the other hand, if one keeps an eye on private television news channels, it is seen that Americanization is being promoted in the name of Westernization. Sexually charged advertisements are coming and these advertisements are being run very well in the time slot by suppressing the news.<sup>3</sup> The concept of 'After the Break' is also helping these news channels in such a situation. Whenever an attempt is made to fill the empty time through mass culture, man will ultimately end up with a cultural void and something like this is already visible. A fat woman or a pregnant woman will not be seen anchoring in television news channels because the display of sexuality in her is considered less.<sup>4</sup> In such a situation, most of the women with slim fit/beautiful face/shoulder length hair are seen anchoring.

### 1.4 Changing Media and the Concept of Audience

<sup>2</sup> कुमार, मुकेश (2016, अगस्त 16). जो बात आज अर्नब कह रहे हैं, अगर वह भीड़ का नारा बना तो सोचिए पत्रकारिता का क्या हाल होगा. Retrieved Jul 1, 2018, from <http://www.samachar4media.com/vicharmanch/article-on-media-written-by-senior-journalist-dr-mukesh-kumar-2-23744.html>

<sup>3</sup> चतुर्वेदी, जगदीश्वर (2012). *जनमाध्यम प्रौद्योगिकी और विचारधारा*. नई दिल्ली: अनामिका पब्लिशर्स एंड डिस्ट्रीब्यूटर्स प्रा.लि. पृ. 100-101

<sup>4</sup> चतुर्वेदी, जगदीश्वर (2012). *जनमाध्यम प्रौद्योगिकी और विचारधारा*. नई दिल्ली: अनामिका पब्लिशर्स एंड डिस्ट्रीब्यूटर्स प्रा.लि. पृ. 100-101



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### Changing Media:

Information and entertainment products are never ending ones and do mean only for the masses. These products are tailored to the demand of the target group (TG) so as to attract this particular group. Media products that do not attract the TG, have to be highly refined otherwise they have to be dropped from the market. **Media products in the form of reports, programs and information are linked to the political world under the pretext of democracy and it seems very difficult for them to live up to the standards of objective reporting.** However, if the product is a satire, a dramatized program, etc., it may not necessarily be in accordance with objective reporting. Television news media has very limited time because of bombardment of information and is also under pressure to broadcast programs as per their audience i.e. public interest. **Despite this, Comparatively, political news is given more priority than other news in the media. Whatever be the type of news, media always selects it based on agenda and presents it to the audience in an effective manner.**

According to renowned communication scholar and expert Jagdishwar Chaturvedi (2012), many television channels have entered the media market, but it has to be assessed whether these channels have really commercialized our culture or are they all for entertainment or are all these working for enhancement in knowledge. If we talk about leaving aside entertainment channels, news channels are also showing such advertisements which are displaying sexuality and stereotype.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.5 Political Interference in Television News Media

According to renowned journalist Ravish Kumar, be it politicians or business houses, everyone remains connected to the media for their personal interests. It can also be said that all of them have to make meet with the media at their ends and that is why they become shareholders of media houses and invest money. In such a situation, the media needs to remain alert. There is a need to take the general section of the society along because it is not known when these opportunistic people and institutions will leave and the media may lose its credibility and be left empty handed. Credibility is the only tool which the media has, can attract advertisers and then only it can survive in the market at the same time.

In the 'public sphere', television news channels express their opinions and work to give direction to the society. They have a social impact on the trends of life of the society. Today's public interest has also been decided by these media houses i.e. Manufacturing of Consent. By watching and listening to the content served by the television news media, people started deciding what they would say, what they would eat and what they would wear. The television industry was seen to be more commercialized rather than socialized. In media industry, T.V. channels are competing for Television Rating Points (TRP) and giving priority to market

<sup>5</sup> चतुर्वेदी, जगदीश्वर (2012). *जनमाध्यम प्रौद्योगिकी और विचारधारा*. नई दिल्ली: अनामिका पब्लिशर्स एंड डिस्ट्रीब्यूटर्स प्रा.लि. पृ. 100-101



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competition, which has also become an important issue. Before the advent of BARC, an organization formed by the government consisting of members also from private television industry, Television Audience Measurement (TAM) used to issue TRP rankings. According to a report, published on the Newslandry website, TAM's data was very unreliable because this organization used to measure the ratings through a geographical sampling method. In this, instead of considering each individual in the sample, TAM used to decide how many viewers a channel has, on the basis of 'how long a channel was watched based on the time schedule?' In the race for TRP, these private T.V. News channels made a lot of claims like in Lok Sabha Elections (General Election) – 2014, when the election process came to an end on May 16. In a report given by the indian television.com team, based on TAM data, Aaj Tak Hindi news channel was said to be at number one in ratings and ABP News channel was at number two. India TV was given the third place. On the basis of ratings, it can be said that the channel which gave more importance to political news in a sensational manner, got more TRP and the income figures were also higher for the same channel.

In order to make profit in the media market, many T.V. News channels come and are closed down after some time. If a media house is owned by any renowned leader or a political party or is running under the patronage of a business house, then the situation changes, that is, it gets success. It can be so.

Amidst all these changes, the question now arises whether the method of news presentation in television news media is changing in the right direction or in the wrong direction? Paid news related issues come to our notice everyday but there is yet no concrete evidence found. They are neither caught nor does any channel or newspaper accept it. When it comes to political communication, the matter becomes quite serious and interesting. Political parties use all means of communication, especially television news channels, to convey their message to the public and take public feedback through television. Only after the successful use of communication system, a party comes into coalition position or power and works for the public through its schemes. At the same time, the direction and fate of the country is decided. In parallel, the issue of political communication is also interesting because all political parties are directly connected to the public and their message is connected to the public or rather, their message is for the public only. Political interference in the media can be understood from an example, when former Chief Minister of the state Prithviraj Chavan was accused of paid news, the Election Commission took action against him and asked for details of expenditure incurred on elections according to the news published in 'Hindustan Times' newspaper, during the Maharashtra Assembly elections 2009. It is a different matter that he could not satisfy the Election Commission with the facts in this regard.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The correspondent (2014, July 14). Ashok Chavan fudged poll expenses, says EC. Retrieved Aug 1, 2015, from [https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/ashok-chavan-fudged-poll-expenses-says-ec/story-cVLPQXmV9k4kB7FDv\\_XGK0L.html](https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/ashok-chavan-fudged-poll-expenses-says-ec/story-cVLPQXmV9k4kB7FDv_XGK0L.html)



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The common man wants to know the attitude of political parties towards his problems and his interests, listens and reads the statements of leaders carefully and analyzes those statements. On the basis of statements, he personally understands the profit-loss situation of the country and forms his opinion towards the political parties and on the basis of that, he votes for his favourite party or candidate in the elections. Talking about the present time, Indian politics is dominated by parties like Congress, BJP, SP, BSP, Nationalist Congress, Trinamool Congress, DMK, AIADMK, Shiv Sena, Assam Gana Parishad, Biju Janata Dal, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). All the means of communication are equally available for every political party, yet some of these parties use the means of communication, especially television, to convey special facts and sentences against the opposing parties to the general public by creating special slogans, making attractive promises. By using news channels in a special way, they win maximum seats and come to power. During elections, political parties spend crores of rupees on communication and television news channels play an important role in this communication.

### 1.6 Ownership Trends in Television News Media and Corporate-Media-Politician Nexus

The backdoor entry of corporate houses into television journalism is a matter of concern. According to an article published in Outlook online magazine (July 14, 2014), this is the first time in the media world that one of India's largest industrial houses has purchased the largest stake in the Network18 group. When Mukesh Ambani, owner of Reliance Industries Limited, entered the media, he became the owner of major parts of 13 TV news channels, 22 TV entertainment channels and 18 websites. In this way, he got a hold on programs being broadcasted in a total of 11 languages. Mukesh Ambani's company Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) itself issued a press release in May 2014 saying that the company's board has approved giving Rs. 4,000 crore to Independent Media Trust (IMT) for the acquisition. In this way, Mukesh Ambani has become capable in acquiring many big TV channels of the country's largest media group and taken rights over the content of the channel also. This is worth mentioning that Mukesh Ambani invested the money through Independent Media Trust and this trust is completely a part of Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Group. Independent Media Trust has bought 78 percent stake in Network18. It has bought 9 percent stake in TV18. According to news agency Press Trust of India (PTI), Network18 Group and Reliance Industries had signed a deal in January 2012. Under this deal, Reliance will get Eenadu TV. Eenadu TV sold part of its total stake, which would enable Network18 Group to use its distribution and content. After the acquisition of TV18 media group by Reliance, serious questions have been raised on the independence and credibility of Indian media industry as a whole.<sup>7</sup> According to former Minister for Information and Broadcasting Manish Tiwari, it is worrying that big corporate houses are taking stake in the media. Mukesh Ambani's name has also appeared in the Nira Radia tape scandal in June 2009, in which he was found saying that 'Congress is also its own

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<sup>7</sup> Raman, Anuradha. (2014, July 14). Bid ED In The Chair. *Outlook*, 30





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shop'.<sup>8</sup> An incredible game of nexus between politics and media has come to light through the Nira Radia tape scandal, in which big journalists and editors are seen posing as lobbyists. Big names like Veer Sanghvi, Sagarika Ghosh, Prabhu Chawla and P. Sainath are included in the group of lobbyists.

After the tape scandal, Veer Sanghvi replied, "I have no right to get self-righteous about Outlook because, in my career as an editor, I have also carried tapes without verification. Besides, how reliable is verification, anyway? As journalists, we lack the expertise to tell what is genuine and what is fake." (Sanghvi 2009). One thing needs to be clarified about this statement of Sanghvi that he said this sentence in clarification after the tape of Nira Radia released by Outlook. From this it can be said that television journalism has today become a puppet in the hands of big industrial houses. Through big journalists, these houses are getting the news broadcasted to the public as target according to their interests or agenda. These industrial houses are creating public opinion in favour of their favourite leader. They are also deciding for how long is the speech of which leader to be telecasted? To whom should we give less time and to whom more? Now, the industrial houses have started deciding this also.

### 1.7 CONCLUSION

According to a chapter written in the book 'Media Ownership', many rules for the regulation and functioning of media houses in European countries are different from the Indian media. In European media, it is already decided that what percentage of the media market in a given geographical limit will be captured by which media house or media mogul, that is, what percentage of which media will be captured? If the media houses do not follow the rules made, then necessary action is taken against them. Europe's media is largely in the hands of private houses and Indian media is also in the same dock, but the rules made for regulation and functioning are different in both the places. Except Prasar Bharati, Indian media is also run in private hands. If attention had been paid to the inaction of Prasar Bharati, some success would definitely have been achieved. Private channels do not have a monopoly on information resources and facts.

News is being primed and presented in its own way, due to which the format of prime time is also changing rapidly. Priming means that personal TV at 3-4 pm in the news channels, senior TV presenters sit around a round table. A meeting is held by journalists and it is decided which news is how important? News are noted on a board in order of importance and the angles/viewpoints of these news are discussed and then all or some of them are played in the prime time slot. In the Lok Sabha elections 2014, Modi was presented as a materialization of television news in the form of Modi Wave and ultimately Modi became the Prime Minister of India. This was a different kind of media coverage in which Modi was covered everywhere and

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<sup>8</sup> Kya Congress MukeshAmbani Ki DukaanHai? (2012, October 31). Retrieved March 09, 2018, from <http://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/kya-congress-mukesh-ambani-ki-dukaan-hai/282815>



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BJP presented him in front of the media as the face of the PM. There were many reasons behind this like his hardworking nature, his progressive thinking and his successful leadership in Gujarat. According to the Election Commission, 3100 cases of paid news have been reported during the Lok Sabha elections, out of which the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) has issued notices in 787 cases. One incident can definitely be discussed here - in the recently held Maharashtra Assembly elections, three regional channels of Maharashtra once again proved what political lobbying is by giving similar headlines to Modi and showing him in similar videos. It is not necessary that BJP or Modi's team used these TVs for this broadcast. Some lure may have been given to the channels, but it is definitely possible that these channels may have made such broadcasts to make their fortunes in future. This can be called political lobbying.

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