



A Study of the Ownership Pattern of Indian Media-Literature-Based Review

Prof. Dhiraj Arya

Ex. Professor Manav Rachna International University (MRIIRS) Visiting Professor (lingayas University), Faridabad

Abstract

In today's media-oriented social system, media ownership is mainly associated with the presentation of media use, and the basic structure of media ownership actually indicates the shape of initiatives for media functioning in the Indian commercial market. The current patterns of media ownership are also having connections with the legal mechanisms, their advantages and disadvantages, and their impact on modern political, social, and commercial sectors. This present study mainly focused on the data on the ownership of Indian media, which is very modest, rather in terms of data on their market and audience, and if they are not considered together, the image of the media in connection with their influence on the formation of public opinion cannot be fully understood. The study is mainly trying to review the significance of media ownership in India. The methodologies used in the study are mainly secondary in nature.

Keywords: Media Ownership, India Political nexus, commercial Media, public opinion

Introduction

Modern mass media comprise, monitor and regulate a vast majority of the prevalent public discourse and ostensibly influence the dominant perceptions, notions, belief and value systems in our society. This influence has been constantly on the rise globally, especially since the media boom of the Cold War.

The process has seen a striking duality in the form of rapid proliferation of media organizations but an even faster consolidation of holding companies and corporations, leading to largely monolithic ideological slant. From print newspapers and radio to e-papers, news websites, SMS news and the still properly-uncharted terrain of new media over handheld gadgets like Internet enabled smart phones, tablets etc, and communication has come a long way.

The staggering growth in audience size has also invited critique of muzzling divergent voices. Free media, pluralistic approach and

taking cognizance of public opinions, aspirations and views are among the cornerstones of a health media and healthy democracy. In a democratic society, free flow of information and knowledge is among the first few prerequisites and a media, immune to external or internal interferences and deviations, is but integral and instrumental in orchestrating a successful democracy. A free media ensures proper flow of knowledge to enable citizens in a democratic politico-administrative structure for making informed, correct and responsible choices. The free flow of information also makes sure that there is a check and balance performances of elected representatives about their sworn duties and responsibilities. In similar way, media is also working on the concept of materialization of content and advertisement playing a very demanding role in present media (Singh,Ojha 2019). According to a report on Indian media ownership published

by Reporters Without Borders, India has 118,239 registered publications including 38,933 weekly newspapers, monthly magazines, 36,564 monthly magazines and 17,160 daily newspapers while the country also sports over 880 satellite channels, more than 550 FM and community radio stations, over 380 news channels, raising it among the largest media markets of the world. (Reporters Without Borders, 2019)

The 1960s saw tightening grip of the government on the newspaper industry with the 1962 Newsprint Control Order. Newsprint allocation was limited by quota and that had to be approved by the RNI with a proof of circulation from a Chartered Accountant. At least 70 percent of the newsprint had to be compulsorily purchased from the State-run producers while the rest 30 percent could be imported only through the State Trading Corporation (STC).

The Press Council of India also acted as a tool to regulate the media, under the regime of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi even though her father Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru was a vocal opponent of press regulation. Her Press Council formation dated back to the recommendation of the First Press Commission, which suggested a compulsory press council, though the same never got voted in the Lok Sabha and was only resuscitated by Prime Minister Gandhi.

Changing dynamics of Media and Politics

Much of political upheavals and turmoil during the period of Mrs Gandhi including the Emergency declared on June 25, 1975, were blamed on the media. There were notorious instances of harassing the media by cutting power lines to the newspaper press. During this time, several prominent

newspaper owners like Ramnath Goenka of *The Indian Express* came in direct confrontation with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and was instrumental in engineering the Janata Party government in the elections that followed the Emergency. (Verghese, 2005, 2017)

The growth of Indian language newspapers can be traced from 1977 till 1999 and he writes that the hike in average literacy rates, rise of capitalism, coupled with the technological growth during this period contributed to the newspapers and periodicals during this time. (Jeffrey, 1997)

Certainly, the media in the present scenario is very much associated with global politics and power politics; therefore, there is a well-marked impact of politics and power on the media, enhancing the phenomenon of power-based media ownership. (AK Singh, Ojha, Misra, 2023)

Next in the line were afternoon dailies like *Mid Day*, *Times of India's Evening News* etc., all published in cross media ownership pattern. The cross media ownership and integration through increasing media convergence continued throughout the decade. But a new phenomenon started in the meanwhile; magazines had started to emerge in the Indian market. Though *India Today* started off as an independent magazine in the mid 1970s, it soon gained the status of a group with cross media and conglomerate media ownership.

Newspaper owners soon shifted to publishing lifestyle magazines like *Stardust*, *Savvy*, *Debonair* and *Society*, before moving on to supplements in regular publications like '*Colour*', '*Mid Day Multimedia*', '*The Saturday Times*', '*The Sunday Review*', '*Brand Equity*' etc. It is

estimated that almost 80 percent of the total advertising revenue of the time went to print alone around 1980, since commercial television hadn't yet started. *Doordarshan*, the radio and cinema got a meagre proportion of the advertising revenue.

Tracing the evolution of Indian media ownership

After the Indian Broadcasting Company was sold off in 1930, the central government took the control of radio broadcasting. It was known to people as Indian Broadcasting Service and in 1936, it was rechristened as the 'All India Radio' and in 1957 it was named as 'Akashvani.' Comprised of around 200 stations of All India Radio, there are separate channels of around 30 stations. Those channels are for commercial broadcasting in addition to three commercial broadcasting centers. Located in Delhi, the AIR's news services division broadcasts English news bulletins and other major language. The News Service Division carries out news making including talks and several kinds of programmes related to information that are broadcast on national network.

The radio's national channel was made to order on May 18 in 1988. In November, 1967, the All India Radio's commercial broadcasting service was established on a trial basis from the popular Vivid Bharti Centers.

Since 1990, the government lost its control on the broadcasting media with the passing of the Prasar Bharti Act. With this, the AIR has officially become an autonomous body since September 22 in 1997.

Many have analyzed media consolidation in many ways. One of these interpretations classify the consolidation process to take

place in three ways – cross media, vertical integration and conglomerate ownership consolidation. These types of ownership in the media sector are included of cross-media ownership in the print, radio and TV. This consolidation pertains to vertical integration of the media market cutting across content creation, carrying and distribution in television, radio or both. The prominence of each section of the market share in these media formats relates to a set geographical boundary for both these segments. (Sarkar, 2013)

Naturally when people like R Jagannathan protested TRAI's observations and suggested the recommendations needed to be "thrown in the nearest dustbin", Nahata and Ambani came out to extend their support in this case. Jagannathan's observations were then extensively published in the editorial of website he was directing at the time, which had ownership conglomeration with CNN-IBN, CNBC Awaaz, CNBC TV18, IBN7, IBN Lokmat and Firstpost. Three ministries including the ministry of information and broadcasting, ministry of corporate affairs and the Finance ministry were both then headed by Arun Jaitley. Jaitley, who is said to have maintained favourable relationship with both media and media owners, was also close to Sharma, who was sidelined as well for a ministerial berth due to a defamation suit involving Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

The risk in concentration of media ownership

In Indian media laws pertaining to media concentration, cross, vertical or horizontal media integration are highly fragmented and often, there are no clear definitions of

‘concentration’. For example, the country doesn’t have an overarching *lex specialis* to regulate the media sector but simply hands over the responsibility to Competition Commission of India (CCI) to adjudicate in cases of mergers and acquisitions, anti-competition agreements etc.

In the case of Indian television, print or Internet service providers, there is no legal specific definition which delineates the functional parameters of ‘horizontal concentration’ of ownership, nor any particular threshold or limit as such, depending on objective calculations or estimations.

In the case of cross-media ownership concentration, the data is far more elusive, especially owing to the absence of financial data of the top eight media organizations which have highest revenue generation across all media sectors like print, television, radio etc. These media organizations are Zee News, TV Today Network, ABP Group, Network 18, HT Media, The Times Group, DB Corporation Limited and Prasad Bharati. Among the more important mergers and acquisitions that are changing the face of Indian media as we speak, are Sun Network and Network-18, which joined in a strategic alliance in 2010 and came up with *Sun18 Media Services*. *Sun18* offered over 30 channels across all platforms in India through a wide array of distribution networks including terrestrial cable, DTH, IPTV and HITS. Similarly, *Star Den Media Services Private Limited* and *Zee Turner Limited* joined each other in a 50:50 joint venture in 2011. It was called the ‘*Pro Media Enterprise*’.

Recent scenario

Many of these media owning companies present a simple shareholding picture, which can easily delineate the guiding force behind the concerned media. However, several other media organizations have a complex web of subsidiary companies, which criss-cross each other in ownership, creating an elusive and obscure ownership relationship between owners and the media they own.

Birla shares in India Today Group can be heavily confusing, since their shareholding structures of over 24 companies often stand out with cross-media ownership, a pattern which can be found in Essel Group and Zee Media Corporation, which is owned by Dr. Subhash Chandra. The shareholding structures in those media are subtly veiled by many inter-connected and cross-owned subsidiary companies.

The Media Ownership Monitor India report studied 58 leading media outlets of the India and concluded that the Indian print media market is ‘*highly concentrated*’. As per readership is concerned, four outlets – Dainik Jagran, Hindustan, Amar Ujala and Dainik Bhaskar together cater three out of four readers or have a 76.45 percent of readership share within the national Hindi language market. This is a trend commonly found in all regional media markets of the country including Bengali, Punjabi, Kannada, Odiya, Gujarati, Urdu, Assamese and Marathi language media.

Conclusion

Two hundred and forty years back since the first newspaper was published in India – *Hickey’s Gazette*, the national mediascape has received a series of dailies, periodicals and other modern media in succession. Over 120 newspapers and periodicals were

published between 1780 when the first newspaper emerged in this country till 1947, when the country became free from British colonialism. Till then, the Indian media was predominantly a carrier of the national awakening, even amidst strict government restrictions in the first half of the 19th Century, the Amherst regulation of 1826.

When the British colonizers were leaving India, the structure of Indian media ownership was mostly individual, except a few contemporary large media houses like the Times of India, The Indian Express etc. The broadcast sector was purely State owned and private enterprises were not allowed to operate till the 1990s. Autonomy, even on paper was absent till 1997. Hence, the media ownership, which was mostly individual, and hence, pluralistic has come a long way to the situation today, where even media regulators are at a fix to determine the extent of cross media ownership and precise stock holding position of one media company over another.

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