

# CIRCULATION, TRP, PAGE VIEW MATTER, NO MORE ETHICS AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Prof. Debanjan Banerjee**

**Asst. Professor, Department of Media & Communication Studies, NSHM  
Knowledge Campus, Kolkata**

**Abstract:** Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together or Publicity – publicity - publicity is the greatest moral factor and force in our public life. Quoting perpetual proverbs of the most responsible profession of the millennium, Communication vis-à-vis Media. Ignorance will not be treated as bliss if you ignore the importance of this sector and the people they serve. Unquestionably the mentioned sector is the most dominant in today’s perspective. Trillion dollars are invested across the globe and million dollars are coming as Return on Investment. A colossal chunk of world population is the consumer of this domain and India is not an exception. An astute rightly said, if your “consumers” are contented you are the emperor otherwise will grind no doubt. Many believe the doctrine in theoretical perspective but seldom implement in reality. No body bothers about any corporate social responsibility. The paper will try to identify the pain of the consumers in media industry – how they are deprived, cheated and used as an instrument of extracting money and on the contrary what media is suppose to do for protecting its consumers and the society.

**Key words:** business, communication, profit, media, money.

## **Introduction**

Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together or publicity, publicity, publicity is the greatest moral factor and force in our public life. Quoting the incessant proverbs of Joseph Pulitzer, the famous American newspaper publisher to justify the importance of media vis-à-vis the fourth estate in today’s global village. No doubt the world is revolving in its axis. From politics to business, sports to entertainment or science to environment the influence of media is breathtaking - love or hate but you cannot ignore.

The so called responsible, glamorous and spectacular keyword “Media” has become the buzzword of the century. Trillion dollars are invested, and billions are coming as ROI – return on investment out of this. Leading businessmen and houses of the world are investing money (India is not an exception) in this profession and extracting profit. Definitely the business is generating revenue leads to more employability and many positive vibes of the overall growth of the economy. But every light has got a proportionate shadow, and sometimes it often becomes too detrimental when the light is large, important, influential and decisive.

The fourth estate, the savior, the watchdog of the society is nowadays often being accused of doing malpractices just for the sake of money. The stigma has been labeled that the men behind this noble industry is only making money and satisfying the power corridor of their respective choice. No more ethics – only Circulation, Page Views and TRP (Television Rating Point) matter.

Being a pillar of society and the savior of democracy media should have some responsibility. American society of Newspaper editors prescribed some canons of journalism (for media industry) pertaining to this.

- a. Media should be **responsible**;
- b. **Freedom of the press** is to be guarded;
- c. **Independence** and **prioritizing public interest** more;
- d. Media should be **truthful, sincere and accurate** while transmitting information;
- e. **Impartiality** be the only criterion;
- f. **Fair Play** is the key word and
- g. **Decency** should be maintained.

### **Ethical aspects of Media:**

Ethics implies the norms which media must uphold and cherish in order to keep the integrity and sanctity of the profession intact. According to Webster's New World Dictionary "ethics" is a system or code of morals, of a particular person, religion, group, profession etc. In the modern era, when the "business" angle is gaining priority in the media profession; it requires quite an effort on the part of a scribe to function in accordance with the ethical norms of the profession and corporate social responsibility is one of such morals.

Several codes have been formulated from time to time, to guide the profession and its owners and professionals. Press, being the conscience – keeper of the public, must be protected, and the codes are an exercise in this direction. In recent times, when several forces are up in arms for curbing the press freedom and are trying to malign the press, the codes have gained an added significance. In this spirit many codes were framed and all of them dealt about responsibility of the profession towards society. And being a profession the basic corporate responsibility of protection of consumers and the society as a whole.

In 1968, the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference (AINEC) formulated a code of ethics. Other codes such as the Parliamentary Code (1976) and the International Code (1991) were also proposed to give direction to the press. And all of these dealt with the protection of its consumers so as the society and also reminded the ethical obligation of corporate social responsibility.

The above canons are no doubt omnipresent in the rule books but in reality it has been observed by the common mass (read media consumers) and the researchers of the piece over the decades that the following doctrines are habitually devastated by the owners of

the media houses in the so called developed democracy, and India is not an exception. No SR no CSR - only Circulation, TRP, Hits and Clicks lead to Profit proved to be the sole and exclusive mission.

The political pressure, the unholy nexus between political parties and media owners, pressure from advertisers and big business houses are completely tarnishing the media content, and on the other they convert it in most of the cases into a biased, false, inaccurate, manipulative and indecent stuff- an utter juxtaposition of the canons, and a sheer example of crucifixion of consumers.

### **Ethics – Contemporary Scenario and Compulsion**

Indian press has in their favor a hidden strength for historical reasons. They contributed immensely to the reawakening of the nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Media played a pivotal role for the struggle of independence. The role of media was really noble. It is this glorious history that vests Indian newspapers with legitimacy not found to the same extent in other institutions of society.

The nation press, as a result, has rarely been a target of public criticism quite unlike in most other democratic countries. Apart from this, in a society with a long history of illiteracy, people have blind faith in media. If anything is published (nowadays broadcasted or uploaded) in media cannot be objected or denied by anybody whatsoever. The blue eyed boy who cannot be questioned under any circumstances. Truly media on those days were pure, intention was sacred and dissemination of information was accurate and unbiased. The fourth estate was ethical a savior of society. But nowadays the scenario has changed completely nevertheless an utter juxtaposition. The protector is playing sometimes the role of a destroyer – the PEN has become a sharp sword made to crack the consumer. The one and only mission is Circulation, TRP and Page Views and the vision is PROFIT by hook or by crook. Many things are responsible for such an unfair trade practices.

- a. **Big Business:** Contemporary newspapers, magazines, channels, news portals are big businesses, typical of many industries in their mergers, consolidations and potential for monopoly. The whole aspect of ownership and control of media, therefore, needs to be carefully looked at before one can examine the question of ethics in today's journalism, who holds control over finance, editorial policy, information sources, hiring and firing of personnel? Are the newspapers and news channels are presenting the facts in a balanced manner or are there a certain editorial viewpoint which interprets these facts before they are printed or telecasted? All newspapers, channels and news portals, even the smallest of them, are shaped by answers to these and similar questions. Few houses definitely try to protect the larger interest of the media consumers and society but many want to milk the medium for profits and forget their basic obligations to society. There are numerous instances of owners and editors who abused their position to gain political clout or fatten their fortune.

- b. **Accountability:** A free and independent media is a custodian of public interest. Almost a century before Joseph Pulitzer thought the press would never tolerate injustice or corruption. Never be a part to a party, always oppose the privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing or broadcasting news always be drastically independent never be afraid to attack.
- c. **Vested Interest:** The press has vested interest in chaos. To attract the maximum audience, it emphasizes the exceptional rather than the representative, the sensational rather than the significance. It pins its faith on the Northcliffe formula that power, position, money and sex make news. And notwithstanding the fact Indian press also follow the same doctrine and cover in detail the private lives of the Bollywood celebrities and the umpteenth marriages of the daughters of leading politicians. The important relevant issues of the society and development stories of the country are impudently ignored. Christopher Thomas of the Times points out that this penchant for sensationalism is just one of the rudimentary principles of journalism per se. He laments “Journalism involves rummaging around in other people’s closets so smell their duty socks. The stronger the smell the better the story.”
- d. **Negative Aspects:** It is the negative aspects of politics that dominate the headlines: factionalism, splits, backbiting, floor – crossing, misuse of influence and so on. All of these, no doubt, merit coverage; people take legitimate interest in the behavior of their elected representatives. But if disciplined behavior or good constituency work attracts less notice, the impact of the press on politics may well prove to be disruptive. G. K. Chesterton put it delightfully: “Journalism largely consists in saying Lord Jones is dead to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive.”
- e. **Competitive Business:** It is Edwin Newman, a professional journalist, once confessed: News is a business, a competitive business. People go into it to make a living. News organizations exist to make profits. The element of competition has much to do with what we do and it is vital.
- f. **Background:** With immense competition in the corporate sector following the opening up of the economy, there are now fierce attempts by business interests to purchase either individual journalists or newspaper owners. Today, the press has become a battle ground for political and corporate warfare. It serves as a kind of leverage for vested interests through selective use of information to embarrass political and business rivals. In the process, the media often forsakes its traditional role as a watch dog and tends to become a lap dog of the power – monger politicians. It also raises thorny questions on the difference between reporting and exploiting the news.

- g. Spin – doctors: With the rise of a species called spin – doctors, who manipulate media on behalf of political bosses and business houses, the Press has settled down to the comfort of being a part of the establishment elite. An inevitable fall out of this growing disillusionment is that the image of the Press as the guardian of society is being fast replaced by that of an opportunists time – server, out to make a quick buck in troubled times.
- h. Double Standards: There is a plenty of evidence to suggest that media owners compel their employees in many occasions to go for double standard reporting. They would preach about the need to uproot superstitious beliefs and give a lip – service to promote scientific temper. But in practice, they would give an elaborate coverage or allot long slots for astrological predictions.

### **Media and its responsibilities**

The press is undoubtedly an industry, a business, but with a difference. What is published, telecasted or uploaded, matter the minds of readers, viewers and surfers. Media (both the owners and practitioners) therefore, have some social obligations. It must act with a profound sense of responsibility towards the society. The practitioner (read journalist) and the owners of the show have to serve the consumers with fair, positive, relevant and timely information in a palatable, digestive and entertaining format. Needs to cater the weaker sections of the society and try to involve them in the nation’s process of development. The cardinal principles categorized the responsibilities under three major heads: Social, Professional and Legal.

**Social** - The social responsibility of media is of paramount importance. It is unquestionably recognized that “journalism” is the mirror of society”. The journalist acts as a spokesman of mankind. He / She must therefore provide a truthful, comprehensive, unbiased, and intelligent account of the events in a context that gives meaning. Facts and opinions must be clearly differentiated by that effective colander namely “objectivity”.

The press must serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism. The media practitioner should act as an effective medium for the two-way communication between readers and different organizations of the society.

**Legal** – Publication of baseless, graceless and manipulative material should be avoided at all costs in order to safeguard the practitioner himself and his organization from the legal entanglement. Libel, Slander, Contempt of Court, Copyright, Blasphemy, and Sedition etc. are always a “live wire” on which a sensible media man dreads to tread. The professional and its owner must be well aware of the various laws relating to the press; and must always act within the limits of the law and should not infringe them.

**Professional** – Apart from the mentioned obligations, the media professional have some professional obligations to abide by. Disseminating information in all circumstances, sometimes normal and sometimes otherwise. The information provided helps the media consumers to make up their minds on vital issues; this also have a role in shaping their

attitudes. In unusual times, a journalist and his respective owner (as in many a case in the democratic set up and libertarian concept where owner's will is decisive not the ethics or canon) have to think fast and they must not lose their composure and sense of objectivity.

In modern times, news is competitive business. In most of the time this profit making exercise leads to hasty, biased, ambiguous and sensational reporting. A true media professional must avoid such misdemeanor and keep his integrity intact. He / she must never jump to premature, hasty and incorrect conclusions. The so called popular "opinion polls" much in vogue these days, are certainly an exercise in premature judgment and they do interfere in the electoral process.

On contentious and sensitive issues, the professional responsibility of a good scribe is to pursue the event and report comprehensively but judiciously. "Follow up" is a very desirable attribute of a good media professional, and this should be put to use as often as possible.

Truly the mentioned ethics are there in books but rarely practice and performed in reality. The owner is the King, the power corridor the Emperor and the paid media professional, the so called glamorous journalist is nothing but a pawn in this intricate chess board. Whatever the Emperor, King believe, think, introspect is reflected in the content.

The political pressure, the nexus between political parties and media owners, pressure from advertisers and big business houses are completely jeopardizing the media content, and on the other they convert it in most of the cases into a predisposed, counterfeit, erroneous, scheming and licentious stuff- an utter juxtaposition of the canons. Profit has become the only mantra, and even sometimes the news are purchased and sold – unfortunately the fourth estate is turning into paid estate.

### **Fourth Estate or Paid Estate**

The dreaded virus in today's trillion dollar media industry is "Paid News" as news can be created, news can be manufactured and news can be made or purchased if you pay. A mammoth amount of money is involved in the industry where the above malpractices take place. Contents are brutally manipulated for serving the powerful section of the society. As a matter of fact Fourth Estate (Read Media) is losing its importance and a stigma has already leveled on this – Fourth Estate has become Paid Estate. India, the czar of modern democracy is the worst victim of such evil.

In the year 2009 Election Commission (EC) was asked by the Press Council of India (Watchdog) to define what constitutes "paid political news". It further stated that the Press Council would have to play a larger role in addressing the issue.

In a presentation made to the print industry watchdog, the EC listed the guidelines that restrict political entities from misusing media platforms during electioneering and also enumerated steps taken by it in the past to check the "menace".

It also said that the Commission would, in particular, like some guidelines to be laid down by the Press Council to determine what is “paid news”, so that the expenditure incurred by political parties and candidates on such paid news may become accountable.

Later on it was defined “Paid news is run to pass off an advertisement, a piece of propaganda, alike a news and advertisement...pass that as news, pretend that it is news that is “paid news”. Paid news does not disclose to the reader that this information has been paid for”.

Definition drafted but no action has been taken whatsoever. Innumerable numbers of examples are flying in the media arena of our country.

An interesting observation that the political class is more honest than the media when it comes to ‘paid news’ during elections, judging by the fact that several poll candidates have owned up to this corrupt practice. At least, after the Election Commission and the Press Council of India shot off notices to them and held inquiries into the matter. They have acknowledged guilt by belatedly adding their “news” buying expenses to their election statement of accounts. Some candidates have accepted in writing that they bought what are now called, somewhat oxymoronically, “Paid News Advertisements.” But not a single one of the newspapers they say they gave their money to has accepted any wrongdoing. These are not just any papers. In readership terms, they include three top-ranked dailies.

### **Objective**

The endeavor of this paper is to pinpoint the pain of the consumers of communication vis-à-vis media and health care sectors in Indian perspective – how they are deprived, embittered and used as an instrument of extracting profit.

### **Research Methodology**

For the present study, the researchers have used the data collected by a survey of readers, viewers and surfers of leading newspapers, television news channels (including vernacular) and news portals of Kolkata metropolitan city. Besides, some leading case studies of paid news against some leading Indian politicians are also taken into account.

### **Findings**

In the Indian system the maximum chunk of the business is controlled by the leading businessmen and business houses. And all these people are making it as a ruthless money making business where Circulation, TRP, Page Views and Advertisements get maximum importance not ethics. In addition to that they take many advantages from the power corridor and vice – versa, and ultimately that is reflected in the content which is full of bias, inaccurate, manipulative and indecent by nature. Consumers are crucified brutally and in many a case they are also a victim of **A Hobson's choice**. On the other when the consumers are having more options but still the inflictions remain the same as all them

are united (read the owners of the trade) when the question of unethical money making is concerned. You really cannot **ESCAPE**.

Some case studies can pinpoint the above mentioned problems in a nutshell:

**Case Study 1:**

The Election Commission delivered a historic verdict by disqualifying Uttar Pradesh MLA Umlesh Yadav from contesting again for three years for not including in her official accounts of expenditure the amount she spent on advertisements in two Hindi dailies that were masquerading as news items.

**Case Study 2:**

The blatant infringements of the electoral code of conduct by Ashok Chavan, the former Chief Minister of one of India's most populous states, Maharashtra, when he returned to power in the 2009 Assembly elections are especially well-documented. In late 2009, the journalist P. Sainath published a series of exposes that showed the extent to which the political class and the fourth estate were in bed together, leading to the hollowing out of democracy by big money.

**Case Study 3:**

The EC had begun proceedings against Madhu Koda (Ex Jharkhand CM) for his alleged failure to submit his poll expense account in a 2009 by-election. The allegation against Koda was that he paid huge sums of money to various newspapers for a favorable coverage of his poll campaign.

**Case Study 4:**

On January 15, 2013, the EC found that Madhya Pradesh Cabinet Minister Narottam Mishra “failed to lodge his accounts of his election expenses in the manner prescribed by law.” He faces possible disqualification. The EC’s notice to Dr. Mishra concerns 42 news items on him during the November 2008 state elections. These, it pointed out, “read more like election advertisement(s) in favour of you alone rather than (as) news reports.” The EC names four newspapers in its notice: *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Nai Duniya*, *Aacharan* and *Dainik Datia Prakash*. *Dainik Bhaskar* is the second most-read daily in the country.

**Case Study 5:**

In many cases, the route to exposure followed the pattern set in the classic case of the former Congress Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Ashok Chavan. His 2009 poll campaign for the State legislature drew scores of full pages of “news.” Not a single one of those pages ever mentioned the name of Madhav Kinhalakar, his rival for the Bhokar seat. In a 2009-10 investigation into paid news, *The Hindu* found a hagiographical article on Mr. Chavan appear word for word in three major rival publications. In two of them, on the same day, in all of them under different by-lines (*The Hindu*, Nov. 30, 2009).

Examples are numerous and frightening but unfortunately no stringent action has been taken to curb such obnoxious practices.



## Conclusion

Who will bell the cat when the cat is cunning, opportunist and powerful indeed. The owners of the big show (read media industry) are really powerful in that way. They are not VIP but they deal with the VIP's. The give and take policy goes on. I am here to save you, and I do expect something on return. And this is the real picture and destiny of Communication Content of our country.

Ethics can only be retrieved if proper law and monitoring system are incorporated with immediate effect. Prasar Bharati (Autonomous body), Press Council (Watchdog nodal agency) should be conferred absolute power and the existing press laws should be immediately revamped can be a solution to curb the menace. A stringent punishment provisions have to be incorporated in the existing Press Law which can lead to cancellation of license, a huge fine, imprisonment, or both and a non – bail able warrant for the offender. Moreover Information and Broadcasting Ministry will have to monitor all these and should be accountable and answerable for any irregularities. It is high time to uproot the venomous virus otherwise the existence of the fourth estate will be in stake and that will further lead to the destruction of democratic system sooner or later.

Undisputedly profit is obligatory but not at the cost of ignoring the consumers as well as the society. Enhancing intangible assets would be more perceptive rather to go for petty profits. It may be beneficial for short run but not in long. And it is judicious to sacrifice the battles (for consumers) for the sake of war. .

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