



Research Article

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Corporate Cupidity Impacting News Framing and Media Discourse: A Threat to Media Credibility in India

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the sustainability crisis in Indian media, focusing on how corporate greed affects news framing and media discourse. This shift raises concerns about journalistic integrity, independence, and the democratic role of the media. The study uses the propaganda model of political economy and reception theory as theoretical frameworks. The quantitative and qualitative have been used. Preliminary findings reveal that corporate greed has negatively impacted news framing and media discourse in India, influencing editorial decisions and compromising journalistic ethics. The study emphasizes the need for regulatory interventions, transparency, and accountability to address corporate greed in Indian media.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate cupidity refers to corporations' excessive greed and self-interest, often leading media institutions to prioritize their profits over social and environmental concerns (Cho & Patten, 2007; Seligman, 2022). Due to corporate cupidity, a considerable sustainable crisis has raised serious concerns and significant questions about a range of interconnected challenges that threaten the long-term viability and integrity of the Indian media industry. Due to the compulsion of grand narcissism, increasing competition, changing news consumption patterns, and declining revenues make Indian media more vulnerable to corporate influence, compromising their independence and ability to produce quality journalism, news content, and media discourse (Janhavi, Lohat, 2020). Corporate pressures raise ethical concerns and erode journalistic ethics by prioritizing profit-making sensational news. Indian news channels are bombarding subjective, uninvestigated fake news and political biases,

which severely undermine the credibility of Indian media (Bepari, 2020). Several terms like "paid media", "sickular media " and "presstitutes " have been used to criticize current media practices, news framing and media discourse. Corporate-owned media limits pluralism and diversity. The concentration of media ownership can stifle dissent, ignore marginalized voices, restrict the representation of diverse perspectives, and monopolize the flow of information. This crisis raises significant questions about the role of media in a democratic society where they are more concerned about generating revenue than providing accurate, unbiased and comprehensive information to the public. That is why allegations of bias, sensationalism, and prioritizing corporate interests over public welfare have plagued the Indian media (Roy, 2011).

Since Independence, Indian media has recorded sustainable growth in technology, infrastructure, operations upgrades, and increasingly rampant media outlets. Nevertheless, present media segmentations have

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emerged with different needs for news consumption by other sections of society. This brought a boom in the number of media. Until 2017, India has over 100 news channels, with a reach of 161 million TV households, 94,067 newspapers, and more than 200 million Internet users (Chadha, 2017). Another report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism claims that till 2021, India has 392 news channels, which include national, regional, and private players (Journalism, 2021). Now, corporate media is fulfilling the demand for news and information.

The existing research has comprehensively investigated the media landscape and explored the detrimental consequences of corporate cupidity on news framing and media discourse and their impact on the audience. This paper explicitly fills the research gap by investigating the following questions: How do corporate profit motives shape news framing and media discourse in the Indian mediascape, and what are the portents for articulating diverse voices and the expressions of marginalized communities? Therefore, this paper explores how the test of corporate cupidity bears on the sustainability of journalism and public opinion, revealing various intertwined challenges that both industries are confronted with and the related threats to democratic processes. The present research output will yield a better understanding of the presently ongoing Indian media crisis and also extract some directions toward the restoration of ethical journalism, which conforms to the principles of accuracy and impartiality.

Literature Review

The literature review aims to explore the impact of corporate cupidity on news framing and media discourse in India by using the propaganda model of the political economy of mass communication and reception theory. The propaganda model offers a framework for analyzing how corporate interests influence Indian media institutions and serves as a tool for creating propaganda news to mobilize and support special interests rather than objective reporting. These models are more relevant in the Indian media landscape, where corporate ownership has increased, influenced, and shaped news content and media discourse than ever before. The propaganda model's core components – corporate ownership, advertising, media reliance or media sourcing, flak, and anti-communal – provide a lens to assess the sustainability crisis in Indian media. At the same time, the reception theory helps to understand the audience's receiving perception in negotiating and contesting media messages.

Ownership and Corporate Influence

The first filter of the propaganda model is corporate ownership. Corporate alliance in the Indian media has steered the power into the hands of a few influential business houses, resulting in a conflict of interest and compromising media organizations' journalism ethics

and integrity. Its impact is evident in Indian media when they failed to ask critical questions to NDA led government several times, such as demonetization, handling the COVID-19 pandemic, CAA19, CAB, and NRC protests, farmers' protests, increasing unemployment and inflation, poverty and economic policies and promote jingoistic sentiments by framing news as per the government line (Sharma, & Pegu, 2023). According to a study, primarily regional and national news channels are owned by business groups whose significant interests are finance and power gain (Kohli-Khandekar, 2012). This influences editorial decisions, news framing and agenda setting. The First Press Commission of 1954 expressed concern over media ownership, as discussed in the Second Press Commission 1982 (corporate ownership, 2018). Ramoji Group started a so-called 'chit fund' company and eventually founded the Eenadu newspapers and ETV TV in August 1995. Uttar Pradesh-based businessman Subrata Roy Sahara, who started his business with chit-fund and other finance, construction, hotels, and information technology businesses, started Samay TV, a national news channel, and several regional language news channels in March 2003. Telecommunications, metals, fertilizers, and synthetic fibres-based business Aditya Birla Group announced a 27.5 per cent stake in Aroon Purie-controlled Living Media India in May 2012 (adityabirla.com, 2012). Since 2014, a big clamour has started over corporate ownership, biased reporting, and the suppression of dissenting voices (Friend & Singer 2015). In 2015- 2016, Magsaysay award-winning journalist Ravish Kumar from NDTV India used the term "Godi Media" to target pro-government media houses and TV channels. Journalist Ravish Kumar has questioned the ownership of these media houses and their influence on shaping the news and media discourse. The term "Presstitutes" has been used against the Modi government and addressed as propaganda tools for Congress and Left parties (S.T. 2022). Multinational conglomerate company Reliance Industries Limited has acquired Network18 media company, established in 1996 by journalist Raghav Bahl, and extensively producing news in business and general (Raman, 2014). Another acquisition occurred in December 2022 when Indian multinational conglomerate Adani Group took over New Delhi Television India (NDTV India). Adani Group's core businesses lie in edible oils and foods, integrated agro products and integrated resource solutions, roads, airports, solar manufacturing, defence and aerospace, data centres, mining, and water management (Economic Times, 2022).

Advertising Revenue Base

Advertising revenue plays a significant role in the survival of media houses. Substantial Advertising creates a conflict of interest, as media houses prioritize the interests of advertisers over news objectives (Bogart, 2017). Indian media practices are based on grand narcissism, and its primary source of revenue is advertising (Chadha,

2017), which leads to self-censorship and promotion of news content that aligns with their corporate goals and interests. In an interview with medium.com, Columnist P. Sainath stated that Indian media is politically free but imprisoned by profit motive. Thus, media is driven by revenue rather than by objective base reality. News shaping is more influenced by commerce, not for the community's benefit. It is more profit-centred than people-centred. The news and media discourse revolves around narrow corporate greed (bansalsamarth.medium.com). 'Strategic partnerships and private treaties' are some dominant instances which indicate that media companies are driven by advertising revenue and commercial gain. These terms were started by BCCL in 2005 and involve exchanging shares for advertising. Advertising companies and advertisers can offer to captivate equity deals, royalty payments, or real estate exchanges instead of cash. These deals are usually done at discounted rates (Sharma, 2013). This allows media companies to gain an equity stake between 2 and 15%. By participating in these partnerships, media companies can cooperate in building brands and enhancing business value (Medianama, 2010).

Media Sourcing

The third filter of the propaganda model explains media sourcing as elite sourcing. It shapes media narratives according to the interests of the media houses. Different narratives can be seen due to media sourcing not only in India but also across the world. During the Iraq war, considerable disagreement was experienced in news presentations between Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Western Media. This happened due to ignorance of mainstream sources or the inclusion of these sources (Boyd-Barrett, 2004). In the Indian media landscape, these sources are often associated with corporate entities, political relationships or financial gain. Due to this, sometimes the coverage gets distorted, perpetuated, and marginalized, marginalizing alternative perspectives. CAB, CAA, NRC and NPR are the best examples of this section. The anti-CAA agitation is the most significant case in Indian media coverage history. This news made a gigantic clamour and headlines across India and the world since the act was passed on December 11, 2019 (Alam, 2020). The protest started in the northeast states of Manipur, Meghalaya, and Mizoram, and it became intense in Assam. The reason for this protest was different from other ongoing protests across India. The Assam protest over CAA relates to Assam's anti-foreigner agitation for six years, from 1979 to 1985 (Saikia & Chowdhary, 2021). Then, the Congress-led Centre Government Prime Minister, the Late Mrs Indira Gandhi, tried hard to engage with Assam agitation protesters from 1980 to 1984, but no middle way was found (Pisharoty, 2019).

After Mrs Gandhi, the Late Mr Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister, led the peace talks, and an agreement was signed on August 15, 1985, between the Central Government, the

All-Assam Students Union, and the All Assam Sangram Gana Parishad (Baruah, 1986). This agreement is called the Assam Accord. According to Assam Accord Clauses 5 and 6, all foreigners who came to Assam before January 1, 1966, and their names appeared in the voter list for 1967, would be granted India's citizenship. Those who arrived in Assam after January 1, 1966, up to March 24, 1971, would be detected under the Foreigner Act 1946 and Foreigner Tribunal Order 1964. They need to register as a foreigner under the registration of the Foreigner Act of 1939. They would not be deported but would get voting rights after the expiry of 10 years from their detention as foreigners. Anyone who entered Assam after March 25, 1971, needs to be expelled. At that time, citizenship was not granted based on religious persecution. (Pisharoty, 2019). According to the new CAA 2019, due to religious persecution, Indian citizenship will be given to Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, and Parsi communities who have arrived in India before December 31, 2014, from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. They will no longer be treated as illegal immigrants. The cut-off date is a colossal issue in CAA 2019 for the Assamese, as the inflow will affect Assamese identity (Devi, 2020).

Along with this, another protest was going on by those excluded from the NRC list and considered illegal migrants from Bangladesh in India. They were 1.9 million people. The second type of protest got more highlights than real Assam issues that fabricated a religious phobia to polarize and benefit India's ruling party (Devi, 2020; Saikia & Chowdhary, 2021).

Fear of Flak

The fourth filter of the propaganda model focuses on the fear of flak, which can be defined as "governing social institutions possess the power to pressure media to play a propagative role in society. The propaganda model emphasizes the potential consequences of media organizations and journalists deviating from the dominant narrative. In India, media outlets and journalists criticizing the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) policies and setting media agenda in public favour often face legal threats, harassment, and economic pressures. They have also been subject to secret surveillance by different state agencies using the Israeli Pegasus spyware. (Bharadwaj, 2021). World Press Freedom Index survey 2023 indicate that India's press freedom rank dropped to 161 out of 180 countries for journalism (World Press Freedom Index, 2023). In 2020, 67 were imprisoned, and almost 200 were physically assaulted. A free press is essential for democracy, but fear of flak creates a chilling effect, discouraging independent and investigative journalism (Sharma & Pegu, 2023).

Anti-Communism, Biased Ideology:

The propaganda model focused on anti-communism as a dominant ideology. It serves a narrow range of self-serving



interpretations, and biased ideology creates apprehension by exploiting public fear. In the Indian context, it fits by examining the influence of nationalist narratives and political affiliations. Media institutions often align themselves with specific political parties or ideologies, leading them to biased coverage and promoting political agendas. Modi's national populism has been weaponized to control the media. It has directly influenced press freedom. The narrative of nationalist media "reveals the close relationships between politicians, business executives and lobbyists. Due to this, mainstream media mostly fail to take up agendas related to ordinary people and communities. Manipur violence on May 4, 2023, is a better-fit example. Manipur violence news went viral on social media. Indian mainstream media appeared as a snail to cover Manipur news prominently. Manipur violence started due to fake news claiming that a Meitei Nurse was raped and brutally killed by Kuki militants (Soch, 2023). A fact check found that the picture posted on social media was related to an old story of New Delhi in November 2022. It was a case of honour killing. The fight began between two communities of Manipur – Kukis and Meities- until the news was discovered to be fake news. A few Meiteis inebriated young men dragged two Kuki women, physically assaulted them, and paraded them naked in Kangpokpi district in Manipur (Soch, 2023). The violence had not ended since it started, and the state government's role was doubtful. The Indian government imposed Article 355, and a shoot-and-sight order has been imposed. According to some other media reports, the reason behind the enormous ethnic violence in Manipur was a high court order that directed the state government to solicit to include an ST tag for the Meitei community to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry by May 29 (India Today, 2023).

The Rationale for Reception Theory:

The rationale for mentioning the reception theory by Stuart Hall is to understand the audience's behaviour while perceiving media messages, interpreting, and negotiating them in a particular environmental setting (Stuart Hall, 1980, 2005; Rohid, Mahdi 2018; Zaid, 2014). In the context of the sustainable crisis in Indian media, reception theory provides insights into how audiences engage with and make sense of media content influenced by corporate interests (Rohid & Mahdi, 2018). This scenario is considered a journalism crisis as it cannot facilitate critical questions and discourse that affect the lives of ordinary people in the country. The survey data and observation matrix focused on CAA 2019 and Manipur Violence media coverage to understand the comprehensive impact of corporate pressures on journalism practices and the sustainability crisis in Indian media.

Negotiated reading

The reception Theory recognizes the audience's behaviour in the reception and interpretation of media content

(Stuart Hall, 1980). It claimed that the audience shares a specific interpretation framework. In the Indian context, audiences are increasingly aware of the biases and corporate influence within the media landscape. This awareness influences how they consume and interpret news, leading to critical engagement, alternative media consumption, and the formation of counter-narratives (Schrøder, 2019) such as Hindu Rastra, Nationalist Media, Anti Nation, Godi Media, and Media Presstitutes. Journalist Ravish Kumar stated well in this regard that a fake public can lead to a fake republic, a fake political consciousness, and a fake democracy (Sharma & Pegu, 2023).

Encoding and decoding

Reception theory suggests that media houses encode their messages based on their foremost ideology. However, audiences can decode these messages based on social, political, cultural, and personal experiences (mediatheory.net, 2023). In the Indian media, audiences may decode news content differently based on their socio-political backgrounds, challenging the intended meaning and potentially creating alternative interpretations that challenge the dominant narrative (Devi, 2022). According to Ahmad's (2000) study, different ethnic groups interpret television content in diverse and unexpected ways, resulting in varied meanings. Socially bonded and discursive factors, such as religion, institutional culture, work responsibilities, education level, increased educational sponsorships and less dominant groups, play a crucial role in shaping the interpretative meanings of development-oriented programmes.

Counter-Hegemony

Reception theory recognizes the perspective for audiences to resist dominant ideologies and media narratives. It creates spaces for counter-hegemonic discourses (Hagen & Wasko, (2000). In India, alternative media platforms, social media activism, and citizen journalism are gaining prominence as channels for expressing disagreement and dissent and challenging the corporate-dominated media discourse (Makwambeni & Adebayo, 2021). Digital and social media platforms have inspired new practices and encouraged ordinary citizens to share their experiences (Mutsvairo & Columbus, 2012). It facilitates a platform for those citizens who are not media professionals but are willing to share their experiences and contribute to contemporary media discourses (Mhiripiri & Ureke, 2018). Social media and digital platforms have allowed us to give voice to the lowermost populations of India. Moreover, social media and other digital platforms have become new protest drums that subvert hegemonic power, especially in repressive regimes (Mare, 2014).

The review effectively limits the broad topic of media ownership to a discussion on news framing to a corporate interests perspective, which is so evocative of relevance in the Indian media landscape. That focus itself underlines

the gravity with which media ethics and integrity must be discussed.

However, These analyses have benefited from a more critical evaluation of the methodologies and findings in the cited studies and an engagement with the existing literature. Historical cases of media ownership trends in India have formed a vital context for present challenges.

Secondly, the review places a negative connotation on corporate ownership by not shedding light on the positive side, which could include increasing financing for journalism. A balanced view would bring more weight to the discussion. This, therefore, places the research in a better position to develop a finer understanding of how corporate ownership influences media practice through engaging a wide variety of literature and considering other different views.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology consists of the following key components:

The snowball sampling (Parker et al. (2019) technique was applied as the respondents shared similar professions or a common understanding of news framing and journalism practices.

Due to applying snowball sampling techniques, there are several potential biases may be introduced in the present research, such as:

Social Desirability Bias

The participants may provide answers they perceive as more socially acceptable or congruent with the majority, especially in controversial issues such as company power. This may result in underreporting dissenting opinions and uncaring experiences, therefore distortion.

Regional and Cultural Bias

Focusing on certain media professionals and specific communities might introduce biases related to geography or culture. This would result in an incomplete understanding of the media landscape, as the experiences of media personnel in urban centres could not reflect those of rural areas or other regions.

Confirmation Bias

This is the tendency of a researcher to look for or emphasize information that confirms a hypothesis or expectation, wherein a researcher interprets his findings in support of the pre-held bias.

The author used mixed methods in the study to mitigate the impact of potential biases and the validity of the responses. Combining qualitative and quantitative research methods can provide a more balanced view and allow the exploration of unexpected findings that may counter initial hypotheses.

The quantitative data was obtained through a survey, and qualitative data was collected through observation to gauge corporate influence on news framing, media

discourse, and the quality and diversity of news and assess the effect of corporate influence on the representation of diverse voices, marginalized communities, and alternative perspectives in Indian journalism.

The author conducted a comprehensive survey using close-ended objective questions, which helped to gather precise and quantifiable data. Two sets of questionnaires have been carefully designed to match the research objective to ensure the accuracy of the findings. An online Google doc link was created and distributed through social media, using WhatsApp, as it is the most accessible platform to reach the target respondents. As a result, the author received 305 responses from three distinct focus groups, carefully selected to ensure their relevance to the research objective.

Media Professionals (102)

The survey participants include Journalists, Photo-journalists, Video- editors, Editors, Subeditors, Channel Heads, Input-out department, and Animation media personnel from NDTV India, BBC India News, Zee News, ABP News, TV9 Bharatvarsha, TV18, CNN, R.Bharat, Sahara TV, Doordarshan, Samachar Plus, India News, Times of India, Navbharat Times, Indian Express, Bloomberg TV, Gujrat Samachar, ETV, ABP Ganga, Asia Times, and Swaraj Express. The rationale for choosing a diverse range of media professionals is to examine their experience and challenges due to corporate ownership.

Media Student Interns (158)

Media student interns from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Satya Group of Institutions Noida, Guru Govind Sigh Indraprastha University Dwaraka New Delhi, Institute of Management Studies Ghaziabad, and Galgotias University Greater Noida have also been included in this research. Media student data have been included in this research because they have interned in different media outlets and are ready to join media organizations after graduation. They are future journalists, and their perceptions and experiences are also important regarding the current media landscape.

Assamese Societies (45)

The survey includes members of Assamese societies residing in Bangalore and Assam. They are included in the survey due to their connection with Assam, the North East Indian region, and their better understanding of CAA 19 and CAB protests. Their response is significant to understanding the depth of the Indian media crisis over CAA 19 and CAB protests. The survey data has been gathered from Delhi, NCR., Hyderabad because these cities are the main centres of TV journalism. Assam is also included because it is a prominent state in North East India and witnessed the CAA19 protest.

The author utilized an observation matrix to collect qualitative data to seek additional information to

understand the complex factors influencing news framing and media discourse in India. It focuses on corporate benefit, corporate interest, shared a common interest, advertising, TRP dependency, the corporate benefit, sourcing, media reliance on the government, not being vocal against the government, and ideological biases. The criteria for the observation matrix are derived from the propaganda model, which helps identify the impact of corporate cupidity on media content, news framing, and media discourse. Twelve news stories on Manipur violence coverage in different media outlets have been observed. The rationale for choosing Manipur Violence for qualitative observation data is that it has recently made national and international headlines. It also indicates how mainstream corporate media worked as a snail to cover the event and failed to fulfil their democratic responsibility. Manipur violence took place on May 4, 2023, and its video went viral on social media internationally, but national media appeared moderate in covering the news.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The survey responses were analyzed by using IBM SPSS*Statistics, version 25. The data is coded and entered into SPSS software program for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, summarize the data. The graphs and tables are used to describe 305 responses. The below graph clearly shows the popularity and viewership of news channels in India. India Today, NDTV India, BBC, Zee News ABP News, TV9 Bharatvarsh, R. Bharat, and CNN are the most-watched channels. The finding suggests that news channels still significantly impact the Indian masses, making it essential to consider the perspective of media students' interns, Assamese society members and media professionals.

The data collected with a mean score of 2.02 indicates that the majority of respondents are from Uttar Pradesh, India, but they reside in Delhi, NCR, for work and study. The survey also included respondents from Assam and other states. With a mean score of 1.69, the findings indicate that most respondents are from the 18 to 35 age group, with the right to vote and a good understanding of media functioning. Furthermore, the mean score of 1.54 for professionals highlights that most respondents are media professionals and students. It's important to note that the

inclusion of respondents from Assam has contributed to understanding news framing on CAA and NRC.

The survey results indicate that the received mean on the ideology of media houses falls within the range of 3.54 with 350, with a standard deviation of 1.541 and a variance of 2.374. A significant percentage of 61.7% of media personnel responses indicate that the ideologies of media houses are swayed by various reasons, including corporate ownership, political party bias, profit, TRP, and left and right ideology. Contrariwise, 21.2% of respondents believed that corporate profit and TRP are the main determinants, while 17.1% agreed that political parties' favouritism works as a determinant to shape news channel ideology. Furthermore, the survey results indicate that 76.8% of media personnel agreed that senior journalists are hired as consulting editors to negotiate corporate benefits from the government and other sources. In contrast, 19.2% of respondents did not agree with this statement, while the remaining 4% suggested that this might depend on the situation and motives and aspects.

Table 1 summarizes the perceptions of media bias in the following categories: Advertising, Corporate Benefits, Corporate Interest, Media Ideology, and Selective Media. It gives the mean scores, sums, and standard deviations that would be expected to be associated with corporate interests that may influence media.

The average score indicates there is a low perceived bias concerning Advertising (Mean = 1.33), Corporate Benefits (Mean = 1.30), and Corporate Interest (Mean = 1.29). This indicates that, according to the respondents, those variables affect medial content minimally. Meanwhile, Media Ideology had a mean score of 3.54, which reflects great awareness of ideological bias in media narratives and concern about corporate influences.

The Selective Media score was Mean = 1.23, which implies perceived impartiality in content selection. The low standard deviation for Advertising, Std. Dev. = .471, indicates consensus among the respondents over the fact that there is minimal bias. The more significant dispersion of the standard deviation for Media Ideology, Std. Dev. = 1.541, shows a variation in perceptions about ideological bias.

The responses generally show a low bias in advertising and corporate interests but a high degree of concern concerning ideological influences, indicating that there is

Table 1: Statistics for corporate dominant media

<i>Statistics</i>		<i>Advertising</i>	<i>Corporate Benefits</i>	<i>Corporate Interest</i>	<i>Media ideology</i>	<i>Selective Media</i>
N	Valid	98	96	99	99	99
	Missing	3	5	2	2	2
Mean		1.33	1.30	1.29	3.54	1.23
Sum		130	125	125	350	124
Std. Deviation		.471	.651	.610	1.541	.421

still a need for vigilance in terms of corporate agendas to shape media discourses.

Table 2 shows the means scores and standard deviations for the responses, delineating the media professionals' general ideas about the role of journalism, anti-communism, and the public's reception of these issues.

Media Creates CAA Agitation (Mean = 1.71) indicates a general disagreement on the role of media in creating CAA agitations. Most professionals do not believe that media leads to such movements. The moderate standard deviation (Std. Dev. = 0.457) indicates some consensus, though a minority holds differing opinions.

Fake News, Alternative Facts (Mean = 1.20): The respondents strongly agree that misinformation is one of the significant variables creating confusion in the media landscape. A low standard deviation (Std. Dev. = 0.402) signifies strong agreement upon the negative impact of misinformation.

CAA was Media Propaganda (Mean = 1.55): This sets a middle tone of agreement in that considerable dissenting voices do not see the media's propagandistic influence. Std. Dev. = 0.500 shows moderate response variability, indicating differing opinions on media influence on the CAA narrative.

Accused of Telling Half Truths (Mean 1.25): The low score indicates general disagreement with the notion that the media are mainly charged with providing half-truths; this reflects skepticism of such claims. Standard deviation (Std. Dev. = 0.481) suggests diversity in experiences and interpretations by media professionals regarding accusations of dishonesty.

Assam Issues Hijacked: The mean of 1.33 shows mild agreement and indicates some recognition of media misrepresentation of Assam issues, though many professionals look upon this criticism skeptically. Std. Dev. = 0.495 suggests moderate disagreement, meaning there is a diversity of perceptions regarding how the media portray Assam issues.

The data reflects a complex belief landscape among media professionals, who have strong concerns over misinformation but are also divided on particular narratives and implications in modern journalism.

According to the findings in Table 3, with a mean score of 1.2000, most respondents agreed that lack of depth news coverage creates chaos and confusion. This highlights the dire need for reliable, in-depth news coverage to help people make informed decisions. The statement "Indian Media fails to serve the public interest and is busy in fulfilling their ulterior motives and corporate benefits" received a mean score of 1.2637, which indicates that most respondents agreed with the statement.

Furthermore, the statement regarding Indian mainstream media promotes fanaticism, nationalism, and populism. Mean scores of 1.4010 and 1.3214 elucidate that media students and Assamese Society members agreed that media fabricate news content and media debates to promote fanaticism, nationalism and populism among the nationals and divide Indians as traitors vs nationalists. A statement that the media hijacked the Assam issue received 2.5758, respectively, indicating a general agreement among the respondents. The respondents agreed that the Indian audience gets the news in specific environmental

Table 2: Statistics Related to Journalism Anti-Communism & Fear of Flak

Statistics		CAA Agitation Created by Media	Fake News, Alternative Facts	CAA was Media Propaganda	Accused of Telling Half Truth	Hijacked Assam issues
N	Valid	96	100	99	99	99
	Missing	5	1	2	2	2
Mean		1.71	1.20	1.55	1.25	1.33
Sum		164	120	153	124	132
Std. Deviation		.457	.402	.500	.481	.495

Table 3: Media Students and Assamese Society Members' Perception of Mainstream Media

Statistics		Lack of depth coverage	Fail to serve public interest	Accused of fanaticism	Fabricate news	Hijacked assam issue
n	Valid	200	202	196	Fabricate News	198
	Missing	4	2	8		6
Mean		1.2000	1.2637	1.4010	1.3214	2.5758
Sum		240.00	254.00	283.00	259.00	510.00
Std. Deviation		.40100	.44173	.72111	.46822	1.33360



Table 4: Correlation between variables to understand respondents' perception and its relation with the sustainable media crisis in India

	<i>Biased Coverage</i>	<i>Corporate Benefits</i>	<i>Corporate Interest</i>	<i>Lack of Depth of Coverage</i>	<i>Political parties' favouritism</i>	<i>Accused promoting FNP</i>	<i>Fabricating News</i>	<i>Serving Self Interest</i>	<i>Hijacking real issue</i>
BC	1								
CB	0.23881782	1							
CI	0.40457395	0.27731288	1						
LDC	0.27204665	0.25942061	0.27785119	1					
PPF	0.15284	0.26133486	0.39703135	0.21749165	1				
APFNP	0.39009343	0.25544146	0.33394584	0.30081582	0.32857069	1			
FN	0.08389808	0.0207157	0.07737872	0.14733739	0.15018064	0.11697493	1		
SSI	0.15712299	0.04937659	0.36054474	0.32793972	0.34171376	0.2134992	0.14491645	1	
HI	-0.0155794	0.29849012	0.26698186	0.17069602	0.32391377	0.13380926	0.01293801	0.16739035	1

settings, and they decode this content based on their socio-political backgrounds. They perceive intended meaning and potentially create alternative interpretations that challenge the dominant narrative.

Most respondents also agreed that fake news has added more confusion and credibility crisis to Indian media. The survey findings indicate concerns about the role of Indian mainstream media in promoting divisive ideologies and the spread of fake news. Respondents emphasized the need for media literacy and expressed concerns about corporate-based media ownership prioritizing their interests over public welfare.

Table 4 represents a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between different variables, which was performed by creating a correlation coefficient matrix that comprises nine items. The matrix values demonstrate a strong relationship correlation between profit-oriented biased coverage and corporate benefit, corporate interest, lack of depth of coverage, and political favouritism. This coverage can harm society, promoting fanaticism, nationalism, and populism, which can ultimately benefit ruling governments by serving their ulterior motives. Furthermore, some variables are relatively small, indicating a moderate correlation, such as corporate benefits being moderately related to serving self-interest and fabricating news stories and biased coverage promoting communal angle controversies. Similarly, biased coverage is moderately associated with hijacking real issues and promoting communal angle controversies. These relationships threaten the integrity and accuracy of news and information. Addressing and rectifying these issues is crucial to prevent the promotion of self-serving interpretations and the hijacking of real problems.

The observation matrix data includes twelve news videos related to Manipur Violence, which have been analyzed thematically. The matrix is devised by using four filters of the propaganda model. The second section of the matrix includes recurring themes, patterns, and biases

in news framing and media discourse. Content analysis techniques are applied to categorize and interpret the qualitative data.

Table 5 represents the observation matrix, which revealed a significant impact of corporate cupidity on Indian media content. The variables analyzed in the matrix include ownership bias/institutional, ideology/political favouritism, advertising bias, sourcing bias, and fear of flak. The data presents a concerning trend - it suggests that media outlets are influenced by corporate interests and political favouritism, with an average score of 1.83. Furthermore, news channels rely heavily on advertising revenue, unlike YouTube news portals, which better present research-based stories, as reflected by the 1.25 average score. These findings are particularly worrying as they indicate potential bias and failure to fulfil journalistic responsibilities. It is essential to note the average score of 1.75 for advertising bias, which implies that news channels may be taking the easy way out to avoid potential criticism. We must hold news outlets accountable and demand unbiased and fair reporting.

Table 6 represents the second section of the observation matrix. It is concerning to note that the coverage of Manipur violence news seems to be primarily framed around communal angles, with an average score of 2.083 indicating that such framing aims to benefit certain political parties. On the other hand, an average score of 2.25 suggests that most media outlets remain neutral while covering Manipur news, refraining from asking critical questions and exploring accountability for the violence. However, some media outlets have used sensational language and tone while fabricating and presenting violent news, which is not ideal.

Practical Implications

The biased reporting and corporate influence on media discourse in India, now explained in this current study, are fundamentally guided by the propaganda model (Herman

Table 5: Observation matrix representing coverage based on the propaganda model ¹

<i>Media outlet</i>	<i>Bias/ Ideology/ Favouritism</i>	<i>Advertising bias</i>	<i>Sourcing bias</i>	<i>Fear of flak</i>
Outlet 1	3	2	1	2
Outlet 2	1	2	2	1
Outlet 3	1	1	2	1
Outlet 4	2	1	2	1
Outlet 5	2	1	2	1
Outlet 6	1	1	2	1
Outlet 7	1	1	3	2
Outlet 8	3	1	1	1
Outlet 9	3	2	1	1
Outlet 10	1	1	1	2
Outlet 11	2	1	2	1
Outlet 12	2	1	2	1
Average	1.83333333	1.25	1.75	1.25

Ownership Bias/ Institutional Ideology: Corporate Interest=1, Political Favouritism = 2, Neutral=3

Advertising Bias: Ad Revenue Base=1, Neutral=2

Sourcing Bias: Research Based=1, Not Research Based =2, Neutral=3

Flak: Yes=1, No=2

Table 6: Observation matrix representing themes and patterns in news coverage

<i>Media Outlet</i>	<i>Recurring Theme</i>	<i>Representation of Key Actors</i>	<i>Patterns and biases in News framing</i>	<i>Language and Tone</i>
Outlet 1	1	2	2	1
Outlet 2	2	3	3	3
Outlet 3	1	3	3	3
Outlet 4	2	1	1	2
Outlet 5	2	1	1	2
Outlet 6	2	3	3	2
Outlet 7	3	3	3	3
Outlet 8	3	2	2	3
Outlet 9	3	3	3	3
Outlet 10	1	2	2	1
Outlet 11	3	3	3	2
Outlet 12	2	1	1	2
Average	2.08333333	2.25	2.25	2.25

Theme: Ethnic Group = 1, Communal Angle= 2, Community Clash= 3

Key Actor Explanation: Pro- Government = 1, Critically Explained= 2, Neutral= 3

Patterns, and biases in news: Pro-Government=1, Critically Explained= 2, Neutral= 3

Language and Tone: Balance=1, Sensational=2, Neutral=3

& Noam, 2002) and the Reception theory (Stuart Hall, 1980, 2005; Rohid, Mahdi, 2018). Further to exploring these challenges, this study has several practical implications and potential solutions that can be explained in light of public discourse and media literacy initiatives informed by international case studies. This multifaceted phenomenon under investigation suggests comprehensive reforms to protect the integrity and independence of the Indian media landscape.

Firstly, Finland’s case is exemplary in integrating media literacy into its educational setup. Besides the general building blocks of education, media literacy education in Finland regularly includes critical thinking and analysis of media in its curriculum, which would enable students at an early stage, starting at an elementary school level, to appraise the quality of information. The workshops for the public are organized in schools wherein a journalist and an educator come together in front of the students and their



parents to impress upon them the value of media literacy to combat misinformation. This model can be more easily adapted to Indian educational institutions and perhaps serves the goal of engaging the country's youth more critically with media messages (Media Literacy Education in Finland, 2020).

Contrarily, the government of Mexico has picked up some regulative policies to decrease corporate intervention in the operation of media. Laws ensure that the owners and funders are openly disclosed, adding to transparency and accountability. Secondly, the government facilitates multi-level community programs for media literacy, thus allowing citizens to be prepared to analyse news content and determine who may have an agenda in the news reported (Media Ownership Monitor Mexico, 2023).

In Germany, for example, civic organizations routinely sponsor open workshops and forums that bring media professionals together with scholars and public members in a dialogue on media ethics and responsibility. The participatory model nurtures community involvement and extends public knowledge about complex media environments. India might take that as a model to expand the work of better transparency in media operations and further media institutions' accountability (Centre for Media Pluralism and Freedom, 2017).

These multidimensional ways of engagement provide a great understanding of the Indian context, where corporate pressures and a lack of transparency in the media pose significant challenges.

Secondly, the engagement of Public and Media Practitioners in Educational Programs is very significant in addressing this issue in Indian media. Engaging chief editors and known media personalities in symposia, conferences, and public debates in educational institutions can make for a form of accountability. Activities like Panel discussions and workshops on ethical reporting can be organized that should focus on the implications of corporate interests in framing news in a manner that forces media professionals to openly and honestly address this matter. Hands-on training for journalists in the use of integrity and reporting without bias, building on examples of ethical reporting workshops which have already achieved success in the United States.

Thirdly, Setting up Regulatory Panels will also be significantly helpful. Forming a panel comprising retired judges under the umbrella of the Supreme Court to oversee the functions of media may indicate a landmark in the direction of self-regulation. Such a body could draft guidelines and quarterly reviews and reports. The broad format for scanning news content with due regard to upholding the ethical standard in news reporting, keeping corporate interests at a minimum in the news. Making periodic reviews of media content necessary to ensure adherence to a set guideline can help bring accountability to the media sector.

Fourthly, encouraging community participation and response can also be very useful. For example, promoting a citizen journalism movement where citizens can report on local issues and share information through social platforms can democratize information dissemination and immediately engage citizens in the media ecosystem. Community-based Training for the Journalist; workshops in ethical reporting, fact-checking, and media ethics would train community members to assist in creating a more balanced public discourse.

Fifth, promoting alternative media and counter-narratives highlight and nurture alternative media stories that can be a strong counter-narrative. Transparent and public-interest-oriented media should be highlighted for emulation. One such instance could be an expansion of digital news portals. In countries such as Brazil, there has been an expansion of independent digital news portals that focus on community-based reporting. Creating more avenues for these could lead to India emulating them, allowing democratic roles to be carried out by the media.

Sixth, self-regulation can enhance the credibility of media outlets. By adhering to a set of established ethical guidelines, media organizations can build trust with their audience, leading to a more loyal viewership.

Finally, monitoring advertising practices by developing transparency in revenue models: Media should develop transparency about their sources of revenue to reduce perceived biases. This would be investigating how the sources of revenue from advertising affect content. Best Practices from other countries like Sweden, which demands transparency in advertising, similar models could be emulated in India to develop credibility in media output. The challenges thrown up by corporate interests in Indian media call not only for identifying such issues but also for formulating actionable pathways for change. Keeping in view the far-reaching influence of corporate entities through media participation, a monitoring system of the revenue streams should be provided in media organizations. One way this can be attempted is by establishing an independent regulatory body to monitor the financial dealings of media houses and weed out unethical practices such as quid pro quo deals (Spence, 2017), paid news, and other misfeasances (Weber & Johnson, 2016). A public reporting system, coupled with auditing of media revenues and expenditures, might improve transparency and accountability and reduce the potential influence of corporate interests on news content.

By promoting engagement between media professionals and the public, promoting self-regulation, and engaging in media literacy, India can move closer to a more credible and reliable media that speaks more to public interest than corporate agendas. Developing an environment that encourages diverse voices and promotes media accountability will promote sound democratic participation by creating an informed citizenry.

Limitations of the Study and Future Direction

The reception theory itself needs a critical assessment within the Indian context, since there can be an immense diversity among the media audiences of this country. India encompasses a multitude of languages, cultures, socio-economic conditions, and educational backgrounds combined together to give a complex structure of media interpretation. While reception theory focuses on the very active role audiences play in interpreting media texts, perhaps their application cannot successfully capture the elaborate ways that diverse cultural and social contexts influence these interpretations.

The reception theory is not devoid of limitations concerning its practice in India, which may end up failing to take into consideration those structural factors that equally influence audience reception. In that respect, the interplay of the influence of corporate interests on media stories involves the diverse ways of consuming and interpreting such messages by different audiences. Individuals' thinking might also be biased because, in the present media context dominated by sensationalism and profit-oriented politically motivated agendas, people are only being exposed to a narrow range of views. Thus, media ownership, especially on the part of corporatist entities with various specific agendas, can often lead to an environment in which several of the stories are kept on the front burner while others are left in the background. The result can be undemocratic for a discourse which reception theory strives for.

Besides, the inequalities in media access create further layers of complications in audience interpretation. For example, individuals in cities may be exposed to numerous types of media, all of which bring forth different meanings depending on the various streams of information that they have to tap into. As for the rural populations, their dependence on some of these channels might be less diverse and only set upon some that are biased, thus limiting their capacity to tap into other narratives. This finally sets a situation where the opinions of individuals become standardized in certain pockets while alienating them from meaningful discourses within the societies-opposite to the idea of a uniform way of interpreting media texts among different audiences.

There is also a need to critically apply the reception theory of interpretive communities in the Indian context, as these are very often mired in caste, religion, and regional identity, leading to fragmentation in ways that identical media content is interpreted. This fragmentation gets further amplified by the emergence of social media, where echo chambers reinforce existing biases and limit exposure to divergent viewpoints. Consequently, the reception theory may not be able to explain how entrenched identities lead to the use and interpretation of media and hence polarize understandings of social issues.

Finally, as much as reception theory offers a lot to reveal in regarding insight into the audience's interaction with media, it should not forget the important role and responsibilities of media organizations in developing such understandings. Regarding this, the media play a quintessential role of watchdog and informer of the public interest—a task that extends way beyond publishing materials for interpretation. In this context, it is increasingly urgent to focus on the need for integrity and diversity by media organizations in the face of challenges to their integrity created by influences of corporate interests through the meaningful involvement of audiences in a bid to understand and meet diverse needs.

Although reception theory provides useful frameworks for appreciating audience interaction with media texts, the limitations in the Indian context arise because of an inadequate consideration of the complex socio-economic and cultural factors involved. The more nuanced approach that brings these dimensions into play would enrich the discourse of media consumption and facilitate reforms that aim at improving media's democratic functions in India. This, in fact, is a call that future research should be done on the complex relationship among corporate influence, audience interpretation, and media responsibility in the search for media that authentically represents and supports diverse voices it's supposed to serve.

CONCLUSION

The findings consequently reveal the proximity with which corporate interests are linked to the fundamental democratic function of media in India. This analysis underlines one apparent, disturbing reality: a large number of media professionals recognize the overriding influence of corporate ownership, political bias, and advertising revenue on news coverage and framing. What happened is that a stark majority of the respondents, 61%, stated that it is external pressures which shape media ideologies, and the integrity of news dissemination is enormously threatened. If a conduit is made for a proper democracy, then it seriously questions the foundational role of media.

The data suggests a somewhat disquieting trend in which most media organizations have profit-oriented agendas that often override the serving of public interest. This shift in focus undermines journalistic integrity and the capability of providing fair and full coverage. Adding another layer to this credibility crisis at an already burgeoning problem of fake news and partisan coverage threatens to tear the fabric of social cohesion and public consciousness.

Such are alarming findings, and let us be reminded time and again of the significant role media must play in fostering a vibrant democracy. Rather than being an avenue to advance corporate or political interests, the media should be an independent watchdog to hold power



accountable and empower active citizenship with accurate information. We can achieve this by making ethical standards, media literacy, ownership, and operational transparency paramount.

Ultimately, creating a media environment free of undue corporate influence is not just an ideal but a requirement to ensure the health and resiliency of our democratic society. We must work toward creating an accountable and responsible media landscape in service to the public interest so that our democracy can be healthy not just for us but also for our children and our grandchildren.

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