

**A Comparative Study of News Credibility and
Objectivity of Traditional and New Media
(A study in Indian context)**

Abstract of Thesis

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CHAPTER-1

Introduction

Credibility is the most precious asset of a mass medium, whether traditional or new. Irrespective of ideological orientation, the mass media's effectiveness in serving as watchdogs or mobilizing public opinion in support of national cause solely depends on their credibility.

Eastin (2001) says: "Nowadays millions of people have access of New media and the number is growing. Characteristics of the Internet such as interactivity, open standards, and global reach make it uniquely easy that anyone could publish on it; in other words, there is less control on the Internet than traditional media. Increasing the amount of information on Internet will decrease the chance of discovering false information."

Generally, Internet news is abundant and easily available nowadays, but its credibility is still very low (Lu and Andrews, 2006). People now have the opportunity to create/circulate/publish news on their own and can have feedback and different version of the same story facilitated by the Internet, which is seen as free from control. Anyone with a blog can be a reporter, anyone with a cell phone can be a videographer and anyone on Facebook, Twitter or a thousand other platforms can be a news editor, or at least a curator (Rosenstiel, 2005).

However, with increasing media availability and use of new media by people, credibility and objectivity of news & information made available by different media is being intensively debated among the people in general and intelligentsia in particular. Therefore, the issue of credibility & objectivity in relation to both types of media, viz., traditional & new needs to be studied in a systematic manner.

1.1 *Defining Traditional Media and New Media*

Here, it will be in the fitness of thing if both forms of media- Traditional & New are defined at the outset.

(i) Traditional Media - Television, Radio, Newspapers, magazines, newsletters and other print publications have been put under traditional media (Rozario, 2013). However, in this study, Radio, Television and Newspapers have been studied as Traditional Media.

Belch & Belch (2014) in their study said, “.... The rapid growth of the Internet, social media and mobile media now offer marketers a variety of options that just a few decades ago did not exist. Moreover, younger consumers in particular are reducing their use of traditional media such as newspapers, magazines and even television as they become more reliant on digital media.”

(ii) New Media – This terms has been used to describe the new generation of digital, computerized, or networked information and communication technologies. These can take many different forms as News web portals, Blogs, Podcasts, live streaming and video-sharing sites, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Twitter etc. Cambridge dictionary defines New Media:

“Products and services that provide information or entertainment using computers or the internet, and not by traditional methods such as television and newspapers.”

1.2 *Statement of the problem*

In the age of digital communication, most online media (New Media) are always in a hurry to present latest information to draw the attention. News objectivity, which is the basic principle of news reporting, is not really taken into consideration in most online contents of the news stories. Similarly, due to different pressures, credibility/objectivity of Traditional media is also questionable.

Media is considered as Fourth Estate and plays the role of a watchdog in a democracy. Hence its credibility and objectivity among the people hold a significant parameter in regard to smooth functioning of a vibrant democratic country. In this context, is Indian media objective in its functioning and does it hold credibility among the masses in India? This study makes an endeavor to find out answer to such questions.

1.3 *Significance of the study*

Many studies have been done for credibility and objectivity of news in western countries and US. However, in India such studies are very less. Reports of paid news have questioned the credibility and objectivity of the mass media. Generally, the people deem information taken from various media as gospel truth. This study is significant because it puts a comparative analysis regarding the credibility of media, the fourth estate vis-à-vis that of other important institutions of democracy. With the emergence of social media, such studies become even more relevant.

1.4 *Theoretical perspective*

This study is built on social responsibility theory. This theory, according to McQuail (2005:172), holds that “the media have obligations to society, and media ownership is a public trust. News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant. The media should be free, but self-regulated. The media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct. Under some circumstances, government may need to intervene to safeguard the public interest”.

According to gatekeeping theory, at its most basic level, is the idea that there is selectivity in the process of determining what news stories are published or broadcast. A major point of the theory, as developed by psychologist Kurt Lewin, is that there are forces that can either inhibit or aid the flow of news items through the “gates” (Shoemaker, 1996).

This study derives its operational framework from the agenda-setting theory also. The agenda-setting theory means the following: “Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, the mass media shape our perspectives of the world and focus our attention, influencing our views about what are the important topics of the day”(McCombs, 1978, p. 90).

The Internet, especially blogs, have created a number of new agendas and platforms through which to find news, which has made agenda setting harder to gauge, (Coleman and McCombs, 2007).

1.5 *Objectives of the study*

This study strives to meet the following objectives:

- (i) To study credibility and objectivity of the news reports/coverage by the traditional media (Electronic and Print) and that by new media in India and make comparison.
- (ii) To study and compare credibility and objectivity of the news programs by Private channels Vs Government channels.
- (iii) To identify and analyze factors that influence objectivity and credibility in journalism.
- (iv) To verify whether the rise and expansion of New Media brought about a change in perceptions of media credibility and objectivity.
- (v) To find the primary components of traditional and New media credibility and objectivity.
- (vi) To find similarities and differences in the credibility and objectivity dimensions of traditional and New media.

1.6 *Research Questions*

- Between traditional and New Media, which is considered more credible and objective source of news by the masses?
- How do people see Govt. channels as compared to Private channels as sources of news and information?
- What are the factors, which influence objectivity and credibility of media functioning in India?
- To what extent the advent and expansion of New Media has impacted popular perception regarding objectivity and credibility of different sources of news?

- Is there any need for devising fresh codes and ethics for journalistic practices so as to ensure objectivity and credibility of news in our country?

1.7. Methodology

Researcher used quantitative survey method with cross sectional research design for the study.

In this Positivist approach the researcher seeks to “explain, predict, or describe the world in terms of generalizable laws, facts, or probabilistic relations between behavioral constructs and contextual variables” (Suri, 2013). The methods associated with such an approach are mainly quantitative, using statistical analysis of large datasets .In this approach attempts are made to reduce researcher bias as far as possible. While the impact of one variable upon another can be proved or disproved. The tools are selected in advance and therefore do not deal with uncertainty or unpredictable outcomes well.

1.7.1 Population

The Universe comprises all the people of Lucknow city, who are 18 years or above and are exposed to both, Traditional Media (News paper, Television and Radio) and New Media (Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Newsbased websites etc.)

1.7.2 Sampling

Total 500 samples were selected by purposive sampling method out of which 400 received valid questionnaires were analyzed. Distribution of male and female was 218 and 182 respectively. The researcher tried to select the samples from different occupations, income groups as well as from different age groups.

1.7.3 *Tool*

A questionnaire in relation to research objectives and questions was used as a tool of data collection for this study.

1.8 *Chapters*

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the subject of study and explains the theme of research including the research method. Chapter 2 refers to different books, journals, research articles and digital resources relevant to subject of study. Chapter 3 discusses different aspects of objectivity & credibility of news in different media. Chapter 4 puts a detailed account of factors influencing objectivity and credibility in journalism. In Chapter 5, data and information gathered through administration of questionnaire have been analyzed and interpreted. Chapter 6 puts a summary of the research. It also puts forth some suggestions based on findings and analysis of the study including the limitations of present study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter of the research work is focused on reviews of different books, journals, research articles and digital resources relevant to subject of study.

CHAPTER-3

News: Credibility and Objectivity

Getting news now a days is not the same as that during the time of terrestrial broadcast when people waited for morning newspapers or sat down at an fixed time for the evening news on Door Darshan. Similarly News consumption today is also not the same as that during the pre-internet time when people tuned in to events happening around the world through 24X7 television news channels. In new trend a significant number of persons are using Internet for their news/information requirements. They are using new media for getting news. Traditional media are still here but there is a growing competition from interactive new media.

This chapter is divided in following subthemes:

- 3.1 *Credibility of Media*
- 3.2 *Objectivity of Media*
- 3.3 *Credibility & Objectivity : The debate*
- 3.4 *Credibility and Objectivity in Traditional Media*
- 3.5 *Credibility and Objectivity in New Media*
- 3.6 *Credibility & Objectivity amidst Agenda -setting and Gatekeeping*
- 3.7 *Audience: 'Mass' and/or 'Market'*
- 3.8 *Social Responsibility Vs Corporate Interest*
- 3.9 *Code of ethics for Media & Media persons*

CHAPTER – 4

Major factors influencing credibility and objectivity in Journalism

Objectivity and fairness, the core values of journalism are constantly been threatened by different factors which have arisen in today's media, be it print, electronic or online. Some of the factors responsible for influencing objectivity and fairness in journalism are discussed under following subthemes in this chapter.

4.1 *Commercialization and corporatization of media*

4.2 *Sensationalisation and trivialization of news: Challenges to media as a fourth estate*

4.3 *Paid news phenomenon*

4.4 *Mediascape: changing priorities*

4.5 *Objectivity and credibility of news in digital age*

CHAPTER-5

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Data and information collected through administration of questionnaire were analyzed at length. Different key areas in relation to the research objectives have been analyzed and a detailed analysis have been presented in this chapter.

This chapter is divided in following subthemes:

5.1 *Respondent Analysis*

5.2 *Media Habits of respondents for getting News and Information*

5.3 *Media use and utility for respondents:*

5.4 *Credibility and Objectivity of Traditional Media Vs New Media*

5.5 *Perception about objectivity/credibility of news in New Media*

5.6 *Code of Ethics for Journalist*

Thus, based on detailed analysis and interpretation of data and information gathered from the field of study, it could be inferred that –

1. The purpose of viewing Television differed; 9.8 % claimed that they watched TV for both news and entertainment and 16.3 % for news & information only while 9.3 % for more Information and less entertainment. So, It was found that 35.4 % people watched TV primarily for News and Information. Similarly, 10.8 % used New Media only for news and information, 28% used it for both news and entertainment and 9.8 % for more information than the entertainment. So, about half of the respondents (47.6%) used New Media as an important source of Information. Thus, it could be inferred that people considered New Media and Television as the main sources to get information and they are getting significant amount of information from New media as compared to the television.

2. Between Doordarshan and Private channels, people considered Private channels (92%) more credible. Of TV News channels and Newspapers, 56.8% of the respondents felt that newspapers were more credible and of AIR and newspapers, people considered (82%) newspapers more credible. Thus, TV news channels were more credible than AIR. When credibility of new media and Television was compared, it was found that television was more credible (77%). Thus, News paper is the most reliable/credible medium among the people in terms of credibility and objectivity of media.
3. In the event of any conflicting news story or getting different reports of the same story, only 5.8 % persons cross checked it with government channels (DD/AIR) while a significant number checked it on Private TV channels (31.5%). Most of the persons (39.3%) chose newspapers to check the credibility of such news items. Only 6.8 % of the respondents showed faith in New media for cross checking facts if they got conflicting news reports. Therefore, here again newspapers emerged as a credible media as compared to other forms of media.
4. A huge proportion (83.5%) thought that coverage of DD/AIR was not objective. Most of the respondents (75.5%) thought that due to Governmental pressure, it was not independent in news coverage & reporting. Although newspapers were found to be one of the most credible media, yet huge number of the people (88%) opined that due to some pressure, mainly commercial/financial (42.9%), Owner`s business interests (22.2%) and governmental pressure (16.2%), newspapers` objectivity also came under doubt. The objectivity in news coverage/ reporting in new media were also doubted. 63.3 % of the persons did not think that it was independent in news reporting and it was also being used for political propaganda & campaigns by vested interests/groups/individuals etc. Thus it

is obvious that people think that all types of media bow down under some sort of pressure, be it from govt. or non-govt. and thus compromise objectivity of their news stories.

5. Not only Govt., political, commercial or owner`s business interests influenced objectivity of the news but at times, freebie or sponsored facilities also had an affect on it. 80% of the respondents agreed that a freebie or sponsored facility to a journalist affect the credibility of the journalist/medium. For objective and credible coverage of news, most of the people (89%) agreed that there should be code of ethics for media persons and 77% of the respondents wanted self regulation for media persons. Thus, a need for some ethical code or self regulation for journalistic practices was felt.
6. More than the half of the respondents (56.3%) spent time on New media for one to two hours per day. Although most of them (49%) were searching entertainment news, yet news about Politics (18.1%), Sports (12.7%), Economy & Business (9.8%), regional (4.9%) and others (5.4%) were also searched. If the persons got news from New Media, its credibility was reported to be low; only 15.5 % accepted it or found it worthy of being believed. Some of them cross checked it via private news channels (45.3%), or another channels of New Media (32.0%). Therefore, objectivity of New Media was under cloud and its credibility was low.
7. When the respondents were asked to give rank about the trust in Four Estates (Legislature, Executives, Judiciary and Press) of the country, Judiciary was ranked first by 70.0% of the people, after that was press/media with 15.0% of the people`s choice for rank one. And for credibility of media, Foreign TV/Radio Channels (46.8%) got Rank one while

Indian Private channels (22.8%) got rank one. DD and AIR were least credible according to rank and New Media (16%) was ranked third among all forms of media. Therefore, in spite of many doubts in their minds, people still have trust media.

8. About the media being biased or unbiased, 72.5 % of the respondents said that newspaper were unbiased. 78.0 % and 76.0% said that AIR and Doordarshan are biased. On the other hand, BBC Radio was the most credible medium among people as 81.3% of the respondents found it unbiased. Similarly, Foreign TV channels were also considered credible/objective with a significant number (72.5%) terming them as unbiased. 64.3 % people found new media biased. Private channels (38%) were reported to be relatively unbiased as compared to new media (28%). Thus, people still rely upon foreign media either Foreign TV or BBC Radio as credible source of news and information as compared to the Indian media. But in Indian media, Newspapers are trusted as unbiased in nature in comparison to other media.
9. 42.3% of the respondents agreed that there should be legally imposed code of ethics for the journalists and 61.8% thought that it should be formulated by the journalists, while 22.8% said that it should be formulated by the government. Thus, the need for code of ethics for journalists either by journalists themselves or by Govt. agencies was propagated so as to ensure objectivity and credibility of media in our country.

CHAPTER- 6

Conclusion, Suggestions and Limitations

This study reveals a valuable account of news credibility and objectivity of Traditional and New Media. Conclusions thus arrived at and suggestions therefore are presented in this chapter.

6.1 Conclusion

The analysis and interpretation of the data suggests that majority of the respondents found newspapers the most credible/ reliable medium. Thus, Newspapers still command a greater degree of credibility and objectivity as compared to TV channels and New Media including the Public Service Broadcasters DD & AIR and Indian private news channels. Today when 24-hours news channels are telecasting breaking news/ news flashes and live feeds giving immediate coverage and information of news and events, newspapers still hold the place of honour in terms of news credibility & objectivity. Similarly, even though use of new media is increasing, it has not found favourite place in the minds of the respondents as far as news is concerned.

In the event of conflicting reports of the same story by the different media, the maximum number of the respondents believe the story as given by Newspapers followed by Private News channels and New Media. A significant number of the respondents confirm news & information coming through New Media from another media or other channels of new media. Therefore, new media is yet to emerge as a credible & objective source of news and information.

This study also suggests that as compared to DD/ AIR, Indian Private news channels and New Media, the foreign TV/Radio channels command more credibility among the people. Ranking of different media was done based on people`s responses. In this ranking, foreign TV/ Radio was ranked first followed by Indian private channels, New Media & DD/AIR in that order. Thus, foreign media enjoys respondents`s trust more than domestic media. It should be a cause of concern for media practitioners in India & policy makers as well.

Of the Four Estates, respondents have most confidence and trust in Judiciary followed by the Press/Media, Executive and Legislature. Thus, the Press/Media still enjoy the place of pride in respondents `s conscience which is undoubtedly a heartening revelation in this research study.

Of the six given occupational groups, Journalists ranked third in terms of public confidence and trust behind military personnel and teachers. Bureaucrats, Businessmen and Politicians got fourth, fifth and sixth place respectively. Hence again, Journalists still enjoyed public confidence which is a good pointer for a vibrant democracy like ours.

A huge chunk of respondents feels that news reporting by DD & AIR is biased due to government pressure. One particular reason for the lack of trust in DD & AIR can be traced into the establishment bias. respondents believe that DD and AIR, being government media, present only the government`s version news stories and facts either are concealed or are presented in a skewed manner.

In spite of being the most credible medium, Newspapers are also seen as biased due to commercial/ financial or owner`s business interests. respondents observed that New media was being used for propaganda and campaigns by vested interests/groups or

individuals etc. Thus, credibility/objectivity of all media is under suspicion, which is not a good trend, and different media platforms & groups must look into this emerging popular perception.

About reporting during elections in India, newspapers are considered more objective and fair than DD /AIR and New Media. However, a high percentage of respondents find no medium objective or fair. This clearly indicates political bias in media functioning in our country.

For objective and credible coverage of news, considerable number of the respondents feel that there should be self- censorship for media persons. A general opinion emerged that Code of Ethics for the journalists should be devised and defined by journalists and media practitioners themselves.

There is a dominant feeling among the respondents that a freebie or any government sponsored facility to a journalist does affect credibility of the journalist or medium. Thus, a need for some ethical code or self regulation for journalistic practices was felt.

Newspapers, Private News channels and New media including social media and blogs/ news based websites are the main sources to get news. For the respondents getting news/ Information from New media, WhatsApp and Facebook are two major sources to get information. After that, news based websites, Twitter and YouTube are main sources to get news. Thus, social networking sites are one of the main sources of news/information who depend primarily on new media. Moreover, it is also found that people use new media mostly for entertainment purpose, though it is also used to get news/information about politics and sports.

Very few respondents are listening to radio news; and even less are the regular listeners. Those who listen to radio, a huge majority still rely upon BBC radio for credible and objective news. They are listening radio on its website as well. Thus, it may be concluded that among those who depend upon radio as credible source of news, BBC Radio has found a favourite place.

To conclude, credibility of news depends on how it is produced, what issues have been raised and with what intention and effect in mind and how the audience/ readers react to its/ their way of presentation. In a particular medium, different news items may have different reactions about their credibility among different audiences/ readers in different situations.

6.2 *Suggestions*

To enhance the credibility of all media so as to ensure fair and objective coverage of news coupled with free and frank expression of views, followings suggestions may be applied as per findings of this study:

1. Innovative, creative and objective coverage of the news and events have to be planned based on feedback of the people. Hence, professional independence is necessary.
2. Efforts should be made to stimulate a new work culture in the electronic media so that our broadcasting system must bear its own national individuality.
3. Mass communications educators should be represented in the media policymaking bodies.

4. The right type of training has to be imparted not only to the freshers but also to the in service personnel in order to generate a sense of ethics and accountability and responsibility to public and society in general.
5. Narrowcasting should be practiced at a large scale in our Broadcasting system to encourage local participation and raising of local issues and its coverage so that people could trust the broadcast media more.
6. There should be statutory body on the lines of the Press Council of India, which governs & regulates all forms of media including new media.
7. DD & AIR (Prasar Bharti), an autonomous corporation should have both structural and functional autonomy so that people's trust in it could be restored.
8. Political interference of any type in all media platforms should be effectively restrained.
9. The government must refrain from interfering in media functioning, which may be overt or covert because there is a growing popular belief that govt. does interfere in some way or other in media management including in its editorial operations.
10. There must be some system/ legislation in place to regulate New Media, which is largely ungoverned today.

6.3 *Limitations of the study*

This study has some limitations as well. Amidst financial and time constraints, significant area and components relevant to the topic of research were covered; but it was

felt that many more facets of the present subject of research remained untouched. In further studies, these areas may be covered.

Limitation of this research are detailed below so that future researchers on this subject or similar subjects could take these into reckoning during their researches.

1. This study was conducted in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Research results might differ in other districts/cities and locations because the pattern of New media's use may be different in different regions of India. Moreover, every region has some socio-cultural distinctiveness, which may impact result of the study.
2. A large sample size and its spread may give highly reliable findings in relation to the subject of research.
3. Penetration of new media is increasing fast, especially after mobile data went cheaper. Therefore, similar study after a few years may give different set of results.
4. Rural and urban areas in our country differ in terms of new media availability and usage. Therefore, a separate study for these areas may give useful insight on the subject.