

“Paid News Syndrome in Print Media” A Study Based on selective Newspapers Readers in Jaipur City.

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Abstract-

The importance of Newspapers cannot be understated. They are of vital importance to us. They come to know about the happenings in the world. The Newspapers cover almost every aspect of life- social, economic, political, cultural, etc. They design a complete picture of our day-to-day life. The objective of the freedom given to the media is to facilitate transparency, more accountability of public servants, and check the corruption. However, what happens when the mass media houses them falls prey to corrupt designs, especially during election campaigns. Journalists are often showered with lavish gifts and other favors that include foreign tours and cash. The result is that these journalists strive to serve those from whom they have received favors forgetting that they will be compromising with the primary objective of journalism, which is to work in the public interest. The evils of paid news are posing a threat to ethics and value-based journalism. It is intended to destroy the credibility of the media itself.

Keywords: New Media, political engagement, newspapers, media ownership, democracy, advertisements, Commercialization, Readership, Media Industry, Election Commission

Introduction: -

Newspapers are the fourth pillar of democracy. The newspapers keep the readers well informed about the day today happening. An informed and well-aware citizen is essential for a stable and robust democracy. Newspapers perform the role of a mediator between the government and the public. They help form public opinion and turn the people for or against the rulers' moves. This is why even the most fearsome dictator is afraid of the press. Different people read the newspaper for different purposes.

In a democracy like India, the importance the newspapers are even more significant as they, through their well-researched articles and editorials, enable us to make the right decision during the elections. Unfortunately, the media fails to play its role as the fourth estate effectively. We are witnessing today something very different from the ideals with which the newspapers are established. The media today is wholly guided and influenced by market forces.

The newspapers have become just like any other consumer item, sold like any other product. ^[1]

The concept of paid news and advertorials that are a combination of editorials and advertisements has become commonplace worldwide. The media is not performing its duty in an objective and unbiased manner. Instead, they have become the spokesperson of business and commercial houses. Such a situation was bound to impact the nature of the media. Moreover, it was found to have fallen prey to the vice of malpractices and corruption. Sevanti Ninan (2010)² says-“Paid news is what one and all are talking. This is a paid treatment but not labeled as advertising. Meaning it looks like average media content but will be sponsored by advertisers.

Noam Chomsky(1997)³ points out that 'What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream' that media companies are corporations that sell a product. The product is audiences, and the customers here are the corporate advertisers.

Here, Chomsky argues that media companies do not profit when anyone subscribes to a newspaper but instead are getting a loss. However, they still try to increase their circulation as they get money from advertisers based on the size of audiences:

Paid news is a Recent Phenomena:-

It will not be improper to say that the Paid News syndrome is a new phenomenon and that it cropped up in the form of commercialization of the news. The recent decade saw Inter-corporate investments between media companies are also clearly emerging. Besides, it creates hurdles to handle media dominance and any emerging media monopolies. [4] Media is a sensitive business. It is very closely related to society and affects its different aspects. While the media is duty-bound to take care of social interests, another aspect of it is the business. It is also an industry where people invest and expect to earn profits. Paid news is mainly sponsored by politicians, business people, and celebrities to improve their public image or achieve political goals. These are some times name as "special report", [5]

The mass media in India is possibly dominated by less than a hundred target groups or conglomerates, which practice considerable influence on what is read, heard, and watched.

Dilip Mandal's book (2015) [6] has mentioned such examples. It has quoted BJP MP from Lucknow Lalji Tandon, Samajwadi Party candidate from Deoria Mohan Singh, and former Jharkhand chief minister Madhu Koda, claiming that the media houses demanded money from them to give them coverage during the polls. The evil of paid news poses a threat to ethics and value-based journalism.

Parameters set by the Election Commission for ascertaining whether a particular news item in the newspapers can be Paid News [7].

- 1- Same news with photographs and headlines publications of different authors simultaneously.
- 2- The newspapers reports show that candidates are likely to win the elections.

3- News, mostly such cases favoring a candidate, do not have a by-line.

4. Advertisements with a related story on the same page.

5. Articles labeled as Advertorials.

6. Advertisement is written in minimal font size.

The cases of 'Paid News' generally manifest in the news published about a candidate or a political party eulogizing them or similar news articles/reports denigrating the opponents. The Election Commission has directed that strict vigilance needs to be observed by making use of the existing law so that the incidence of 'Paid News' or surrogate advertisements in Print and Electronic media in the context of elections is appropriately checked.

Some Major Paid News Issues in India

Bennett, Coleman, and Co. Ltd, Case-which owns the Times of India, has asked celebrities and the wealthy to pay for favorable coverage. They have offered a "private treaty" agreement, which accepts an equity stake in a company in return for favorable coverage. [8] In a 2018 Cobrapost sting meeting with Times Group, MD Vineet Jain and Sanjeev Shah revealed that significant cash transactions running into hundreds of crores are routinely channeled through white-collar investment companies (in this case, DSP, a Mumbai based investment bank operated by Hemendra Kothari and Merrill Lynch) from political outfits and communal agencies to media houses which prefer to work through cheques. [9]

Jindal Blackmailing Case-" Rs 25 crores per year was asked by the TV news channel in the form of advertisements for not covering stories related to coal block allocation. [10]

Narottam Mishra Case-"from Datia, Madhya Pradesh (MP), in the 2008 state Assembly elections. Indeed, one particular news item with the same headline and body appeared in three leading Hindi news Delhi immediately before the polls. In 2017, the ECI ordered Mishra barred from contesting elections for three years. [11]

Chattisgarh Government Case-The Chattisgarh government was accused of paying the media for publishing and airing news in its favor in 2015. Indian Express claimed that the government of Chattisgarh had paid for favorable news publication". The newspaper claimed that nearly 200 documents were exchanged between the PR department and the editors.^[12]

Sing operations by Cobra post: In 2017 and 2018, sting operations by Cobra post, a news agency was publicized, and its videos were posted publicly. The videos showed a journalist posing as an RSS person who approached popular television and news media channels to publish and telecast news that would publicize fake news, promote the BJP, communal issues, and Hindutva right-wing ideology vilify their political opponents.^[13]

The rationale of the study

In the changing social environment, the integrity and credibility of the media have come under questioning from different quarters. It is seen that media's nature has transformed completely today, and it is no longer a mission but a profession. Corruption has become a common word in every field, and the mass media is no exception.

The study focuses on how the emergence of growing corporate culture in the media industry has led to paid news syndrome in media. The corporate culture brings with it a change in the working style. The objectives also change, and instead of the mission, it becomes a profession. Similarly, today the office of the Editor has almost disappeared. Now the Editor does not have control of the editorial content. The content is often decided by the marketing or brand managers. Often the owner himself becomes the Editor of the Newspaper.

Journalists' inadequate or unsatisfactory paid salaries also causes paid news tendency among journalists. Furthermore, most journalists are appointed on contracts, and they also do not get retirement benefits. As a result, they sometimes indulge in corrupt practices to make money. It is a well-accepted fact, Media today is mainly owned by big industrial houses.

Importance of the Study

The Paid News phenomenon has acquired alarming proportions in the past few years. It has got itself deeply entrenched in the Indian media and is threatening the very foundation of Journalism. Paid news has become a real problem in Indian journalism, and it threatens to derail the basic principles that journalism stands for. Last decade and since 2009 in particular, the phenomenon of "paid news" has acquired a new and even eviler dimension by entering the sphere of political "news" or "reporting" on candidates contesting elections. Paid news involved two entirely different dimensions.

Parameters set by the Election Commission regarding Paid News

- 1- Identical news and photos published with by-lines of some authors simultaneously.
- 2- Newspapers, articles praising candidates on the same page
- 3- News claims that a candidate is winning elections from the constituency.
- 4- News items favor a candidate, not carrying any by-line.

Review of Literature

Thakurta et al. (2012)^[14], who co-authored the Press Council's report on paid news, stated that whenever there has been a slowdown in the economy, the advertising revenues of the newspapers also start shrinking the jobs are at stake. The values and ethical norms of journalism take a backseat. **Biswas (2012)**^[15] observed that globalization has been affecting the code of conduct of Indian media. He draws the opinion that the leading cause of Paid News syndrome in India is growing commercialization in the media practices after the post-2000 era. **Kate, Azuka et al. l. (1996)**^[16] notes that news commercialization is a trend where media report a piece of news as factual and objective. In effect, therefore, commercialization leads the media to emphasize the beneficial aspects of media products while sacrificing their quality or debasing inherent functionality.

Atia et al. l. (2016)^[17] observed that a journalist who writes a news story or article to suit the

advertiser's needs gets salary bonuses and earns more money than their colleagues in Egyptian media. This creates inequality between editorial pay scales and potentially harms healthy newsroom relations. So media is suffering from free paid journalism in the country. **Joshi (2010)**²⁸ wrote a piece in his column published in "Jansatta:" stating that Newspaper owners acted identically when they demanded money from candidates in exchange for publishing news about them just before elections.

Research Methodology

Research methodology involves such general activities as identifying the problem, review of literature, formulating hypotheses, the procedure for testing the hypothesis, data collection and analysis, interpreting the results, and drawing conclusions.

Research Methods- Survey research methods used for data gathering. Newspapers, magazines, project reports, annual government reports, Web Sites, and books were beneficial in gathering relevant information for the research. The collection of primary data helped the researcher accumulate high relevancy data for the present study.

Sample size - The data were also collected from 200 respondents selected from media experts, journalists, advertisement agencies, and members of the academia, media teachers in Jaipur city. A schedule questionnaire was prepared and used for the field study and sampling, followed by surveys. Thus Convenient sampling (Non- Probability) was used for data collection in this study.

Area of Study-The area of study has been conducted in Jaipur city. The study covers the paid news domains/areas, including-Political affairs, Elections, Business/Industry, and advertisement.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the research study are as follows.

1. To find out who is more responsible for paid news syndrome in media.
2. -To study the awareness about the paid news
3. To examine the role of self-regulation in containing the trend of paid news
- 4- Impact of paid news on values of news content

Hypotheses

H1- There is no difference between paid news and other editorial content.

H2- It is a threat to ethics and value-based journalism.

H3-Paid news is a tool for media industrialists to enhance their business interests.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Profile of Respondents

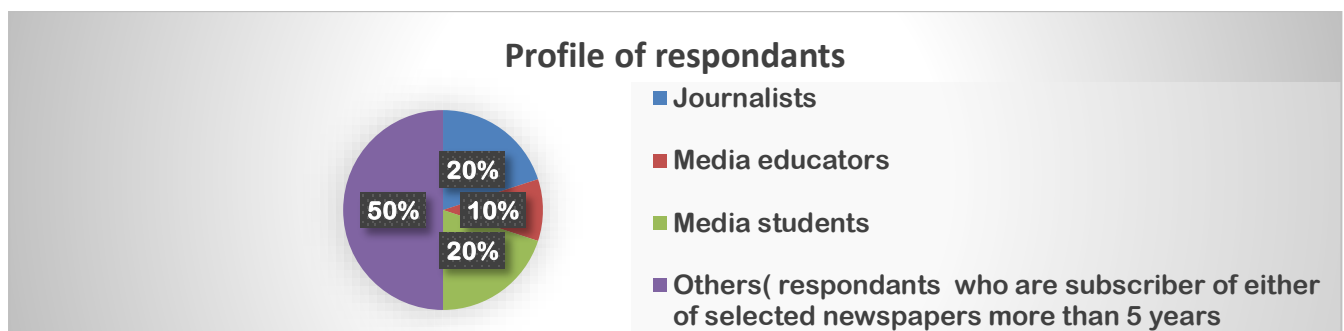


Chart No-1 Profile of respondents

The above data shows that the researcher selected 200 respondents for the study. The distribution of respondents includes Journalists,

Media educators, Media students, and 100 others (who have been a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years).

**Q- 1-Do you know
about paid news? A-Yes, B- No**

Respondents	Options	
	Yes	No
Journalists	90 %	10 %
Media educators	80%	20%
Media students	40%	60%
Others(Respondents who are a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years)	33%	67%
Total no. of respondents 200		

Table No -1 - Respondent's knowledge about paid news

As per the obtained response, out of 40 percent of Journalists, a maximum of 36 percent knew about the paid news. Because they are practicing journalists, they may have experience of it. Only 4 percent were unaware of it. Similarly, out of 20 percent of media educators, as many as 16

percent knew about the paid news. It is also natural as they are teaching media ethics.

Q.2. Do you think that sometimes advertisement is published in a news form?

A-Yes, B- No

Variables	Options		Total Percentage
	Yes	No	
Journalists	80%	20%	100%
Media educators	70%	30%	100%
Media students	50%	50%	100%
Others(Respondents who are a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years)	30%	70%	100%
Total no. of respondents 200			100%

Table No -2 -Does advertisement publish in news form in newspapers

Seventy percent of journalists, queried, said that news is given lesser space than advertisements in the newspapers. Only 15 percent of media educators felt that news is given less space than advertisements in the newspapers. 4 percent disagreed that news gets less space than advertisements. Twenty percent of the media

students replied affirmative to the query, while 20 percent did not agree.

Q-3. Has the media today become a product?

A- Agreed; B-Partially Agreed; C- Disagreed; D-Partially Disagreed

Variables	Options				Total Percentage
	Newspaper	TV News channels	New media	Radio	
Journalists	42.50%	20%	07.50%	30%	100%
Media educators	30%	20%	15%	35%	100%
Media students	35%	27.50%	12.50%	25%	100%
Others(Respondents who are a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years)	54%	16%	9%	21%	100%
Total no. of respondents 200					100%

Table No -3- Variations in the acceptance of newspapers as a reliable source of news

Newspaper emerged as the most reliable source of news as most respondents from all the categories made such an averment. 42.50 percent of journalists said that the newspaper was the most reliable source of news, while only 20 percent trusted the TV channels.

Q-4- Who is more responsible for paid news syndrome in media?

A- Businessmen- B-Politicians C- Journalists D-Media Houses

Variables	Options				Total Percentage
	Business men	Politicians	Journalists	Media Houses	
Journalists	32.50%	17.50%	07.50%	42.50%	100%
Media educators	55%	10%	10%	25%	100%
Media students	45%	20%	15%	20%	100%
Others(Respondents who are a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years)	67%	16%	15%	2%	100%

Total no. of respondents 200	100%
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Table No -4 - Response about the syndrome of Paid News in media

32.50 percent of the journalists blamed the businessmen for the Paid News syndrome in media. 17.50 percent held politicians, and 42.50 percent blamed media houses responsible for the menace. Only 7.50 percent blamed their fraternity. Fifty-five percent of media educators held the businessmen responsible while 10 percent blamed the politicians. Twenty-five percent said media houses were responsible, while 10 percent blamed the journalists. Forty-five

percent of the media students blamed the businessmen, and 20 percent blamed the media houses.

Q-5-. Do you think Paid News increased during the polls? A- Agreed; B-Partially Agreed; C- Disagreed; D-Partially Disagreed

Variables	Options				Total Percentage
	Agreed	Partially Agreed	Disagreed	Partially Disagreed	
Journalists	22.50 %	27.50%	25%	25%	100%
Media educators	35%	20%	30%	15%	100%
Media students	45%	17.50%	15%	22.50%	100%
Others(who are a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years)	53%	19%	17%	11%	100%
Total no. of respondents 200					100%

Table No -5 -Paid News is a tool for media industrialists to further their business interests

The researcher found that the least number of journalists agreed that paid news increased during the polls. Only 22.50 percent of journalists agreed that Paid News cases increased during the polls, while only 25 percent disagreed. Thirty-five percent of media

educators also agreed, and only 30 percent disagreed.

Q-6. Paid news is affecting the credibility of journalism. A-Yes; B- No

Variables	Options		Total Percentage
	Yes	No	
Journalists	90%	10%	100%

Media educators	80%	20%	100%
Media students	75%	25%	100%
Others(who are a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years)	40%	60%	100%
Total no. of respondents 200			100%

Table No -6- Paid news is affecting the credibility of journalism.

The charts show that 90 percent of journalists felt that paid news has been affecting the credibility of journalism. Only 10 percent disagreed with it. Eighty percent of media educators and 75 percent of media students also said that paid news affects media credibility.

Q-7.Has self-regulation succeeded in safeguarding media ethics? A-Yes; B- No

Variables	Options		Total Percentage
	Yes	No	
Journalists	10%	90%	100%
Media educators	10%	90%	100%
Media students	25%	75%	100%
Others(Respondents who are a subscriber of either of the selected newspapers for more than 5 years)	40%	60%	100%
Total no. of respondents 200			100%

Table No-7- Self-regulation succeeded in safeguarding media ethics

Ninety percent of the journalists and an equal percentage of media educators said that self-regulation had not safeguarded media ethics. Seventy-five percent of the media students and 60 percent of the others also felt the same way. Forty percent of the others, however, said that self-regulation has succeeded.

Major findings of the Research Study

•The research study shows that 80% of media educators and media persons think that news is

given less space than advertisements in the newspapers. 60 % of the media students also have the same opinion.

• According to this study, 32.50% of the journalists blamed the businessmen for the Paid News syndrome in media. 17.50% held politicians, and 42.50% blamed media houses responsible for the menace.

• The least number of journalists agreed that paid news increased during the polls. Only 22.50% of journalists agreed that paid news cases increased during the polls, while 25% disagreed. 35% of

media educators also agreed, and only 30 % disagreed.

- The study shows that 52.50% of the journalists think that newspapers today have become a product. 20 % partially agreed, while an equal percentage disagreed.

- 90% of journalists felt that paid news has been affecting the credibility of journalism. Only 10 % disagreed with it. 80 % of media educators and 75 % of media students agreed that it affects media credibility.

- It was found that 90% of the journalists and an equal percentage of media educators said that self-regulation has not succeeded in safeguarding media ethics. 75 % of the media students and 60 % of the others also felt the same way.

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