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**Rethinking Media Systems:  
Insights from a Case Study of Paid News in India**

SAVYASAACHI JAIN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the University of Westminster  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Final submission 2017

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Rethinking Media Systems: Insights from a Case Study of Paid News in India**

This thesis examines whether and how an enhancement can be effected in the depth and accuracy with which media systems theory meets its proclaimed objective of understanding and describing the behaviour of media systems. It draws upon critiques of the applicability of media systems theory to non-Western media systems to ask whether the grounded study of media systems reveals additional variables or approaches to enhance its descriptive and explanatory power. It answers these questions by conducting an exploratory case study of the complex and relatively unmapped Indian media system, focusing on the system-wide phenomenon of paid news, of which the most egregious form is political advertising masquerading as news at election time. The case study draws upon a thematic analysis of rich empirical data from 47 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with top journalists, editors, owners, policy makers and heads of regulatory bodies, triangulated against a large variety of documents and statistical data.

The study constructs a map of the Indian media system to establish its commercial, organisational and regulatory contours, and produces an analysis of the forces and relationships that define the systemic behaviour that is manifest as paid news. Its theoretical contribution includes the suggestion of candidate variables and approaches to supplement existing macro-level factors used by models and typologies of media systems theory. It also sets out seven theoretical propositions:

- 1) The wider applicability of media systems theory is hampered by the adoption of Western media as a pivotal reference point;
- 2) Normative beliefs and macro-level structures are inadequate descriptors of media systems;
- 3) Dimensions other than politics and economics can be critical to defining media systems;
- 4) Variables that account for forces and relationships within the media are important in characterising media systems;
- 5) Media systems are not passively shaped by political, economic and other structures; they have agency and can act independently;
- 6) Grounded case studies can yield variables and approaches that help characterise media systems; and
- 7) System-wide ethical or normative fault-lines such as paid news can reveal critical characteristics of a media system.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Professor Daya Thussu, my unfailingly supportive thesis supervisor

Professor Chas Critcher, who cracked a gentle whip and catalysed critical insights

My wife, Mimmy, who, though she always believed, will be more relieved than I am

My son, Abhimanyu, whose academic output I envy

All my family, friends and colleagues who asked how it was going

My mother, Professor Jasbir Jain, who has always been an inspiration

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my original work.

Savyasaachi Jain

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian media system is complex. At the broadest level, it is a conglomerate of about two dozen distinct major linguistic media systems in newspapers as well as news television. The linguistic sub-systems operate in regional, ethnic, cultural, political, historical and economic contexts that can vary widely. Within the media in each language, there are differentiations according to the medium as well as multiple vertical layers of operational scale, geographical reach and localisation. Each element can – and often does – exhibit independence of practices and manifest behaviour. However, these horizontal and vertical segments are not silos; audiences overlap, and many media organisations operate across media, language, region and levels of localisation. They are also, of course, united by common legal, regulatory, political and economic frameworks at the national level. The result is a labyrinth of sub-systems differentiated along various parameters, but all recognisably part of the organic whole that is the Indian media system.

Taken as a whole, the Indian media system is also arguably the most vibrant of all contemporary media systems. It is the largest newspaper market in the world, having overtaken China in 2010 (WAN-IFRA, 2011). It is host to more than 800 television channels, of which about half are classified as news channels by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and has more than 105,000 registered publications, of which nearly 15,000 are daily newspapers (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2015). More important, at a time when traditional media have been in rapid decline in the advanced economies of the West, in India, both newspapers and television have been witnessing double-digit growth rates over more than a decade, which is expected to be sustained in the medium term (FICCI, 2006, 2008; FICCI-KPMG, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

However, the Indian media system seems to be under-represented in academic literature, especially in view of its size and dynamism. From an Indian perspective, and arguably from a less parochial point of view as well, it has not received the attention that it deserves. After all, it caters to about one-sixth of the global population, a young population with a median age estimated at 25.5 in 2010 (United Nations, 2013),

inhabiting the world's largest democracy and powering an economy with one of the highest contemporary rates of growth (World Bank, 2014). This seeming neglect can be seen as the result of a number of factors, including the complexity of the media system, the fact that Indian media is relatively protected from foreign investment and thus not commercially integrated with the rest of the world, and, of course, the dominance of the Western world and their media systems in the study of media and communication.

This thesis focuses upon the Indian media system and its place in media theory. It is not an attempt to theorise the Indian media system as a whole, but there is a definite intention to make sense of its apparent complexity and to comprehend some of its critical qualities and behaviour. It does so in the light of the comparative study of media systems.

This study is not overtly comparative – it studies India, but does not explicitly compare it to other media systems. However, it remains essentially comparative, and in more than one sense. For one, it studies India in the light of the theoretical constructs of media systems theory, which are inherently comparative. In any case, because dominant media theory often pivots around Western experience and normative expectations, the study of any other media system could arguably be considered comparative. Secondly, and equally important, is the contra-flow. The conclusions of this research into Indian media have implications for how theoretical representation of media systems outside the Western world can be refined to more accurately reflect their reality. Thus, though large parts of this thesis concern themselves exclusively with India, the conclusions from that grounded inquiry circle back to the comparative study of media systems.

This chapter sets out the context of this research project, as well as its ambitions, approach and process. It begins by describing developments in the Indian media system that defined the case study at the heart of the inquiry. It then discusses the theoretical framework and specifies the research questions, approach and imperatives that guided research. It also provides an overview of the structure and organisation of this thesis. Finally, it outlines how this research contributes to the study of Indian media and to comparative media systems theory.

## 1.1 THE CONCERNING EMERGENCE OF PAID NEWS

This research project began with strong concern about the pervasive practice of respected mainstream media accepting, even demanding, cash for coverage from politicians during elections in the world's largest democracy, India.

This practice, which in India is now commonly referred to as 'paid news', first came to attention during the 2009 national-level general elections when Palgummi Sainath, recipient of more than 40 Indian and international awards for his journalism, reported from a part of the western state of Maharashtra not far from India's commercial capital, Mumbai:

It's a development that sets apart the 2009 polls from earlier ones in Vidarbha (and some other regions, too). And it's not a happy one. Candidates complain of 'media extortion.' Some (not all) publications and a channel or two appear to be making poll contenders offers they can't refuse. The offer: 'coverage packages.' The low-end package seems worth around Rs.15–20 lakh [\$30,000–40,000], the high-end ones a lot more. Buy into one and you get a set number of column centimetres, photos and reports, or footage of your campaign and rallies. 'They know we have an election budget and they pressurise us,' says one candidate, who has been an MP more than once. He says he has never seen it this blatant.

(Sainath, 2009a)

Sainath's report was based on developments in the state of Maharashtra. Soon after, *The Wall Street Journal* published a story titled 'Want Press Coverage? Give Me Some Money' relating remarkably similar events in another part of India about 1,300 km away, a region dominated by entirely different media organisations:

Ajay Goyal is a serious, independent candidate contesting for a Lok Sabha [the directly elected lower house of the bicameral Indian Parliament] seat in Chandigarh.

Never heard of him? Neither, probably, have a lot of people in Chandigarh because when it came to getting press coverage for his campaign he was faced with a simple message: If you want press, you have to pay.

So far, he says, he's been approached by about 10 people – some brokers and public relations managers acting on behalf of newspaper owners, some reporters and editors – with the message that he'll only get written about in the news pages for a fee. We're not talking advertising; we're talking news.

One broker offered three weeks of coverage in four newspapers for 10 lakh rupees (\$20,000). A reporter and a photographer from a Chandigarh newspaper told him that for 1.5 lakh rupees (\$3,000) for them and a further 3 lakh rupees (\$6,000) for other reporters, they could guarantee coverage in up to five newspapers for two weeks.

(Beckett, 2009)

It soon emerged that these were not isolated incidents. Neither were they stealthy acts of corruption undertaken by opportunistic individuals. The pattern that emerged was of a widespread practice adopted by many news outlets, large as well as small, newspapers as well as news television channels. Some later accounts suggested the practice may have been in existence since the national general elections in 2004 (The Hoot, 2009; Raman, 2010), but it had managed to avoid media attention before 2009, probably because it was occurring on a smaller scale. In the run-up to the 2009 World Newspaper Conference in India, Sainath revealed further details of how the system worked in a series of front page stories in *The Hindu*, a quality national daily. He described the 'financial orgy' of the 'structured extraction of huge sums of money' through coercive 'coverage packages':

The deals were many and varied. A candidate had to pay different rates for 'profiles,' interviews, a list of 'achievements,' or even a trashing of his rival in some cases. (With the channels, it was 'live' coverage, a 'special focus,' or even a team tracking you for hours in a day.) Let alone bad-mouthing your rival, this 'pay-per' culture also ensures that the paper or channel will not tell its audiences that you have a criminal record. Over 50 per cent of the MLAs just elected in Maharashtra have criminal charges pending against them. Some of them featured in adulatory 'news items' which made no mention of this while tracing their track record.

At the top end of the spectrum, 'special supplements' cost a bomb. One put out by one of the State's most important politicians – celebrating his 'era' – cost an estimated Rs.1.5 crore [\$300,000]. That is, just this single media insertion cost 15 times what he is totally allowed to spend as a candidate. He has won more than the election, by the way.

One common low-end package: Your profile and ‘four news items of your choice’ to be carried for between Rs.4 lakh [\$8,000] or more depending on which page you seek. There is something chilling about those words ‘news items of your choice.’ Here is news on order. Paid for.

(Sainath, 2009b)

It was clear that what was being offered and bought through these ‘packages’ was the news space, not advertising space. There was an unambiguous understanding that buying a coverage package would allow candidates to present their political advertising as news, with all its claims to being authentic, accurate, impartial and factual. There was no attempt to display it differently from news as advertising usually is, that is, there was not differentiation in font, no borders and no disclosure, even in a small type size. Thus, there was no indication to audiences that the content had been paid for by an interested person or party. There was also no fig leaf of a news organisation endorsing a candidate or supporting a political position; the paid items were presented as news, not opinion. It was a purely commercial transaction relating to the news columns and, worse, it was often extortionate and coercive.

By the end of 2009, multiple instances of paid political news had been documented, many of which would have been hilarious had they not represented such a serious and egregious violation of all that the news media claimed to stand for. One example was the printing of identical hagiographical pieces about a powerful politician in three rival newspapers, one with a staffer’s byline, another credited to ‘a special correspondent’ and the third with no byline at all (Sainath, 2009c). One of the newspapers used a different headline, but otherwise the three pieces were verbatim reproductions of material churned out by a political publicist but presented to readers as the news output of the three newspapers.

Paid news was concerning along two entirely different dimensions, both equally important. One was of standards, ethics and practices within the media. It became apparent that paid news was both system-wide and institutionalised – it had been adopted by news organisations, large and small, in different languages and regions. It was also taking place at the level of the organisation, not at the level of the individual – marketing departments of news organisations had spotted an opportunity in campaign expenditure and had decided to cash in on it in a systematic and organised manner. Its

rapid spread and large footprint represented the emergence of a new and significant phenomenon that had become entrenched across the media system.

The second dimension of concern related to Indian democracy. It was obvious that paid news had profound implications for the flow of political information and the integrity of democratic processes in the world's largest democracy. A number of issues could be readily identified, ranging from the contraction of the public sphere to the media's failure to fulfil its normative role as the fourth pillar of democracy, the distortion of democratic processes and the privileging of moneyed candidates. In addition, by accepting unaccounted cash, the media were complicit in candidates' violation of spending limits imposed by the Election Commission of India and were themselves liable for infringing tax laws.

Paid news was widely denounced in public pronouncements by a number of high officials, including the Vice-President of India, Hamid Ansari (Election Commission of India, 2010a), and the heads of the Press Council of India and the Election Commission of India (Election Commission of India, 2010b). At least two full-fledged inquiries were set up in a bid to find solutions. A subcommittee was set up by the Press Council of India in 2009, and it submitted its report early the next year (Press Council of India, 2010b). Separately, Parliament's Standing Committee on Information Technology took up the matter in 2010 and issued a report devoted to paid news after studying the issue over nearly three years.

However, despite the outrage expressed at the highest levels and in some sections of the media, and sustained efforts by the Press Council of India acting in concert with the Election Commission of India, the practice continues to flourish, albeit clandestinely. It has been detected during almost all subsequent electoral contests at the national and state levels, indicating that it is as deep-rooted as it is rife. For instance, during state-level elections in Gujarat in 2012, another subcommittee of the Press Council of India reported that 126 cases of paid election news had been identified and 61 candidates of various political parties admitted to having paid for coverage in newspapers or on television (Press Council of India, 2012). In 2016, paid news is still an issue (see, for instance, *Hindustan Times*, 2016, and *DNA*, 2016).

## 1.2 RESEARCHER BACKGROUND AND INTEREST

This researcher belongs to the Indian media system, having worked as a print and television journalist in several large media groups, including some of those being researched in this thesis. The researcher has served as Reporter with *The Times of India*, the English language newspaper with the second highest circulation in the world and a major player in the Indian media system; Correspondent with the weekly newspaper *India Week* from the *Business India* group; and Correspondent and later Producer with the premier television current affairs programme Eyewitness from the *Hindustan Times* group.

However, it bears mentioning that the researcher was not in the employ of any media organisation within the Indian media system for more than a decade prior to undertaking this research project – during this period, the researcher was variously and often simultaneously an independent documentary filmmaker, engaged in media development activities on behalf of international organisations and an international journalism trainer. Thus, the researcher maintained a position within the media system, but not within its core, and with no direct dealings with any major organisation within it. As a result, the researcher is able to adopt and lay claim to the stance of a knowledgeable and interested observer, and one with some contacts within large media organisations, but not one who is directly associated with any of them.

Interest in paid news and its precursor practices within the Indian media system was also intensified by the years spent in media development. For about 10 years preceding this research project, the researcher was first in external partnership with, and then employed by The Thomson Foundation, an international media development charity based in Cardiff, Wales. As EU Projects Editor, then India Projects Coordinator and Asia Projects Coordinator for The Thomson Foundation, the researcher conceived, obtained funding for and managed media development projects, working with journalists and programme makers to improve standards and introduce greater reflexivity in journalistic practices. During this period, the researcher also conducted about four dozen training workshops in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Macau, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Turkmenistan, UK and Vietnam. These workshops, conducted on behalf

of international and intergovernmental organisations such as Arab States Broadcasting Union, Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, The Thomson Foundation, UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP, had a strong focus on journalism ethics and standards even as they focused on climate change, diversity and conflict, documentary filmmaking, election reporting, health reporting, good governance, HIV and AIDS, investigative reporting and migration.

This study benefited from the researcher's acquaintance with the Indian media and also from the fact that a number of contacts were active in prominent media organisations. The phenomenon being studied was contemporary and this, too, was an advantage as leads and information were readily available. Having once been employed in mainstream journalism could have been an inhibiting factor but the lack of active or residual links with any of the large organisations at the core of the media system was fortunate in that there were no conflicts of interest. Thus, though the familiarity and background knowledge of the social and professional context were an advantage, the constraints imposed by the situation were relatively minor. They are considered in some detail in Chapter 3.

Overall, the professional background of this researcher, including the extended engagement with the standards and practices of journalism in India and in several other non-Western countries, played an important role in deciding the focus and approach of this study, empirically as well as theoretically.

### **1.3 FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE EMPIRICAL INQUIRY**

This inquiry revolves around paid news. Paid news is treated as the central case study because it was deemed to possess the potential to illuminate critical aspects of the Indian media. Background knowledge of the Indian media system provided numerous indications that paid news is organically connected to various aspects of the media system. It is clear to observers of the Indian media system that the phenomenon did not emerge in a vacuum; it was the product of developments within the system over more than a decade and thus integrally connected to the whole. Moreover, as this research

shows, the phenomenon is deep-rooted, institutionalised and system-wide. Its pervasiveness and persistence indicate that it is associated with strong forces and embedded logics. It also marks a substantial deviation from the role historically claimed – and performed – by India’s media with regard to its democracy. No claim is made here that paid news is the only significant aspect of Indian media, or that it defines all of Indian media, but this study unreservedly affirms that it is a systemic fault-line that defines some critical features and attributes of Indian media. It is thus taken as a valuable opportunity to gain insights into the Indian media system.

There is no immediately apparent explanation for the rapid and systematic adoption of paid news across Indian media. The answer most readily proffered during preliminary research was a narrative of greed and brazenness, of media houses determined to capture a share of the vast unaccounted wealth that Indian politicians accumulate by corrupt means while in office and pay out during elections. From the perspective of media studies, however, greed is neither an adequate nor a satisfactory answer, for it ignores the structures, forces and processes that have enabled and propelled this system-wide normative rupture. Not recognising that systemic factors may be responsible also implicitly categorises paid news as an aberration or deviation. On the other hand, acknowledging its status as an entrenched systemic practice represents the realisation that investigating this phenomenon has the potential to reveal insights about the system that hosts it.

The news media in India have long laid claim to the idealistic high ground of performing a vital role in a vibrant democracy, building upon the role they played in social movements from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the anti-colonial struggle in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in enriching democracy and national values in the decades after India became independent in 1947. Many Indian journalists – including this researcher, who has enjoyed a long career in newspapers, current affairs television and documentary filmmaking – genuinely believe their broad job description entails acting on behalf of citizens and holding those in positions of power to account. Admittedly, it is possible that this role identification is stronger for those who grew up in a time when a strong sense of social responsibility prevailed in the media, than for younger journalists who entered the field after India began to embrace neo-liberal approaches in

the wake of the economic reforms of the early 1990s. Nevertheless, it can safely be said that journalists continue to largely adhere to a self-image of being engaged in a public service. A strong tradition of public service journalism continues to exist and there is no shortage of high quality output.

How this can be reconciled with the fact that media organisations actively connive with politicians to present political advertising in the guise of news has neither been explained nor explored. The perplexing coexistence of good journalism with venality and corruption, often in the same newsroom, was the conundrum that drove this study.

Journalists did take notice of paid news, but voices protesting the phenomenon were fewer and more subdued than one might have expected from a proud media. Though the majority of journalists acknowledged that paid news was a corrupt practice, their concern did not seem to extend much beyond that. After the initial uproar, voiced in the output of some large media organisations but given short shrift by others, the issue was first relegated to magazines, blogs and a few documentary films or panel discussions on television, and subsequently to the status of background noise. As time passed, the bulk of coverage of the issue, by and large, became limited to news agency reports of speeches mentioning it or announcements by inquiry committees. Some journalists' associations held discussions on the topic, but there was no credible attempt by them or individual senior journalists to tackle the problem within their news organisations. This researcher got a clear sense of journalists distancing themselves from paid news, an attitude akin to resignation if not acceptance, and seeming suspiciously like a realisation that protesting paid news was futile. Few, if any, in the Indian media seek to justify it, but neither is there much evidence of actively resisting it and refusing to accept it as part of business as normal.

Thus, at its core, this thesis concerns itself with answering questions about how matters in the Indian media came to the pass where paid news became a system-wide phenomenon that is not effectively challenged because it is perceived as either acceptable or inevitable. Fuelled by concern at the phenomenon, and puzzled by the muted response from otherwise proud, professional and independent journalists, it seeks to understand the forces behind the prevalence and persistence of paid news.

At a broader level, the inquiry into the emergence and institutionalisation of paid news is a vehicle for understanding the behaviour of the Indian media system. As this thesis will show, the phenomenon of paid news has clear and traceable relationships with a number of structural factors and other operative forces in the Indian media. Unravelling the processes connected with paid news highlights these factors, so the study of paid news reveals a wealth of information on other, connected facets of the Indian media system.

However, empirically, this research had to go beyond a very sharp focus on paid news and adopt a wider approach because the contours of the Indian media system have not been unambiguously established in academic literature. Many of the wider aspects of the media system that were evidently linked to paid news were either uncharted or incompletely mapped. The lack of available data thus necessitated an expansion of the scope to include an exercise of mapping relevant macro-level aspects of the media system as a whole. The map that resulted, and which is presented in this thesis, does not claim to be a comprehensive description of all possible aspects of Indian media, but it does bridge some gaps in the academic study of Indian media.

While the empirical scope of the study had to be expanded, an attempt was made to maintain clear boundaries in other respects. Thus, the central focus of this study is on the time period in which paid news and associated trends emerged. Precursor trends, some of which became evident as early as the late 1980s, are considered, but the attention of research efforts remains on developments in Indian media between 2005 and 2012.

#### **1.4 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND FOCUS**

The examination of paid news, its origin and manifestations, as well as what it reveals about the Indian media system, has been conducted within the theoretical context of media systems theory. The comparative study of media systems is a rich field with a large body of academic scholarship, including several theoretical formulations going back at least six decades. Paid news could also have been studied from the perspectives

of professionalism, or ethics, or regulation, or commercialisation, or journalism cultures, or a number of other frameworks, but media systems theory was preferred.

There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, media systems theory seeks to define and characterise media systems. The goal of the underlying intellectual project is to understand why media systems behave as they do. Scholars consider a variety of aspects and variables according to the approach they adopt, but their fundamental concern is to establish how the context of a media system shapes it and determines its interactions and behaviour. Since this was the broad intention and motivation of this study as well – partly to answer how Indian media came to the pass where paid news became so prevalent – the match between this project and media systems theory was considered apt.

Secondly, media systems theory takes a holistic approach to media systems. Initial inquiry into the roots of paid news suggested numerous connections with diverse factors ranging from the macro-economic environment to regulation, standards, business practices, ownership, media competition, exercise of power by the media, political corruption, electoral practices, economic pressures on newsgathering, the internal dynamics of news organisations, newsroom practices and the professional attitudes of journalists. Theoretical frameworks that take these factors into account either individually or in combination with each other could have been deployed, but it was felt that such frameworks would have been only partially satisfactory – they would take some of these factors into account, but not others. Media systems theory, on the other hand, provided the opportunity to examine a broad combination of these factors in a holistic manner.

Thirdly, media systems theory is essentially comparative in nature. It was an ambition of this research project to draw conclusions appropriate for comparative research, and to avoid being constrained to the geographical boundaries of India. It was felt that to draw conclusions that were limited to Indian media would represent the application of theory to a specific case and present fewer opportunities to contribute to the development of theory itself. A conscious effort has been made here to contribute to the development of media systems theory by distilling the insights that emerge from the study of paid news and the Indian media system.

Last, but not least, is the underrepresentation of India in the academic study of media and the perception that it has received less attention than is its due. Utilising media systems theory thus permitted this thesis to contribute to the furtherance of earlier attempts at the internationalisation or de-Westernisation of media studies by enriching it with non-Western inputs and perspectives.

Overall, the theoretical framework of media systems theory resulted in a rich analysis – it facilitated a multi-dimensional wide-angle examination of the forces and relationships governing the behaviour of Indian media while simultaneously enabling the drawing of conclusions that provide pointers for the development of theory. While the empirical elements of the research revolve around paid news and its context, they are implemented with the idea of understanding how media systems theory can account for this behaviour of the Indian media system. The findings from the empirical study are used as inputs for the theoretical exploration of media systems.

Two research questions have been stated in this thesis. The first is the overarching theoretical aim of this research project – to test the adequacy of media systems theory in accounting for the behaviour of the Indian media system and, if needed, to suggest ways to improve its descriptive and explanatory power. The second question, in two parts, outlines the approach to answering the first question. The first part of the second question seeks to determine the features and behaviour of the Indian media systems as revealed by the case study of paid news, and the second part asks whether this empirical reality can yield suggestions for additional variables and approaches to contribute to the advancement of media systems theory. Thus, the research questions that guide the design and implementation of this research project have a dual thrust. In combining the specific empirical focus of this research with its theoretical framework, they seek to make a contribution in both directions. On the one hand, they seek to deepen understanding of the features and characteristics of the Indian media system, and on the other, they ask what the findings from the case study can contribute to media systems theory.

## 1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is organised into six chapters, the first of which is this introduction. Chapter 2, titled ‘Unpacking Models of Media Systems’, reviews literature on media systems theory. It traces the development of media systems theory and is structured around two key works in this area – Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) and Hallin and Mancini’s *Comparing Media Systems* (2004). It considers these two sets of landmark models of media systems in some detail. In addition, there is extensive discussion of the responses, critiques and suggested refinements that have been proposed in reaction to each of them. This allows the literature review to draw out the prominent strands of arguments that have been made over the last six decades and evaluate the strengths and limitations of the dominant approaches and their assumptions. The chapter thus presents a structured discussion of conceptual issues in media systems theory, including a substantive focus on its applicability to dissimilar media systems that are located in different geographies and societies and shaped by markedly dissimilar economic and political systems, cultures and historical trajectories. This review of literature results in the emergence of the two research questions that guided this research. They are specified in Chapter 2.7.

Next, Chapter 3 contains a discussion of the methodology employed in the research and sets out the theoretical basis, rationale and implementation of the research design. It first considers the lack of data on the Indian media system and how this impacted the research design. It explains how the resultant design incorporated two distinct but complementary elements within the chosen case study approach – an outer case study mapping the contours of the Indian media system and an inner, nested case study focusing more sharply on paid news. Each level had extensive linkages with the other, with leads emerging from one level guiding the exploration of the other level. This chapter also describes in detail the collection and analysis of data from statistics, documents and a large number of semi-structured in-depth interviews, as well as how data gathered from various sources was triangulated.

The methodology chapter is followed by two chapters that present and discuss the research findings. Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive map of the Indian media system. The mapping exercise covers all contextual factors relevant to the focus on paid news

that emerged from the various sources of data and phases of research. This chapter contains a brief review of the history of Indian media and proposes a division into five phases. It provides details of the explosive growth in various sectors of the media in the fifth, current, phase and highlights factors such as intense competition, the distortion of revenue models and the resultant quest for profitability that are directly linked to paid news. It also provides an overview of distinctly identifiable business models that have emerged and explores how all of these elements are linked to the emergence of paid news. The data in this chapter is drawn from a mixture of statistics, documents and interviews.

In Chapter 5, the second chapter of research findings, the focus is on the specifics of the phenomenon of paid news. The chapter defines paid news and considers multiple attempts to address the phenomenon before discussing what it reveals about the forces and relationships within the media system. These findings are largely based on in-depth interviews conducted with nearly four dozen senior figures in Indian media and in institutions that are associated with the media or with paid news, but they also draw upon documents and data from other sources. The interviews reflect the respondents' deep personal knowledge of the factors, processes and forces that have been instrumental in the institutionalisation of paid news and associated precursor practices. These interviews provide insights into the effect of business models, the internal dynamics of news organisations, pressures on newsrooms, changing editorial practices and their effect on journalists and journalism. The data presented in this chapter is closely connected to the contextual map of the Indian media system presented in the preceding chapter; the two chapters draw upon, as well as contribute to, each other.

Finally, Chapter 6 states the conclusions of this thesis. It draws together the different strands of information and perspectives that were generated, synthesises them and locates them in their theoretical context. This chapter contains a structured presentation of the answers to the research questions that guided this inquiry. It goes on to discuss the implications of these answers for understanding the Indian media system and presents seven theoretical propositions that represent a contribution to the comparative study of media systems.

## 1.6 CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

This thesis presents research into the Indian media system and the emergence of paid news within it, these being the two layers of the case study, both of which have received limited scholarly attention. It also considers the implications of these empirical findings in relation to media systems theory. It makes a contribution at both these levels, resulting in a contribution that has empirical as well as methodological and theoretical dimensions.

Empirically, this study first maps the Indian media system. The contours of the Indian media system presented in this thesis are not available with a similar scope or depth elsewhere in academic literature.<sup>1</sup> The constructed map, which analyses longitudinal data over the medium term to establish firm trends in the Indian media system and its constituents, represents a consolidation of data that does not exist elsewhere. While the map of Indian media defines the forces that are driving its current phase, the in-depth investigation into paid news that proceeded alongside provides insights into how the system's broad contours impact relationships and processes in constituent organisations. Taken together, the two levels of the case study present an informative picture of the inner workings of a media system in transition. This makes an empirical contribution by providing a previously unavailable level of insight.

Methodologically, this research project demonstrates the value of the grounded examination of an ethical or normative fault-line – such as paid news – in the study of media systems. This study makes no claim that it covers all aspects of the Indian media system – it goes without saying that there are significant aspects of the Indian media that have not been captured here because they do not relate to paid news. However, studying paid news does reveal characteristics of the media system that are critical to defining its behaviour, and these are characteristics whose centrality might otherwise

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<sup>1</sup> This assertion excludes a book chapter which presented a preliminary compilation of the data presented in this thesis: Jain, S. (2015) India: Multiple Media Explosions. In: Nordenstreng, K. and Thussu, D. (eds) *Mapping BRICS Media*, Abingdon: Routledge: 145–165.

have been overlooked. This thesis provides evidence that studying fault-lines such as paid news can enhance understanding of the core characteristics of media systems.

Theoretically, the research contributes to the study of media systems by suggesting that grounded studies such as this one could – with further theorisation – offer additional variables that could be incorporated into extant media systems theory. Scholars often find a lack of ‘fit’ when they ‘apply’ dominant theoretical models to non-Western media systems they know well. This thesis suggests that this is because extant media systems theory takes into account mainly those variables that apparently determine the behaviour of Western media systems, and that other defining variables with wider applicability could emerge from studies such as this. It also supports the view that grounded approaches can lead to valuable perspectives and insights that are not readily obtained through the normative and structural approaches usually adopted by media systems theorists.

In sum, this thesis claims a contribution both to the study of the Indian media system and to media systems theory. The specifics of the research that supports these claims are presented in the chapters that follow.

## 2. UNPACKING MODELS OF MEDIA SYSTEMS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

‘Why is the press as it is?’ That was the question to which Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956: 1) provided a confident and influential answer in *Four Theories of the Press*. In the six decades since that book, media systems theory has seen the emergence of a number of other models that answer this basic question by classifying the media according to their characteristics. This chapter analyses the approaches that are instrumental in the formulation of the various answers to the question posed by Siebert *et al.* It tests their theoretical robustness and examines their effectiveness for the task of illuminating complex phenomena in the Indian media system.

This chapter discusses the development of leading schemas for describing and classifying media systems in their historical context. It picks two seminal works to act as landmarks and structures the discussion around them. First, it considers Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) and reviews the extensive theoretical discussions it sparked in the next four or five decades. Next, it considers the second landmark work, Hallin and Mancini’s *Comparing Media Systems* (2004), and reviews the various critiques, refinements and alternatives that it generated.

Both these frameworks have played a central role in the study of media systems, and the first of them has also been instrumental in how the world perceives the media and how media practitioners construct their professional identity. They have each been the subject of extensive theoretical critiques, which interrogate their accuracy and effectiveness, highlight debates and, at times, make a powerful case for dismissing them altogether. Taken together, these discussions provide a strong foundation for understanding the strengths and limitations of the theory of media systems. They also highlight a number of conceptual issues relevant to this study.

Comparative approaches have been integral to the study of media systems. Scholars have based their typologies for the classification of media systems on the comparison of the characteristics and behaviour of media in different countries. This aspect is

responsible for media systems theory being instrumental in a geographical expansion of the boundaries of media studies. It is perhaps paradoxical that though the central pillars of media systems theory are firmly located in the characteristics of the media of the developed West, this discipline has served as a vehicle for the study of media systems outside the Western world.

This paradox is one of the threads that run through this chapter. Many – but not all – authors of media system models have been candid in admitting that their approach and data are fundamentally Western. However, this has not usually inhibited them in declaring an international ambition and vision. An explanation on how the two are reconciled is not always forthcoming. In one sense this chapter is an attempt to understand whether the dominance of data from Western media is an inhibiting factor in the internationalisation of media systems theory. If it is, what elements are significant, what is their effect, and how can this be overcome?

This chapter studies various theoretical models of media systems, but, equally, it pays close attention to the underlying assumptions and frameworks, for there lie many relevant questions in search of answers. The broad question is whether these assumptions and approaches are adequate and effective in studying the media of societies characterised by markedly dissimilar values and dynamics, and, if not, how they might be conceptualised differently. The wide adoption of the perspectives of media systems theory suggests that it is widely applicable. However, as is discussed later in this chapter, it has also been pointed out that using Western media systems as the pivotal reference point often manifests itself as an implicit assumption of the West as the normative ideal. This, it could be argued, achieves little more than establishing the presence or absence of the characteristics observed in Western media. Indeed, it is remarkable how few perspectives establish a flow in the reverse direction by, for instance, using international perspectives to enhance understanding of media as a whole. This aspect is considered, however it is not the central thrust of this chapter. Instead, the focus here is on studying underlying assumptions to reveal theoretical blind spots and on exploring how they might be eliminated.

Another question that guides this chapter is whether the models proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and others, including the wide variety of authors in the influential

volumes edited by Curran and Park (2000), Thussu (2009), and Esser and Hanitzsch (2012b), are positioned closer to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm and to each other than they might imagine. Particularly when viewed from a non-Western perspective, it is evident that their shared genealogical root – the potent combination of normative and structural frameworks expounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm – generates a strong familial resemblance.

These questions will be addressed by studying the underpinnings of media systems theory. A number of conceptual issues will be distilled and discussed in an attempt to extract insights that might aid understanding of the Indian media. Together, these aspects will outline the state of the discipline and the conceptual perimeters of its reach in a manner relevant to the thrust and focus of this research project.

The next four sections of this chapter discuss, in order, *Four Theories of the Press*; its critique and subsequent developments; Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems*; and debates surrounding it. The section after that draws out the conceptual issues relevant to this study, and the final section concludes this chapter and states the research questions.

## **2.2 THE SEDUCTIVE LEGACY OF *FOUR THEORIES OF THE PRESS***

The acknowledged point of origin for the study of media systems is Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do* (1956), which has survived multiple attempts to bury it.

It sets out a seminal organising principle that, even as it is reviled by subsequent theorists, has maintained its centrality as their point of reference, attesting to its long lasting influence. Sparks, for instance, affirms:

The fact is that, like it or not, the framework proposed by Schramm and his co-thinkers back in the depths of the Cold War has entered the collective unconscious of the profession, and it remains firmly lodged even in the minds of many of its sternest critics.

(Sparks, 2000: 30)

Hallin and Mancini, whose *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (2004) was a subsequent landmark, are less restrained:

*Four Theories of the Press* has stalked the landscape of media studies like a horror-movie zombie for decades beyond its natural lifetime. We think it is time to give it a decent burial and move on to the development of more sophisticated models based on real comparative analysis.

(Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 10)

The power that Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's typology of four 'theories' of media wields lies at least partly in its combination of an ambition of purpose and a narrative that lays claim to a philosophical distillation of the accumulated wisdom of mankind. The tools it uses to answer the all-encompassing question 'why is the press as it is?' are expansive:

To see the differences between press systems in full perspective, then, one must look at the social systems in which the press functions. To see the social systems in their true relationship to the press, one has to look at certain basic beliefs and assumptions which the society holds: the nature of man, the nature of society and the state, the relation of man to the state, and the nature of knowledge and truth. Thus, in the last analysis the difference between press systems is one of philosophy, and this book is about the philosophical and political rationales or theories which lie behind the different kinds of press we have in the world today.

(Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956: 2)

In the full title of *Four Theories*, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm provide a clear indication of their intention – to present four 'concepts of what the press should be and do'. With their historical and philosophical approach, they produce a narrative of the development of four normative conceptions of the role of the media in relation to society and the political system. They label the four conceptions as the Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist theories of the press.

The authoritarian theory of the press – in effect, the media being assigned the role of serving the interests of the state – is the concept described as having emerged first (Siebert, 1956: 9–37). It developed in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century England and was almost universally adopted in most other societies and countries in the early stages of the

development of the media and political systems, says Siebert. He traces its philosophical lineage from Plato and Socrates through to Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hegel and von Trietschke (Siebert, 1956: 10–15), and describes it as consonant with the absolute power of the monarch and the principle of divine authority espoused by the Roman Church. The explicit purpose of media in the authoritarian framework was to support and advance the policies of government. Though not necessarily government owned, media were controlled through royal patents or similar permissions. They acted as instruments of government policy and were forbidden to criticise the political machinery or those in positions of power. Such systems are based upon the position that the dissemination of information and opinion has an effect on the accomplishment of social and political objectives. Though the media are restrained from interfering with predetermined objectives, they do represent the state's participation in communication processes, in Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's characterisation.

*Four Theories* then goes on to describe the development of the libertarian theory of the press in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries under the influence of the values of the Enlightenment (Siebert, 1956: 39–71). In this conception, the relative positions of state and man were reversed, representing the position that truth is not determined by those in power. Building upon liberalism as a social and political philosophy, the media performs the role of partnering rational man in his search for truth. It thus becomes an instrument for scrutiny of government and for meeting society's other needs. It informs, educates and maintains its economic viability while focusing on discovering the truth. The libertarian model was adopted by England after 1688, later spread to the United States, and has been influential in many other countries since then, says Siebert. In the libertarian model, the media is privately owned and is controlled through the self-righting mechanisms of the market and through the courts. The genealogy of this theory of the press lies in the writings of Milton, Locke and Mill, and its philosophy encompasses rationalism and natural rights.

The third and fourth models in Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's schema are in essence variations on the first two – the social responsibility theory is a development of libertarianism and the Soviet model is a form of authoritarianism.

The social responsibility theory arises from opposition to the libertarian conception of the role of media (Peterson, 1956: 73–103). It departs from the ideology of *laissez faire*, which, in some interpretations, viewed the media as the property of its commercial owners and not intrinsically bound by a sense of the public interest. It also represents behaviouristic doubts about the philosophy of the Enlightenment, especially where it predicates rationalism as the essential nature of man (the social responsibility theory instead views man as rational, but lethargic). As its name indicates, this model seeks to impose upon the media an obligation to be socially responsible. The basic functions of the media in the social responsibility theory are the same as those in the libertarian framework, but they are interpreted differently to lay greater emphasis on public interest. There is, for instance, greater emphasis on discussion, debate and enlightening the public to provide a capacity for self-governance. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm describe the social responsibility theory as having emerged after the 1947 report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press (also called the Hutchins Commission) in the US, and with the active assistance of media codes adopted by practitioners.

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm call their fourth category the Soviet Communist or the Soviet-Totalitarian theory of the press (Schramm, 1956: 105–146). They conceptualise it as being driven by Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist thought in the Soviet Union and other communist regimes, with similar forms having been adopted by Nazi Germany. The social and political objective of the Soviet communist press is to contribute to the success and perpetuation of the party. Ownership is public – the media are both owned and tightly controlled by the state to the extent that they become an arm of the state, an instrument of policy and cohesion. Criticism of the state is, of course, forbidden.

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm go to some pains to discuss differences between their theoretical classification and real media systems, especially to point out differences between the Soviet communist theory, the media in Nazi Germany and the traditional authoritarian model. The Soviet model differs from the authoritarian model because of the former's developmental role – the Soviet system seeks to drive change, whereas the traditional authoritarian system has the objective of maintaining the status quo. The Soviet system also does away with the profit motive. The Nazi media system shared the characteristic of private ownership with the traditional authoritarian model, though it is

seen as having been imbued with the Nazis' brand of mysticism rather than ideology (Schramm, 1956: 140–146). Though Siebert, Peterson and Schramm took a very authoritative approach to their models for the most part, they found it necessary to offer a number of justifications and explanations to account for discrepancies between the reality of some media systems and the model they proposed.

## **2.3 MOVING BEYOND FOUR THEORIES**

### **2.3.1 Critiques, refinements and expansions**

*Four Theories* has been subject to intense scrutiny and extensive critique as befits a work that has attained the status of a classic in media studies – it is the top selling nonfiction title from the University of Illinois Press (Nerone, 1995: ix), and one which has been reprinted more than 20 times (University of Illinois Press, 2015).

Nordenstreng (1997) provides an excellent account of the numerous complementary and alternative attempts to classify media systems, but also makes it clear that none of them gained 'the same momentum as the original *Four Theories*' (1997: 97). He describes these typologies as 'normative theories', an approach that he carried forward to a later book he co-authored, *Normative Theories of the Media* (Christians *et al.*, 2009). He cites Merrill and Lowenstein as proposing an alternative four-part typology in 1971 that was more differentiated: authoritarian with negative government control; social-centralist with positive government control; libertarian without any government controls; and social-libertarian with minimal government controls. They later added a fifth category, social-authoritarian, to the typology. He also discusses Hachten's 1981 five-part classification of media systems into authoritarian; communist; Western (combining Siebert *et al.*'s libertarian and social responsibility theories); revolutionary; and developmental. In addition, Nordenstreng provides details of a number of different conceptions of the media from Finland, Sweden and Poland variously based on normative roles, ownership patterns and official definitions and expectations of the media in those countries.

Nordenstreng draws a distinction between the ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ levels of media theory, separating the normative approach, which has ‘usually been taken for granted, without questioning its foundations’, from the media sociology approach, which describes ‘the real role and impact of media in society’ (1997: 106). He proposes a ‘new beginning’ with a typology of five normative ‘paradigms’ that often coexist in real-world media systems: the liberal-individualist, social responsibility, critical, administrative and cultural negotiation paradigms (1997: 107–109).

Denis McQuail adopts Siebert *et al.*’s four theories and expands upon them to put forward a six-part typology consisting of the authoritarian; free press; social responsibility; Soviet; development; and democratic-participant theories of the media (1983: 84–98). This classification is carried on till the third edition of his *Mass Communication Theory* (McQuail, 1994), but he drops the classification in subsequent editions of the book, saying instead that media systems theory needs to follow a different path:

While attempts are still made to improve the original typification of press theories [...], the goal of formulating consistent and coherent ‘theories of the press’ in this way is bound to break down sooner or later. This is partly because the theories formulated are more about societies than the media. [...] It also partly stems from the complexity and incoherence of media systems and thus the impossibility of matching a press theory with a type of society.

(McQuail, 2005a: 178)

Robert Picard brought another model to the mix – the democratic socialist model, based on the relationship between the state and the media in northern European countries. In his view, the media of the Western world could be described as subscribing to the libertarian, social responsibility or democratic socialist models, while the rest of the world was covered by a mix of Siebert *et al.*’s authoritarian and communist models and Hachten’s developmental and revolutionary models (Picard, 1985: 69–70).

Herbert Altschull, in his *Agents of Power* (1995), attempts to transcend *Four Theories* by proposing an entirely different basis for understanding media systems. He sees three types of media which he likens to separate ‘movements’ of one ‘symphony’. The ‘movements’ correspond to the First, Second and Third Worlds or, as he calls them, the

market-oriented, Marxist and developing countries. On this basis, he proposes a three-fold classification of Market, Communitarian and Advancing media. This, he says, eliminates the problems with Siebert *et al.*'s four theories and other complementary formulations:

Our difficulties clearly increase if we attempt to impose value-laden terms on any of the three movements. Words such as *democratic*, *libertarian*, *communist* and *authoritarian* hinder understanding. *Socialist* is also a troublesome term. After all, it has been used to stand for the monstrous regime of the Third Reich. So, in fact, is *revolutionary*, a term that sometimes stands for what is good and sometimes for what is evil.

(Altschull, 1995: 419)

Altschull challenges the classification of media systems according to the political philosophy of the regime in a country because of the ideological overtones this reflects. Instead, he prefers to differentiate media systems along economic criteria. Interestingly, though he claims his categorisation is primarily economic, it depends heavily on ideologically steeped Cold War terminology that divides the world into three blocs based on political positions and alliances.

### **2.3.2 The 'last rights' of *Four Theories***

It fell to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's colleagues and successors in Illinois to make an attempt to read *Four Theories* its last rites. In 1995, John Nerone published an extensive critique in the form of a collectively authored report, *Last Rights: Revisiting Four Theories of the Press*. He acknowledged the normative power of *Four Theories*, but, in a devastating critique, called it 'a bit slippery in its sense of "theory"' (Nerone, 1995: 3).

Nerone put forward an impressive set of arguments. At a very fundamental level, he questioned the arithmetic in *Four Theories*, concluding that the classic work's authors had in fact based their analysis on just one theory, not four: 'It seemed to succeed in mapping *all* the normative theories because it mapped them from just one' (Nerone, 1995: 184; emphasis in original). Nerone maintained that Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's choice of constitutive questions was flawed – asking questions about the

nature of man, society and state, combined with their Cold War-inspired thinking, meant that in effect the entire framework of their schema pivoted around one theory: classical liberalism.

Other theoretical problems were also identified. Nerone contended that the historical trends in political thought that Siebert, Peterson and Schramm described as the basis for the development of their ‘theories of the press’ were misleading. The linear narratives that guided *Four Theories* were ‘really ex post facto rationalization of pretty accidental developments’ (Nerone, 1995: 182). *Four Theories* was criticised for failing to faithfully take into account the complex and variable positions taken by the thinkers it quoted and for using simplified linear formulations to offer unsupportable generalisations:

This second critique advises us to do history and not theory. It advises us to treat normative theories as ideologies and not as ideas, as historically specific cultural formations and not as generalizable moral precepts.

(Nerone, 1995: 182)

*Last Rights* also explored the professional histories of the three authors of *Four Theories*, highlighting their links to the media industry, the National Council of Churches and to the psychological warfare efforts of the US government during the Cold War:

*Four Theories*, by both its tone and format, represents itself as value-free scholarship, and many readers have accepted it as such. But a strong argument can be made that despite its value-free appearance it is driven by an agenda rooted in the context of its composition, specifically the cold war-era global expansion of the U.S. model of privately owned for-profit media.

(Nerone, 1995: 7–8)

Nerone did not, however, offer any alternate models as possible successors to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s classification, offering instead the explanation that the diverse views and disciplinary backgrounds of the authors made it impossible for them to propose a coherent schema: ‘If mapping is possible, the authors of this book probably are not the group to do it’ (Nerone, 1995: 181).

Despite Nerone's attempted burial of *Four Theories*, it continued to gather new adherents, for instance in Russia after it was translated into Russian in 1998. Vartanova (2009: 218) reports that it became 'the founding text for media/journalism theory [in Russia], with such concepts as the "fourth estate" and the "watchdog of democracy" shaping public debate'. This popularity of the text in post-Soviet Russia is consistent with the ideological resonance that Sparks (2000) suggests. In his analysis, the success of *Four Theories* stems from the fact that it combined a proposed methodology for understanding media systems with an account of media systems that existed at that time:

The plain fact is that the account offered of the two main systems around which the book is organized, the 'Soviet Communist' and the 'Libertarian,' is, in the scientific sense, beautiful. The opposition of free market and state direction has an elegance, a symmetry, a lack of redundancy, and a completeness that gives it paradigmatic status. What is more, this polarity tells us something true and important about the mass media: there really is a difference between the ways in which the market shapes the media and the ways in which the state shapes the media. Whatever other shortcomings it may have, the pattern proposed here is not just simply false.

(Sparks, 2000: 30)

Sparks attributes the classic status of *Four Theories* to the theoretical appeal of three important insights it contained: 1) the assumption that economic influences on the media are distinct from the effect of political systems; 2) the idea that media systems are coherent and are manifestations of core value systems; and 3) the idea that media systems can be seen as servants or adjuncts of the state in some way. These, he says, account for its 'explanatory power' at the 'investigative and pedagogic levels' (Sparks, 2000: 30–31).

### **2.3.3 The discourse of de-Westernisation and internationalisation**

A significant development in response to *Four Theories* was the effort to better understand and describe the manifest nature and functioning of media systems. Scholars reacted to and contested various aspects of *Four Theories* – the validity of its normative appeal, its exclusively Western roots and the universalism it embodied. Downing, for instance, called for 'communication theorizing to develop itself comparatively,

acknowledging in particular that to extrapolate theoretically from such relatively unrepresentative nations as Britain and the United States is both conceptually impoverishing and a particularly restricted version of even Eurocentrism' (Downing, 1996: xi). Others, too, questioned the acceptance of Western meaning-making as universal (Ngugi, 1987; Nyamnjoh, 1999; Sreberny, 2000; Mano, 2009; Hepp and Couldry, 2009). There were also voices that were not convinced of the need to adopt international perspectives, which was seen as a form of exceptionalism (see, for instance, Ma, 2000; Lee, 2000).

A concerted effort to move beyond the theoretical dominance of what Thussu (2009) called the 'anglobalized' media was made by Curran and Park in their *De-Westernising Media Studies* (2000). They began by making clear their disdain for the approach of *Four Theories* as well as its scholarship:

Perhaps the most striking feature about this book, in retrospect, is how little its talented authors felt they needed to know. [...] They got round their evident lack of comparative expertise by advancing a convenient, idealist argument. Media systems, they claimed, reflect the prevailing philosophy and political system of the society in which they operate. To understand the international media system, it is necessary merely to identify 'the philosophical and political rationales or theories which lie behind the different kinds of press we have in the world today' (Siebert *et al.* 1956: 2). In their account, these rationales were written almost entirely by Western theorists. By implication, the world's communication system could be laid bare by studying their thought.

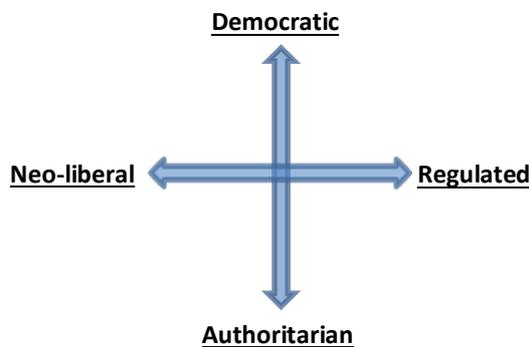
(Curran and Park, 2000: 3)

In contrast to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's historical-philosophical approach, Curran and Park adopted an empirically grounded approach, examining specific variables across countries in their effort to advance media systems theory beyond the cul-de-sac in which it found itself. They began by identifying the perspectives that had thus far guided the development of media theory. They described them as the geo-political perspective (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm and those subsequently influenced by them); the modernisation perspective (which assumed that the media in the developing world should imitate the West); the media imperialism perspective (which feared cultural homogenisation under the influence of American media); and, theories of

cultural globalisation (which incorporated critiques of the media imperialism perspective and pointed to trends that increase international dialogue and exchange) (Curran and Park, 2000: 2–9). They dismissed the position that the nation state was withering away under the onslaught of transnational media flows. Arguing that media systems are significantly shaped by national parameters, they chose to conduct their study as a collection of national perspectives.

To classify media systems, Curran and Park sought answers to a number of questions about various national media systems: 1) How do the media relate to the power structure of society? 2) What influences the media, and where does control over the media lie? 3) How has the media influenced society? and, 4) What effect has media globalisation and new media had on the media system and society? (Curran and Park, 2000: 10). They then categorised countries according to how they fall along two axes, the first ranging from democratic to authoritarian political systems and the second from regulated to neo-liberal economic systems. Their classification is depicted in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1: Curran and Park’s axes for classifying media systems**



(Curran and Park, 2000: 11)

The four quadrants of Figure 2.1 yielded four categories based on the two political and economic variables. Curran and Park added a miscellaneous category into which they placed those media systems that did not fit neatly into other categories – countries that are undergoing transformations and regions that have mixed regimes. Interestingly, they chose to begin their discussions with this miscellaneous category, which they called ‘transitional and mixed societies’, rather than one of the four basic categories that emerged from their two variables. They did so because ‘it offers such arresting

perspectives of the relationship of the media to power in society' (Curran and Park, 2000: 10). In this first category of transitional and mixed societies they placed China, Eastern Europe, South America, the Middle East and Russia. The second category, 'authoritarian and neo-liberal societies', includes Mexico, Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia. Zimbabwe and Egypt were positioned as 'authoritarian regulated societies' in the third category. The fourth group, 'democratic neo-liberal societies', contained Japan, USA, Britain and Australia, and the last, 'democratic regulated societies', was comprised of Sweden, Italy, South Africa, India, Israel and France (Curran and Park, 2000).

Curran and Park's typology is by no means neat, but unlike Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, they did not exert themselves to justify either it or the choice of variables on which it was based. However, it is noteworthy that Curran and Park had to create a miscellaneous category, for it raises an important question about the adequacy of their organising principle. More telling is the fact that the category of transitional and mixed societies yielded, by their own admission, the most significant and interesting perspectives on the relationship between media and society, so significant that they decided to consider it before the four main categories that arise from the four quadrants they defined.

Curran and Park highlight a few broad patterns (2000: 10–13) that they hope will inform theoretical debates on media. However, the data from empirical observation is messy and many of the inferences drawn are ambiguous in their import. On question after question, Curran and Park find evidence to simultaneously support and qualify theoretical constructs, perhaps a reflection of the limited (Western) empirical base on which a lot of media theory rests. On media imperialism, for instance, they admit that while some data from the book supports the thesis, the chapters on India and South America contradict it. Similarly, the data is contradictory on the impact of market forces on sovereign power and on the role of globalisation in promoting freedom and media diversity. In this sense, *De-Westernizing Media Studies* is testament to the complexity of real-world media systems and the inadequacy of current media theory in producing empirically verifiable generalisations at the global level. What the book does best is to present the complexity of the task that faces media theorists:

[T]his book offers a greater sense of difference and variability than is usually registered in media theory. In making the case for de-Westernizing media studies, we are not suggesting that normative values have only a zonal application. On the contrary, the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity seem to us to have a universal validity. Our argument is that media studies will benefit from developing a wider comparative perspective. At the moment, ways of understanding the world's media system are unduly influenced by the experience of a few, untypical countries. These distort understanding not only of non-Western countries but also of a large part of the West as well.

(Curran and Park, 2000: 12)

### **2.3.4 The 'Asian values' debate**

Another tradition that has informed the critique of models of media systems, ideologically if not substantially, is that of 'Asian theories' of media and communication, which are an articulation of unease with the dominance of Western paradigms. This approach advocates the espousal of guiding principles such as 'Asian values', Confucianism or Islam as conceptual frameworks to replace 'Western values'. It is driven politically, ideologically and philosophically, is influenced by seminal tracts such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), and is marked by resistance to the claimed universality – and superiority – of the values and narratives of the Enlightenment to the exclusion of other cultural perspectives and practices. There is a strong element of reconnecting with undervalued tradition, asserting identity, overcoming the legacy of colonialism and overcoming what Gunaratne calls the 'oligopoly of social science powers' (2010: 474). Among other things, the attempt is to avoid adopting 'the distortions of the West as reality about their own cultures' (Wang, 2011: 7).

The discourse on Asian values achieved visibility in the mid-1980s (Xu, 2005). Dissanayake (1985: 4) calls for comparative communication studies to fulfil a number of objectives: widen the field of discourse, discover insights to better conceptualise communication, and to encourage 'explorations in indigenous communication theory' rather than 'a blindly servile adherence to Western research credos'. Dissanayake's (1985, 2003) approach was to examine classic treatises, traditions, cultural practices and culturally grounded characteristics of communicative behaviour in Asian societies to

extract principles and postulates of communication that could add fresh perspectives to contemporary theory.

Miike (2002) proposes a set of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions as the 'Asiacentric paradigm of communication theory', a concept akin to Asante's distinction between Eurocentric and Afrocentric communication theory (Asante, 1980: 402). Nevertheless, these and other efforts (see, for instance, Nyamnjoh, 1999; Dissanayake, 2006; Miike, 1988; Banerjee, 2009; Chu, 1985; Chen and Starosta, 2003) have concentrated on theories of communication rather than on modelling or understanding the media. In some cases, complete formulations of alternative normative frameworks have been proposed. An example is Basayouni Hamada's 'Islamic Cultural Theory', based on the Qur'an and a 'coherent set of Islamic principles' (Sabry, 2009: 209).

However, even after more than three decades in development, the concept of Asian values remains fuzzy. Several formulations of Asian values have emerged. Xu (2005: 14), for instance, defines them in terms of social values such as '(a) group orientation, (b) filial piety, (c) hard work, (d) community and nation above individuals, (e) emphasis on duties over rights, (f) emphasis on responsibility over freedom, (g) social stability and harmony, (h) emphasis on education, and (i) respect for authority' – that is, a listing of general and idealised values whose validity is open to contestation.

Hofstede's cultural variability theory identifies four value dimensions that are culturally influenced: 1) individualism-collectivism, 2) uncertainty avoidance, 3) power distance, and 4) masculinity and femininity (cited by Servaes, 2000: 56). This concept reveals promise of being applicable to the study of media, but there are many others that do not readily do so. Jain (2015: 121) lays out a set of 'Indian values' which include reincarnation and the caste system and appear to be a listing of dominant religious beliefs and social practices with limited attempts to theorise a linkage with media and communication studies.

Thus, no clear theoretical formulation or narrative has yet emerged about how Asian values are manifest in communication processes or in the empirical reality of the media. In fact, Xu even admits that scholars have been 'widely divided over the concept of

Asian values and the existence of Asian values in journalism' (2005: 37). Little progress has been made in this regard beyond agreeing on 'the need to search for Asian ways of journalism and to stay Asian in journalism' (Xu, 2005: 48). As Wang puts it, scholars are still 'labouring over a solution to move beyond Eurocentrism' (2011: 9).

The intellectual project of Asian values has its critics as well. Cunningham and Flew characterise it as nothing more than 'the expression of political elites attempting to foster economic liberalization while maintaining strict limits on political and cultural liberalization' (2000: 217). They, however, acknowledge that the notion has a strong resonance, especially as a critique of Western values. Nain is as sceptical of the influences driving this debate as he is of its validity:

I would argue that, unfortunately, albeit predictably, many of these attempts have been conservative, jingoistic, even 'anti-West,' time and again asserting the uniqueness of the Asian political economy. In arguing for the need to discover 'new' media theories and research strategies, often they end up helping to legitimize repressive regimes, undemocratic practices and tightly controlled media systems whose *raison d'être* is to uphold and help perpetuate these regimes. Hence, in demonizing an overgeneralized 'West' – its values, its systems, its media – this view at the same time elevates the equally over-generalized 'East,' more particularly the regimes in control, to a higher level.

(Nain, 2000: 133)

The Asian values debate concerns itself to a large extent with traditional and culture-specific modes of communication. It is often accused of promoting Asian essentialism as a reaction to Western imperialism. In common with many other attempts to transcend the narrative power of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's normative framework, this debate has not produced any prominent alternate models of media systems. There are, however, several aspects that are relevant to the performance of journalism and the behaviour of media institutions and systems, including the imperatives of nation building in many societies; communitarian approaches to journalism; and the importance of influences arising from prevailing norms and deep-seated traditional cultures.

### 2.3.5 Variables and approaches

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) gave primacy to the political system and the historical development of its philosophical and normative underpinnings in their analysis of media systems. They considered economics as well, but that inquiry was largely restricted to the types of ownership of media tolerated by various political systems. For them, the economic system was secondary to the political system in influencing media. Altschull (1995) claimed to have given prominence to economic variables, but, as discussed in Chapter 2.3.1 above, his typology essentially followed the pattern of geo-political blocs and was thus linked to political ideology. Curran and Park (2000) give almost equal importance to political and economic systems and use both variables to categorise media systems, but as has been observed, the ‘transitional and mixed societies’ category that supplied the most interesting insights fell outside the four basic categories that emerged from their two variables.

Other theorists have suggested alternate variables that may be used to classify media systems. Sparks draws upon the characteristics of post-communist media in Eastern Europe to posit that a close relationship between economic and political actors is a more accurate reflection of the reality in most countries:

[I]t is much closer to being the global norm than is the allegedly sharp separation of the major social powers characteristic of the US. It is only the version of media theory that assumes that what it believes to be normal in the US is normal everywhere that registers this situation as unaccountable.

(Sparks, 2000: 37)

Sparks favours the position that there is substantial interpenetration between political and economic power, and that the two forms of power merge into a single form of social domination. Sparks also suggests that studying the relationship between media and its audiences would be much more productive than examining political and economic factors, but does not offer a model that puts this into practice.

Jakubowicz (cited in Nordenstreng, 1997), like Curran and Park, proposed two axes that resulted in four quadrants, but considered different variables. One of the two axes, autonomy or subordination of the media with respect to the power structure, was

political, while the other measured the media system in terms of dominance versus pluralism of content. Kraidy (2012: 178) refers to William Rugh's (1979, 2004) classification of Arab media systems into four models along a broadly similar logic. Rugh, who determined that Arab media systems did not fit into any of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's four theories, considered two broad dimensions – 'press characteristics' and 'political conditions'. His typology characterised media systems as either mobilisation, loyalist, diverse or transitional.

Koltsova, in *News Media and Power in Russia* (2006), describes a complex schema developed by Yakovenko for classifying the media in Russia's 87 regions. Yakovenko's typology was based on three types of freedom – freedom of access to information, freedom of production of information and freedom of dissemination of information. It then ranked and grouped the regional media systems into seven models: 1) the market model; 2) transitional to market model; 3) conflict model; 4) modernised Soviet model; 5) paternalistic Soviet model; 6) authoritarian Soviet model; and 7) the depressed model (Yakovenko, 2000: 106–118, quoted in Koltsova, 2006: 166). Yakovenko essentially measured the proximity of regional media to the 'democratic ideal', that is, the liberal model, and listed his media models in decreasing order of the levels of freedom they enjoyed.

Cunningham and Flew (2000) argue that any attempt to study the empirical reality of the Asia-Pacific region, including Australia, necessitates alternate models. They focused on historical contexts when they suggested their four-fold classification: the West, the post-colonial, the communist and the post-communist.

It is evident that most scholars treat politics as a central variable. This is understandable because the study of media systems draws extensively upon inputs from the study of political communication. The pattern set by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm of basing normative theories on political philosophy and ideology has endured. As a result, the classification of the nature of regimes often serves as a proxy for the classification of media systems. As Nordenstreng (1997) points out, normative, ideal theories have been absorbed at the level of professional doctrine, while the more 'objective' and 'sociological' analysis of media in relation to society is relegated to the level of 'scientific studies'.

## 2.4 HALLIN AND MANCINI'S *COMPARING MEDIA SYSTEMS*

The study of media systems was reinvigorated in 2004 with the publication of Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. The success of the book and widespread attempts to apply and validate its models internationally took even its authors by surprise. 'We began to worry that instead of putting *Four Theories of the Press* to rest, our book might *become* the new *Four Theories of the Press*, with our three models turning into a kind of universal schema to be applied almost everywhere,' they later wrote (Hallin and Mancini, 2012b: 2; emphasis in original).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) proposed three models and, as the title of their book makes clear, they arrived at these by focusing primarily on the relationship between media and politics. However, they approached the construction of these models from a direction entirely different from the one taken by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm nearly half a century earlier. Hallin and Mancini spurned the conceptually seductive normative approach in favour of an empirical approach. They analysed the historical development of several national media systems in Europe and North America, examining their linkages with the political, economic and social systems within which they existed, but focusing principally on the possible existence of 'systematic connections' between political structures and media systems. Their comparative analysis yielded sets of common characteristics that then became the basis of their models.

Hallin and Mancini called their three models the Liberal model, the Democratic Corporatist model and the Polarized Pluralist model. Because the countries in each group were geographically clustered, each of the three models is also identified with a specific geography. The liberal model prevails across the North Atlantic (Britain, the US, Canada and Ireland); the democratic corporatist model is found in north and central Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland), and their polarised pluralist model is identified with the Mediterranean region (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain).

Hallin and Mancini (2004: 21–45) proposed four major dimensions or variables for comparing media systems. The first, which they call 'development of media markets',

focuses on the development of newspapers with mass circulation. The rationale for including this dimension is the marked differences in national trends in the circulation of newspapers within Europe, with the lowest per capita circulation (in Greece) being about one-tenth of that in some Scandinavian countries. The structure and development of mass-circulated newspapers, said Hallin and Mancini, is an indicator of the relationship of newspapers to their audiences, and their role in social and political communication – for instance, whether media facilitate vertical communication across society, as in the UK, or they serve mainly as a forum for horizontal communication and debate among ‘elite factions’, as in some southern European countries.

The second dimension, ‘political parallelism’, takes into account the manner and degree to which media reflected the major political trends in society, that is, whether journalists and newspapers indulge in political advocacy or embrace the values of neutrality between competing political narratives. Political parallelism embraces five criteria: 1) media content; 2) organisational connections; 3) the tendency for media personnel to take part in political life; 4) the partisanship of media audiences; and 5) journalists’ role orientation and practices (advocacy journalism versus neutral information or entertainment).

Hallin and Mancini’s third dimension concerns itself with the level of professionalism among journalists and comprises three factors – the autonomy of journalists, distinct professional norms, and the level of orientation to the ethic of public service. The authors contrast journalistic professionalisation with the instrumentalisation of journalism, though they largely restrict themselves to the political instrumentalisation of media as opposed to commercial or other forms of external control and influence. They also acknowledge that the dimensions of political parallelism and professionalisation are related to a great extent.

Their fourth dimension examines the extent and nature of state intervention in the media system. An important element of this dimension is public service broadcasting, but other forms of state ownership of newspapers and news agencies, subsidies, and legal and regulatory frameworks are also incorporated into the analysis.

It is worth noting that Hallin and Mancini's four dimensions bear a strong resemblance to a framework proposed by Blumler and Gurevitch in 1995:

[W]e propose a framework, consisting of four dimensions, by reference to which political communication arrangements of different states could be profiled, and their further consequences for the production, reception and wider repercussions of political messages could be hypothetically specified: (1) degree of state control over mass media organizations; (2) degree of mass media partisanship; (3) degree of media-political élite integration; (4) the nature of the legitimizing creed of media institutions.

(Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 62)

Hallin and Mancini's first dimension, the development of media markets, is not represented in Blumler and Gurevitch's framework, but their second, political parallelism, is closely related to Blumler and Gurevitch's second and third dimensions. Hallin and Mancini's third dimension, professionalisation, corresponds with Blumler and Gurevitch's fourth, and their last coincides with Blumler and Gurevitch's first. Though both pairs of authors were examining the interaction of politics and the media, the nature and direction of the influences they were exploring were different. While Hallin and Mancini were primarily concerned with how politics impacts media, Blumler and Gurevitch's question equally looks at the role of media in political processes – 'how does the articulation of a country's mass media institutions to its political institutions affect the processing of political communication content and the impact of such content on the orientations to politics of audience members?' (1995: 60).

Apart from the four dimensions for comparing media systems, Hallin and Mancini also considered a number of variables drawn from political sociology and comparative politics to describe various characteristics of political systems. The five political system indicators they believed most relevant are: late versus early democratisation; patterns of conflict and consensus (polarised versus moderate pluralism); whether pluralism is organised or individual; the role of the state (including to what extent a welfare state exists); and clientelism versus the existence of a rational-legal authority (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 46–86). They defined their three models by combining these attributes of political systems with the four dimensions of media systems.

The political systems in the Mediterranean or polarised pluralist model, for instance, are typified by late democratisation; periods of authoritarianism; polarised pluralism; strong involvement of the state and parties in the economy; clientelism; a relatively weaker development of rational-legal authority in most cases; and, in some cases, a strong welfare state. This influences the nature of the media systems, which are marked by strong state intervention; periods of censorship; high levels of political parallelism; low newspaper circulation; an elite and politically oriented press; commentary oriented journalism; weaker professionalisation; and the instrumentalisation of journalism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 89–142).

The political systems in the democratic corporatist or North/Central European model exhibit early democratisation; moderate pluralism that was organised and segmented; the relative dominance of political consensus in government; strong rational-legal authority; significant involvement of the state in the economy; and, a strong welfare state. In these media systems, newspapers developed mass circulation early; have reached high levels of penetration; there was historically a strong party-political press which shifted towards a more neutral commercial model; and there has been a tradition of strong and autonomous public broadcasting. The journalism was described as strongly professionalised, institutionalised and self-regulated, and benefiting from strong state interventions to protect freedom of the press (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 143–197).

In the liberal or North Atlantic model, the political system characteristics identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004: 198–248) were: early democratisation; moderate pluralism; majoritarian rather than consensus government; prevalence of the values of liberalism; and the strong development of rational-legal authority. The mass media had developed early; newspaper circulation is described as ‘medium’; there is a neutral commercial press; the journalism is information-oriented and strongly professionalised; and it has adopted non-institutionalised self-regulation, according to Hallin and Mancini. The media as a whole is market dominated in these systems, with the exception of the strong public broadcasting in Britain and Ireland.

Even as Hallin and Mancini claimed that their models were ‘coherent and distinct’ (2004: 69), they were conscious of having to resort to a host of stipulations,

explanations and exceptions to smooth over anomalous situations caused by wide variations within and between media systems. There are, for instance, conspicuous differences between the media systems of Britain and the US though they are both classified under the North Atlantic or liberal model. Similarly, Italy and Spain, both categorised as Mediterranean or polarised pluralist, exhibit divergent characteristics. The analysis was further complicated by the fact that the media systems of some larger European countries display the characteristics of more than one model – Britain, though positioned in the liberal model, exhibits some tendencies otherwise strongly identified with the democratic corporatist model; Germany’s media system is very different from those in Scandinavia, with which it is grouped; and while France is identified as polarised pluralist, it is also democratic corporatist in many respects. Once again, as with the models of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), and after them Curran and Park (2000), the messiness of empirical data impeded neat categorisation. These limitations of their models were acknowledged by the authors from the outset:

Many qualifications must be introduced as soon as we begin to use these models. They are ideal types, and the media systems of individual countries fit them only roughly. There is considerable variation among countries that we will be grouping together in our discussion of these models. [...] It should be stressed that [the] primary purpose [of the models] is not classification of individual systems, but the identification of characteristic patterns of relationship between system characteristics.

(Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 11)

## **2.5 CRITIQUES OF HALLIN AND MANCINI**

### **2.5.1 Questioning universal applicability and convergence**

Hallin and Mancini were considerably less confident than Siebert, Peterson and Schramm about claiming universal applicability of their models. They tempered ambition and vision with a strong measure of caution. On the one hand, they recognised the geographical and historical specificity of their models, acknowledging that they had undertaken a limited study of ‘most similar systems’ in Europe and the North Atlantic in countries with roughly similar economic development and which shared a common history and culture to some extent. They said this meant that their models were not

likely to be applicable to other media systems without considerable adaptation (2004: 6). They stressed that they had rejected the normativism and universalism seen in *Four Theories of the Press* precisely because of its limited applicability to other national media systems which had developed along diverse trajectories and logics.

On the other hand, Hallin and Mancini simultaneously claimed an explanatory – and even predictive – power for their approach as well as their models. Models that prevail in Europe and North America ‘tend to be dominant globally’ and so would be useful to scholars elsewhere ‘not only as an example of how to conduct comparative research but also because these models have actually influenced the development of other systems’ (2004: 6). They maintained that their method of historical analysis of the development of media institutions in relation to political structures could be applied to media systems elsewhere, and also that empirically grounded models similar to theirs could be used to answer normative questions about the behaviour of media, its response to influences, and its performance on a variety of professional and theoretical values (2004: 14).

They also suggested that a process of convergence was under way:

It is clear, however, that the differences among these models, and in general the degree of variation among nation states, has diminished substantially over time. In 1970 the differences among the three groups of countries characterized by our three models were quite dramatic; a generation later, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the differences have eroded to the point that it is reasonable to ask whether a single, global media model is displacing the national variation of the past, at least among the advanced capitalist democracies discussed in this book.

(Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 251)

The emerging ‘single, global model’ that Hallin and Mancini refer to is, of course, the liberal model that also formed the foundation of *Four Theories*. Mancini had earlier pointed out that the elevation of the liberal model to the position of the universal reference point neglects all other contextual factors and reinforces an inherent normativism:

One model, the so-called ‘professional model,’ has been raised to the point of becoming the unique, universal model for journalism practice and theory all around the world; it is addressed as the reference model even to measure

distance and difference from. This model has been labelled in different ways: 'liberal or social responsibility model' (Siebert *et al.* 1963, Curran 1991), 'Anglo American model' (Chalaby 1996), 'professional model' (Tunstall 1977).

(Mancini, 2000: 234)

In their view, the spread of this model is driven by five processes: Americanisation, modernisation, globalisation, commercialisation and secularisation (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 254). They find it 'very reasonable to assume that this trend [convergence] will continue in the future' (2004: 282) because of a definite shift towards 'neutral, professional journalism of the sort that has been particularly strong in the United States' (2004: 285).

This, however, is a theoretical construct which has been subject to extensive critique and whose validity remains contested. Humphreys (2011: 170), for instance, points out that a number of studies have refuted the convergence hypothesis, pointing to the durability of national models of capitalism and stressing the crucial mediating role of national institutions. Humphreys suggests that though Hallin and Mancini do at one point touch upon the concept of path dependency, they do not adequately explore its implications, and that applying historical-institutional analysis to national media systems would reveal divergence rather than convergence.

It is also perhaps inconsistent that, while identifying the liberal model as the point of convergence, and in the light of their emphasis on the specific empirical basis of their models, Hallin and Mancini claim that their polarised pluralist model is the one that is most relevant to the study of a remarkable range of national media systems:

[I]t is probably the Polarized Pluralist Model, more than the other two we outline here, that is most widely applicable to other systems as an empirical model of the relation between media and political systems. We suspect that scholars working on many parts of the world – Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Latin America, the Middle East and all of the Mediterranean region, Africa, and most of Asia will find much that is relevant in our analysis of Southern Europe.

(Hallin and Mancini, 2012b: 306)

These claims of models derived from some Western countries being useful as points of comparison has often been interpreted as a claim of universal or near-universal applicability and has been subject to several critiques on these grounds. Thus views them as ‘parochialism’ and dismisses them as ‘untenable’ in his *Internationalizing Media Studies* (2009: 1). He theorises internationalisation as the third important intervention in the ‘anglobalized’ embodiment of media studies, the first two being feminism, and race and ethnicity (2009: 2–3). Earlier, Curran and Park, in their *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (2000), had expressed similar views of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm: ‘In their account, these rationales were written almost entirely by Western theorists. By implication, the world’s communication system could be laid bare by studying their thought’ (2000: 3). Both these volumes draw upon a number of significant but distinct strands that provide critiques of claimed universal validity at the philosophical, ideological, cultural and systems levels. Hanitzsch and Esser also weigh in against the wider applicability of relatively simple models when they say that studies that assume methodological and theoretical universalism ‘are vulnerable to the production of out-of-context measurement’ (2012: 503).

### **2.5.2 Testing, expanding and transcending Hallin and Mancini’s typology**

Hallin and Mancini’s 2004 book is responsible for re-energising a focus on media systems outside the Western world and for revitalising an area of media studies that seemed to have entered a theoretical cul-de-sac. Their method and typology rapidly developed a narrative power approaching, if not rivalling, that of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm. It catalysed a number of empirical studies of various national media systems as well as theoretical explorations, which now form a substantial body of literature. Some of these studies appeared in Hallin and Mancini’s own 2012 edited volume, *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*. These comparative studies can be conceived as taking one or more of three approaches: they 1) tested, 2) expanded or 3) attempted to transcend Hallin and Mancini’s models. Many scholars have, of course, combined more than one of these approaches. All three significantly expanded the geographical and conceptual boundaries of media studies. Many of them yield perspectives relevant to this dissertation.

The first approach – testing Hallin and Mancini’s models – resulted in a number of detailed case studies that provided a wealth of information on the empirical reality of various national media systems from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia (among them Terzis, 2007; Jakubowicz, 2007; Dobek-Ostrowska *et al.*, 2010; Vartanova, 2012; Zhao, 2012; Kraidy, 2012; Hadland, 2012). Whether single-country analyses or encompassing groups of contiguous or similar countries, these studies added to a growing body of research that enriched the theoretical debate. It also became apparent that most countries refused to fit neatly into one or the other of the models; they often combined the characteristics of more than one model. Hallin and Mancini also later confirmed that they recognise the conceptual difficulties inherent in extending their model to cover disparate media systems:

First, we want to underscore the point that our analysis is tied to the 18 cases we analyzed, and we did not intend it to be ‘applied’ beyond those cases; we believe that new theory applying to other media systems will have to arise, as our framework did, out of concrete analysis of those systems.

(Hallin and Mancini, 2012a: 217)

The second approach – expanding upon Hallin and Mancini’s models – examined media systems and their characteristics to determine if other variables were necessary to define them and their behaviour. Country-specific analyses resulted in underscoring a variety of characteristics that were integral to understanding the nature and behaviour of those media systems. Peri (2012), for instance, identified security considerations and the media’s commitment to nation building as factors central to understanding Israeli media. Peri links this ‘mobilized’ state of Israel’s media to the fact that politicians are often editors of newspapers and editors sometimes enter politics. Balčytienė (2012) points to cultural protection and national resistance as driving forces for the media in the Baltic states. de Albuquerque (2012) finds that Hallin and Mancini’s variables cannot adequately describe important aspects of the Brazilian media system. The variables he proposes to add are: whether a media system is central or peripheral with reference to other national media systems and, in common with Voltmer (2012), whether the system of government is presidential or parliamentary. He also suggests disaggregating the dimension of ‘political parallelism’ into two variables – the strength of political parties and the level of involvement of media in political activity. Hadland

(2012), on the other hand, proposes to expand the scope of Hallin and Mancini's 'state intervention' dimension to include the type of coercive intervention that can be seen in young democracies.

McCargo (2012), drawing upon his earlier studies of the media in east and south-east Asia (McCargo, 2000, 2003), expands upon the variables considered by Hallin and Mancini. He points out that the media systems models are inadequate reflections of the messiness of reality: 'Orderly media systems are the exception rather than the rule, and their successful export to Asia or the rest of the developing world looks rather unlikely' (McCargo, 2012: 223). He proposes the concept of 'partisan polyvalence' as a working label for many of the media systems in the Asia-Pacific region. This term points to the multiplicity of voices as well as the high levels of contention between state-sanctioned and unauthorised voices in those media systems. McCargo makes clear that the descriptor 'partisan polyvalence' does not constitute an alternate model, neither does he offer any alternate typology, proposing only that it may be necessary to define 'anti-models' to describe the fragmentation and lack of overarching systems that characterise some media systems in Asia:

Media in the new democracies, illiberal democracies, and semi-authoritarian nations of Pacific Asia are commonly characterized by intense partisanship, persistent state interference, ambiguous modes of ownership, and questionable profitability. Although these features are too miscellaneous to amount to a model, there is ample scope for comparative research concerning the ways in which similar media characteristics recur around the region.

(McCargo, 2012: 223)

The third approach adopted by scholars is to transcend Hallin and Mancini's models by suggesting alternate typologies and theoretical frameworks for the study of media systems. There have been a number of different strands to this approach.

Though the debate on Asian values has remained on the margins of mainstream Western media scholarship, a number of other frameworks have been proposed to study media systems from cultural, historical, institutional and processual perspectives (Hepp and Couldry, 2009; Koltsova, 2006; Humphreys, 2011; Roudakova, 2012). Some of these were similar in approach to Hallin and Mancini's modes. Hardy (2012: 200) cites

research published in German by Blum in 2005, which proposes six models: an Atlantic-Pacific liberal model, a Southern European clientelism model, a Northern European public service model, an Eastern European shock model, an Arab-Asian patriot model, and an Asian-Caribbean command model.

Christians *et al.* propose a typology of four traditions, which they see as the ‘most appropriate for describing and evaluating a complete media system at a given historical period’ (2009: 32). The four are: the corporatist, libertarian, social responsibility and citizen participation traditions (2009: 19–25). Each of these ‘paradigmatic traditions’ represents an internally coherent set of values that have developed in specific historical and political contexts. The four traditions proposed by the five authors are avowedly normative in their approach and are linked to models of democracy and the role of journalists in society.

However, no overarching typologies have as yet emerged to rival the conceptual power of either Hallin and Mancini or their predecessor theorists, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm. Theoretical explorations of how these iconic models can be adapted or transcended do, however, yield several perspectives that are relevant to this research project.

Voltmer (2012) points out that ‘trajectories of the past’ in the form of legacy media institutions, even after they are re-imagined, means that media systems in new and emerging democracies are unlikely to fit models developed on the basis of the experience of Europe and North America. Media systems in transitional states are ‘unique’ and best described as ‘hybrid’. This corresponds to the use of the term hybrid regimes to describe the adoption of some democratic practices and institutions, often in form rather than in substance, and a resultant character lying somewhere between authoritarianism and democracy. The media systems of new democracies correspond closely with their political systems and share the messiness of their reality, says Voltmer (2012: 238–241). Her conception is somewhat similar to Curran and Park’s (2000) category of ‘transitional and mixed societies’, but she also goes on to argue that this is not a sustainable category because the media in emerging democracies stretch the boundaries of Hallin and Mancini’s models to breaking point:

[W]e need to think more systematically about the content and boundaries of the four dimensions – media markets, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism, and state intervention – that are the foundation of the models. Media systems in many new democracies are characterized by a degree of state intervention that goes far beyond what is known from established democracies; media markets are often considerably weaker and more divided between developed and underdeveloped segments; journalists combine universally acknowledged professional standards with the specific values and norms of their own culture and traditions; and parallelism follows different lines of conflict that in some instances are less open to consensus or compromise. These differences in both scope and kind might indicate a new quality that constitutes distinct models in their own right.

(Voltmer, 2012: 244–245)

Voltmer does not, however, go beyond highlighting the concept of hybridity to propose a more complete typology.

Natalia Roudakova (2012) goes one step further. She advocates moving beyond the norms and structures which are the foundation of Hallin and Mancini's four dimensions and most other schema for studying media systems. Roudakova suggests that an approach focusing on processes rather than structures and systems might be more useful, especially for analysing the media in hybrid regimes that fall in the grey area between democracy and authoritarianism. She identifies the elements that might be considered in a processual approach: 'the interplay of continuity and change, the articulation between situational (micro) and historical (macro) developments, and the mutual constitution of human agency and social structure' (2012: 276).

Roudakova opens up and expands the scope of Hallin and Mancini's four dimensions by examining the processes that underlie them. For instance, by conceptualising Hallin and Mancini's 'state intervention' as a process, she disaggregates the state, viewing it as an assemblage of interpretive and meaning-making practices. She shows that the processes through which the state maintains its ideological legitimacy facilitate an understanding that goes beyond that achieved by the factors considered by Hallin and Mancini, such as ownership, regulation and funding. She explains this by pointing out that while state legitimacy stems primarily from elections in Western European democracies, media portrayals of the state are of critical importance for hybrid regimes such as China,

Venezuela and post-communist Russia, which rely on mechanisms other than elections for legitimacy. Similarly, she expands the scope of Hallin and Mancini's 'political parallelism' to include individual capitalists with government connections, and to move beyond concepts of political partisanship of the media to encompass the active role of media in political processes. She finds that under this lens, Hallin and Mancini's four dimensions are no longer distinct structural elements but interconnected and interlinked processes (Roudakova, 2012: 246–277). At the same time, Roudakova is candid in admitting that processual analyses such as hers which are based on ethnographic study are heavily context dependent and are susceptible to greater 'tentativeness' than are structural comparisons.

The cumulative effect of these efforts to test, apply, expand and transcend the established typologies of media systems in one sense reinforced their status as iconic models. At another level, it broadened the debate and expanded its theoretical as well as geographical boundaries. Most important from the perspective of this research, they also highlighted inconsistencies, contradictions, visible or invisible perimeters, and a host of pointers to methodological and conceptual limitations.

## **2.6 CONCEPTUAL ISSUES**

Comparative research in media has developed significantly since the days of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, who were castigated by Curran and Park (2003: 3) for how little they 'felt they needed to know' about the media in other countries. Even when the influence of *Four Theories* had begun to wane, Blumler and Gurevitch (1975) could find only a handful of comparative studies when they surveyed the field. Up until the 1990s, communication research lacked an international orientation comparable to that of political science (Pfetsch and Esser, 2004: 3) and various scholars felt compelled to call for research to adopt comparative methods and interests (Downing, 1996; Gurevitch and Blumler, 2004). However, with a momentum having seemingly been built up, more recently it was felt that it 'seems no longer necessary to do so' (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012a: 3).

Media systems research has benefited from adopting fresh approaches and methods and by incorporating international inputs in the form of both perspectives and empirical data. Esser and Hanitzsch identify six aspects that contribute to making the comparative approach ‘superior’: 1) establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations derived from single contexts; 2) preventing overgeneralising from one’s own experience; 3) challenging the existing paradigms by not taking one’s own country as ‘normal’; 4) developing and contextualising the understanding of our own societies; 5) fostering global networks and learning from the experience of others; and 6) offering a wealth of practical knowledge and experience to solve dilemmas (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012a: 3–4).

Hanitzsch (2009: 414–416) had earlier identified four paradigms in the development of comparative media research, classified on the basis of the cultural contexts they encompassed. He labelled them as: 1) The US and the Rest; 2) The North and the South; 3) The West and West; and 4) The West and the Global. The US-centricity of the first of these paradigms – of which *Four Theories* is a prime example – has been associated with the global ascendancy of the US, Cold War perspectives, and the perspectives of modernisation theory. It dominated media theory from the 1950s to the 1970s. The second paradigm, ‘The North and the South’, represented a focus on the global South and differentials in communicative power. It was driven by political processes that took place within UNESCO in the 1970s and which led to the formulation of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The third paradigm, as its name suggests, combined perspectives from Europe with the dominant Anglo-Saxon perspective which had hitherto received the bulk of scholarly attention. Achieving prominence in the 1980s, this phase of comparative research was fuelled by the process of achieving a politico-economic union in Europe. It led to methodological advances as well as a substantial widening and deepening of the focus of inquiry. The fourth paradigm, ‘The West and the Global’, is marked by cross-national collaborations and large-N studies, and also by theoretical and methodological reflection (Hanitzsch, 2009).

Though media studies has evidently made substantial progress in terms of Thussu’s ‘third intervention’ (2009), internationalisation, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the

approach and typologies of media systems theory are strongly contested at many different levels. Hardy (2012) sums up the key criticisms of *Four Theories* as comprised of four elements: 1) the narrow scope and focus of the classifications; 2) oversimplification of media systems; 3) the confusion of the normative and the empirical; and 4) ethnocentrism. He goes on to identify the five major critiques of Hallin and Mancini's models as: 1) problems with country classification; 2) temporality and media systems; 3) system-differentiating factors; 4) narrow media focus; and 5) journalistic professionalism and residual normative ordering (Hardy, 2012: 192–196).

Hallin and Mancini themselves group the issues raised into the following categories: 1) problems related to classification of media systems according to their three models; 2) the issue of 'media system' as a unit of analysis; 3) the question of omitted variables in their analysis; 4) questions regarding the empirical validation of the typology; and 5) the issue of convergence or homogenisation (Hallin and Mancini, 2012a: 208).

These critiques of the two landmark studies have been reflected in this review of academic literature. It is further summarised and discussed below, structured slightly differently but in a manner that covers practically all of the elements of critique identified above.

The discussion that follows is structured to highlight those elements that are relevant to this research. The intention is to develop insights that will facilitate the emergence of the core theoretical thrust of this inquiry into phenomena in the Indian media. The four conceptual concerns thought to have the potential of facilitating the synthesis of the research questions are:

1. Definitions and national boundaries;
2. The utility (or futility) of the media systems approach;
3. Approaches and reference points ; and
4. Disciplinary boundaries and the choice of variables.

### 2.6.1 Definitions and national boundaries

The first conceptual concern is about definitions and geographical boundaries. This encompasses three elements – the scope of the term ‘media’, the definition of a media system, and whether the nation state is an appropriate unit of analysis.

The scope of the term ‘media’ needs to be clarified to precisely locate the boundaries of inquiry. Although media systems theory principally concerns itself with journalism or the news media and usually excludes entertainment-oriented media industries, it arrogates to itself a deceptive dimension and image by using the broader term ‘media’. In one response to Hallin and Mancini’s typology, Kraidy (2012) argues for the inclusion of entertainment into the analysis of media systems. McQuail made a similar point:

The approach has been unable to cope with the diversity of media and changing technology and times. It has little to say about music, the cinema, or most of television that is concerned with entertainment, fiction, sport and games.

(McQuail, 2005a: 178)

Separately, Norris (2009: 328–329) has noted that media systems theory continues to limit itself to a focus on traditional mass media. It is yet to embrace the universe of online and social media, the ‘800-pound gorilla in the room’ which, it cannot be disputed, has substantially impacted ‘media systems’, however they might be defined. Chadwick (2013) has incorporated online media into his concept of a ‘hybrid media system’, but on the whole, media systems theory does not adequately take newer communication technologies and modes into account.

The second element is the lack of clarity about the use of the term ‘media system’. Norris (2009: 328) argues that it is misleading to think in terms of media systems when their component parts such as broadsheet newspapers and tabloids, public service broadcasting and commercial television have no meaningful connections or interrelationships and may be regulated quite differently. McQuail (2005) also points out that the media in most countries does not constitute a single system with a unifying philosophy or rationale.

The argument is that disparate elements cannot comprise a 'system'. Hardy (2012: 186) observes that the term 'media system' has not been firmly established in scholarship, with the result that it is approached with a variety of conceptual tools ranging from normative classifications to empirical and historical analyses, and from a focus on media industries to structural functionalist approaches.

The third element of this issue is concern about the validity of using the boundaries of a nation state to define the unit of analysis. Challenges have come in many forms, including the discourses around globalisation, identity, homogenisation, differentiation and the location of culture (see, for instance, works on globalisation and culture such as Harvey, 1990; Appadurai, 1990, 1996; Hall, 1997a, 1997b; theories of media cultures as trans-local phenomena in Couldry, 2007; Hepp and Couldry, 2009; Couldry and Hepp, 2012; and a critique of methodological nationalism and 'container' thinking in Beck, 2002).

Curran and Park robustly defend the decision to base their analysis on national media systems because they believe that though the nation continues to be important, their significance 'tends to be underplayed by globalization theory' (2000: 9). They argue that, among other factors, the nation continues to be an important marker of difference, and that regulatory regimes are national. Others have supported this view. Sreberny (2000) contends that it would be inappropriate to assume that national systems are passive recipients of external forces, and Chadha and Kavoori (2005) also call for recognition of the continuing role of the national. Hallin and Mancini have a slightly more ambiguous attitude towards the nation state. They acknowledge it as their primary unit of analysis (2004: 71), but also emphasise that globalisation is one of the factors responsible for a strong trend of homogenisation and convergence in the direction of their liberal model (2004: 254, 282).

On the whole, media systems theory remains conceptually tied to national boundaries. Even theorists who incorporate online media into their analyses continue to do so largely within nation-specific contexts (see, for instance, Chadwick, 2013).

In this study of Indian media, uncertainty about definitions and the analytical legitimacy of national boundaries are not major factors. It is clear that the conception of media for

the purposes of this study is largely restricted to the news media. The media system is taken to be constituted of mainstream mass media – newspapers and television – because they dominate the provision of news in the period under study, as is discussed in some detail in Chapter 4. In addition, the Indian media system is taken to be that which is contained within national boundaries and bound by shared culture, history, laws, regulatory frameworks, and economic, social and political systems.

### **2.6.2 The utility (or futility) of the media systems approach**

Questions of the utility and applicability of media systems theory are rooted in the inconsistencies and contradictions in the classification of media systems under various typologies. It is noteworthy that the messiness of data – the lack of correspondence between observed behaviour and theoretical categories – is apparent even when most similar systems are considered, as in Hallin and Mancini’s models, which were based on 18 Western European and North American countries ‘that have much in common in terms of the history, culture and institutions’ (2004: xiv). As has been noted, this is a common feature of models, whether they have been constructed normatively (Siebert *et al.*, 1956) or structurally and empirically (Curran and Park, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Irrespective of the approach adopted, models are accompanied by numerous riders and provisos to justify the grouping together of seemingly disparate media systems. This is perhaps only to be expected in the construction of ideal types, especially where their primary purpose is not the classification of individual systems but the identification of patterns of relationships that characterise a number of cases.

An oft-quoted example is that of the marked differences between the British and US media (Norris, 2009; Humphreys, 2011). Norris points out that despite sharing a commitment to free markets and freedom of speech, the two media systems are different in most other respects: broadcasting regulation, public service broadcasting, election news and advertising on television, regional and metropolitan newspapers as opposed to national newspapers, the mix of quality newspapers and tabloids, partisanship in the media, and the education and training of journalists. She contends that placing both Britain and the US within one media system, as media systems models inevitably do, indicates a dubious conceptual foundation:

In short, media systems in Britain and the United States seem, at first glance, to have almost nothing in common. And if the logic is faulty in these particular cases, then this raises doubts about other classifications, for example whether there are really closer similarities between Germany and Norway, or between Germany and France. Without any rigorous process for testing the classification independently, when by establishing certain standardized indicators or a set of explicit decision rules, the categorization proposed by Hallin and Mancini remains fuzzy, impressionistic and unscientific.

(Norris, 2009: 334)

Hallin and Mancini rebut this criticism by terming it ‘hyperbolic’ and calling it the result of identifying so closely with one’s own country that the features of its media system ‘take on an exaggerated importance’ (2012a: 209). When seen from a more distant perspective, the similarities between the British and US media systems would be more apparent than the differences, they suggest.

At a broader conceptual level, it has been pointed out that the scope of the whole intellectual project of media systems is so wide and the task so complex that possibly all of media systems theory is a futile exercise. The last sentence of Nerone’s critique of *Four Theories* expresses doubts about the feasibility of theoretical models of media systems: ‘Or perhaps we have outlived the age of maps – maybe what we really need is a dictionary or a phone book’ (Nerone, 1995: 184). Other scholars (see, for instance, Humphreys, 2011; McCargo, 2012) have voiced similar sentiments about later models, raising a pertinent but perhaps under-explored question about the viability of models of media systems to depict the reality of media systems in a meaningful way.

Hardy suggests that classifying ‘media systems *in toto* may require such a level of abstraction that the results may be inherently misleading’ (2012: 188). Norris (2009: 340) describes the state of media systems theory as ‘Babelian’ and suggests that it needs to be ‘more scientific’. Norris also wonders if the search for typological schema and categorical classifications should ‘perhaps be abandoned’ (2009: 340). Humphreys (2011: 159) describes Hallin and Mancini’s work as being characterised by ‘ambitious scope but more limited usefulness of their actual classifications’. He argues that:

[...] media systems are not so easily fitted into identifiable models; they are more 'sui generis' than Hallin and Mancini have allowed. This paper suggests, therefore, that rather than expend time and energy on producing neat typologies, it is much more important to explore in depth a more comprehensive range of salient political, legal and economic variables that bear on the media system.

(Humphreys, 2011: 172)

Humphreys also points out that the constant stream of clarifications and justifications offered by Hallin and Mancini only serves to undermine confidence in the viability of their classification. McCargo (2012: 202) is equally cautious because 'there are so many exceptions to every rule that rules tend to obscure rather than explain the nature of the game itself'. Hallin and Mancini accept that this critique has been made, but dismiss it as making an obvious point about ideal types (2012a: 208–210).

Esser and Hanitzsch set out five goals for comparative research: 1) providing contextual descriptions; 2) recognising functional equivalents; 3) establishing classifications and typologies; 4) explanation; and 5) prediction (2012a: 10–11). Various responses to Hallin and Mancini have critiqued their typology on a number of these criteria. Viewed through this prism, it becomes apparent that Hallin and Mancini's models perform erratically on the first goal, are fairly efficient at the second, and are contested on the third. However, with response to numbers four and five, explanation and prediction, models of media systems do not perform at all well. Critiques that highlight this conceptual concern contend that the level of research and theorisation are as yet incapable of adequately describing, classifying, explaining or predicting the messy empirical reality of media systems – in the non-West, of course, but also in the West.

In one sense, this debate is in fact about minimalist and maximalist approaches to constructing ideal types. There is weight on both sides of the argument for, at its base, this discussion is about whether or not typologies of media systems reveal meaning. One side claims that media systems hide within themselves so much of divergence, and models of media systems are so equivocal, that typologies are of limited, if any, use. After all, if models cannot be applied to other situations, they are not really models, goes the argument. The opposing perspective, of those defending the construction of models, is that this reasoning betrays a lack of understanding about the nature of ideal

types. The first of these two contentions has a certain resonance with regard to the Indian media system, even though this study does not aim to formulate and propose alternate typologies. For instance, it is not possible to dismiss out of hand the hypothesis that India is under-represented in media systems research at least partly because of the complete inability of models to deal with that level of complexity.

The ability or inability of media systems theory to reflect empirical reality is a key concern of this research project. This is because media systems theory aims – and claims – to provide an answer to ‘why is the press as it is’. How effectively it does so and whether it is possible to improve its correlation with reality are central to this inquiry.

### **2.6.3 Approaches and reference points**

The third conceptual concern is that of approaches and reference points. Each of these is individually a significant factor meriting attention for its role in determining the direction and validity of media systems theory. Here, they are considered together because there is considerable overlap – and, often, a feedback loop – between them. These elements act in concert to determine the design of analytical frameworks.

There has been some amount – but from the viewpoint of the non-West, not a lot – of movement in terms of the approaches and reference points adopted by media systems theory in the last six decades. For the most part, the established order of media systems theory – the iconic theories, but also other formulations, mostly from the West – have developed within clearly visible and relatively static perimeters. The pressure for an expanded vision and the adoption of new approaches originates in inadequacies made apparent by the application of dominant approaches to non-Western media systems. When seen from inside the Western world, there has been substantial theoretical development. However, when seen from outside the Western world, the increase in the predictive or explanatory power of media theory is not significant because it takes it little closer to adequacy.

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) adopted an approach that was historical and also normative. They maintained a sharp focus on the development of political thought which, in their view, adequately explained the nature and behaviour of media systems around the world. Their reference point or benchmark for media systems was the US media system, which they considered as modern and evolved. They were unabashedly normative in their approach – the clear proposition of *Four Theories* was that other media systems should aspire to become more like US media.

Their historical-philosophical-normative approach included a focus on values, which in one sense demonstrates a vision about wider social and cultural influences on the media, as well as on its role in society. Christians *et al.* (2009) see the value in normative approaches, especially where it relates to the development of professional ideology and values. A specific focus on values did not, however, gain a theoretical foothold and appears in a diminished form in subsequent theoretical formulations. It is notable that the focus on values resonated for a much longer time in the non-West than it did in the West, which in itself is conceivably an indicator of differences in the discourse in Western and non-Western media systems. Sparks and Reading were disdainful when they declared that ‘values do not determine social institutions’ (1998: 179–180). They claimed that, in any case, no single value can be said to determine all the significant features of a society or media system. This last statement is perhaps an oversimplification of the case – it does not present a viable argument to exclude values altogether from approaches used to study media systems.

The manner in which the historical approach has been implemented has come in for some criticism. In much the same manner as Siebert, Peterson and Schramm were criticised by Nerone (1995) for building linear and coherent narratives through the ‘ex post facto rationalization of pretty accidental developments’, Hallin and Mancini’s 2004 models were found wanting by some peers. Norris highlighted a critical limitation of the approach they took when she claimed that the trends highlighted by Hallin and Mancini were derived from a picture that only they could fully see:

The evidence presented by Hallin and Mancini remains descriptive, drawing upon their reading of selective historical examples, limiting how far their classification can be replicated by other scholars. There are also many

impressionistic reasons to question the proposed categorizations and any potential misclassifications of specific cases sow doubt about the value of the overall schema.

(Norris, 2009: 333)

More recent theory continues to embrace historical approaches at its core, but it has developed a far stronger empirical (and less normative) emphasis. Normative approaches do persist, but many of them in recent decades have originated in the non-West rather than in the West – of course, some of them, such as the Asian values debate, are in themselves a reaction to Western normativism. Curran and Park's categorisation (2000) depended on empirical data from case studies of national media systems for its explication, and Hallin and Mancini's research (2004) contained a profusion of empirical data from 18 countries extending over decades and even centuries.

However, the selection of subjects for empirical study remains narrow in scope and limited in ambition. Partly because of the lack of comparable data sets from different countries, media systems theory tends to concentrate on institutions, structures, political systems, legal and regulatory frameworks and available quantitative data. In many countries, especially outside the West, these structural and institutional parameters yield inadequate characterisations of the media systems, offering little in the way of detail and possessing little explanatory or predictive power for those familiar with those media systems. This is strongly reflected in the plethora of voices that have responded to dominant models by suggesting that a wider menu of approaches is needed to understand the empirical reality of international media systems. This aspect has a strong relationship with the disciplinary boundaries which circumscribe most of media systems theory and which will be discussed later in this section.

The limited deployment of approaches is related to the normative pivots or reference points of models of media systems. Regardless of numerous calls for the de-Westernisation and internationalisation of media studies and for greater comparative efforts (among them Thussu, 2009; Curran and Park, 2000; Downing, 1996), the Western perspective dominates media studies and the pivotal reference point remains the liberal model of media, also sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-American model. Hallin and Mancini (2004) even suggest that there is a discernible

trend of diverse media systems converging towards the liberal model. This is problematic on many counts, not least because this model itself is an idealised conception that does not stand up to scrutiny:

There is a widespread tendency to measure the media systems of the post-communist countries, and in particular their journalism, against what is often termed the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model. This is said to be characterised by fearlessly independent media employing brave investigative journalists who, whatever their personal feelings, are dedicated to the separation of fact and opinion in their reporting, who are even-handed and impartial between contending viewpoints and whose main task is to inform their readers and viewers without fear or favour about all that is most important in the world today. The ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model of the media is a largely imaginary construction. Like some mythological beast, it is an impossible amalgam of selected features of two incompatible systems, joined together without regard to its possibility of existence.

(Sparks and Reading, 1998: 175–176)

The Anglo-Saxon model – whether mythological, real or hybrid – is the most studied model, the de facto standard, the implicit if not explicit normative reference point for media systems. However, it emerged in a unique historical context. Among other things, Britain and the US have enjoyed a long spell of uninterrupted democracy, now running into centuries. This relative stability of political and media systems is a rarity in the real world, even within the West. Most other countries have undergone – or are still undergoing – sharp disjunctures, most of them political in nature, but also social and economic.

Curran and Park (2000) found that their most interesting and significant results emerged from countries exhibiting such disjunctures, which they classified as ‘transitional and mixed societies’. As discussed in Section 2.3 above, this was a miscellaneous category extraneous to the four primary categories that emerged from the logic of their two-variable analysis. Curran and Park were interested enough by the data from these media systems that they considered them first, before they went on to their four basic categories. Similarly, Hallin and Mancini (2004) chose to discuss their polarised pluralist model in detail first, before they proceeded to the other two models. This perhaps indicates that media systems that deviate from the norms of the Anglo-Saxon or

liberal model yield messy empirical data that is not only more representative of the real world, but also more productive to analyse.

However, an important consequence of using the liberal model as a pivotal reference point is the tendency to ignore features and characteristics that are either concealed under its idealised form or have been bred out of this model during its long uninterrupted development. Media systems in transition, or experiencing democratic disjunctures, may display distinct characteristics or be driven by influences that are not found in the relatively stable liberal model. This is at the heart of the rationale of calls for de-Westernisation, internationalisation, Afro-centricity and Asia-centricity: that the characteristics that define other media systems are not even a part of the analytical framework built around the liberal model. Despite some attempts to incorporate empirical inputs from other media systems, a suspicion endures that other models are partially or significantly defined in opposition to this model. de Albuquerque (2012: 75–76), for instance, makes the case that Hallin and Mancini’s polarised pluralist model is a ‘negative model’, defined largely by the absence of characteristics that are identified with the other two models.

To sum up, there are two major issues with approaches and reference points. The first is that the approach to constructing typologies is generally either normative or structural. In either case, ideal types are constructed on the basis of the consideration and application of a predetermined set of factors. Media systems are grouped together on the basis of these factors. Various critiques that have been offered make it clear that significant differences within categories caused by variations along other axes are ignored. This is perhaps why media systems theory often fails to provide an acceptably accurate or granular representation of media systems. Though the intention of media systems theory is to understand why media behave as they do, there is an apparent paucity of efforts to first understand the behaviour of media systems and then classify them.

The second issue relates to the reference point of media systems theory – which, as has been seen, is the Anglo-Saxon or liberal model of media. Major media systems theorists who have proposed overarching typologies have been from the West, and their studies have often adopted a historical approach. This perhaps explains why their analyses are

embedded in particular historical, cultural and philosophical contexts. This thesis does not dispute the dominance of the values of the liberal model in the normative conception of journalism globally, but it does accept that other philosophical, cultural and social traditions could lead to divergences in the translation of professional principles into practice.

These two issues – the primacy accorded to normative and structural approaches to categorisation, and the embedding of analyses in specific Western contexts – are reflected in the frequency with which scholars report a mismatch between specific media systems and dominant typologies.

#### **2.6.4 Disciplinary boundaries and the choice of variables**

The fourth conceptual concern is with disciplinary boundaries and the choice of variables used to study media systems. There are indications that the problems with wider or universal applicability of media systems theory are related to its self-imposed disciplinary boundaries. Models and typologies have largely been constructed at the juncture of media studies and political science, to the partial or substantial exclusion of other disciplines. The critical voices covered earlier in this chapter suggest that media systems might be better understood by additionally considering inputs from areas such as culture, society, economics and even religion and values.

Political systems and the media directly influence each other, but that relationship is arguably not as strong as media's relationship with culture and social factors. While it is acknowledged that media and the political system have a relationship and exert an influence on each other, they continue to be distinct systems. On the other hand, the media's intersection with society and culture is far more intermeshed, and of a nature that can be marked by feedback loops rather than mere influence.

Media systems theory began with Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's focus on political variables with, as discussed, a historical-philosophical approach. They also incorporated economic perspectives into their analysis, both while considering modes of media ownership permitted under various political systems and while considering the

influence of the market on the media. Additionally, their normative approach signalled an implicit and often explicit acknowledgement of the role of values in shaping media systems.

Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) mainly considered dimensions relating to political systems, but one of their dimensions encompassed media institutions and processes. Various other models and schema proposed by other scholars of political communication have also given primacy to political variables. Those from the political economy tradition have, of course, included economic forces in their analyses. Curran and Park's (2000) clean, two-variable analysis utilised one political system variable (democratic vs authoritarian) and one economic system variable (neo-liberal vs regulated). At one point, they seemed to promise a wider inquiry into 'social relations', but this promise did not mature into additional variables for their analysis and classification:

But perhaps the key point to emphasize is that media systems are shaped not merely by national regulatory regimes and national audience preferences, but by a complex ensemble of social relations that have taken shape in national contexts. It is precisely the historically grounded density of these relationships that tends to be excluded from simplified global accounts, in which theorists survey the universe while never straying far from the international airport.

(Curran and Park, 2000: 10)

Similarly, Hallin and Mancini also tantalisingly indicate the possibility of a wider field of inquiry, but rapidly retreat into the comforting confines of political science perspectives:

Comparative analysis of media systems is about understanding those systems in the context of history, culture, and social and political structure more generally, and this means that scholars of communication need to be in dialogue with other fields, including comparative politics, political sociology, and political anthropology.

(Hallin and Mancini, 2012a: 217–218)

No formal rationale has been forthcoming for why media systems theory should shrink media systems into one-dimensional entities that possess only one primary relationship

– that with the political system – worth exploring. The result is an inexplicable neglect of the media systems’ interactions with social systems, cultural systems, economic systems, or even value systems. Interestingly, other efforts to define media behaviour do take such factors into account. For instance, the five filters of Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model (1988) – ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and anti-communism – indicate that US media is characterised by a variety of institutional, commercial, cultural, ideological and professional factors.

There does seem to be, however, a simple reason for the field’s theoretical affinity with political science – path dependency. The scholarship on media systems intersects to a very large extent with that of political communication because many prominent scholars, including many of those who have produced prominent models and typologies, come from the field of political communication. Indeed, many of their classifications, concepts and methods are sourced directly from political communications and, by extension, from political science.

Viewed in this light, it is easier to understand the cacophony of criticism – some of it in fairly strong language – of Hallin and Mancini’s models. Many scholars have evidently found that models based on only one discipline (in this case, political communication) are evidently incapable of describing, accounting for, perhaps even noticing the characteristics that seem most prominent to those who study those systems. As Norris (2009: 331) notes: ‘It is not apparent whether the four dimensions identified by Hallin and Mancini are indeed the critical ones that define the major contrasts today among contemporary media systems’.

The misunderstanding is aggravated because theorists have been expansionist in their ambition to be explanatory, and have laid claim to more ground than they can hold. For instance, in the title of their 2004 book, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Hallin and Mancini use two different terms – ‘media systems’ and ‘models of media and politics’. However, inside its covers, they abandon the more specific and accurate term and switch to the far wider term ‘media system’. This leads to disconnect between expectation and outcome. The users of media systems theory expect a tool which will describe, explain and predict empirical reality, but the fact is

that the instrument at hand can only answer questions about one slice of that reality, neglecting other elements, whatever their perceived importance or salience.

Norris also separately notices Hallin and Mancini's questionable claim to the territory of 'media systems' and calls it a 'misleading conceptual classification'. She points out that Hallin and Mancini are in fact trying 'to define a *system of political communications*, which is a very different animal' (2009: 328–329; emphasis in original).

It is significant that there is little consideration of media-related variables in the analysis of media systems. There is a lack of agency ascribed to the media; the media is considered as if it were determined entirely by the ideological, political or economic structures which surround it. In reality, the media not only exerts considerable influence on society, culture and politics, its behaviour is also influenced by its internal dynamics. Efforts to plumb this complexity have been lacking. Hallin and Mancini's four dimensions (2004) do focus upon the media, but three of the four dimensions consider the relationship between the media and the political system, and only one – levels of professionalism in journalism – examines the working of the media in detail. A notable exception was Chakravarty and Roy's (2013) intense focus on the relationship between ownership and political partisanship in their proposal of an alternative typology of India's linguistic media systems. However, their two categories – partisan and network media systems – also emphasise the media-politics relationship.

From the above consideration of literature, it is clear that a number of conceptual issues related to approaches, reference points and disciplinary boundaries are held responsible for the perceived inadequacies of media systems theory. These conceptual issues are linked to the discussion on the appropriate choice of variables for the study of media systems. Though a limited number of variables has been used in media systems theory, in most cases the choice has been justified through robust reasoning – the only problem being, as has been discussed, that this reasoning might be wearing discipline- or approach-specific blinkers.

Hallin and Mancini are confident that their choice of variables is a good fit for the rest of the world:

In fact, we were struck by the fact that the list of variables we proposed to compare the relationship between mass media and politics in the Western world seemed to hold up reasonably well as we shifted to a ‘most dissimilar systems’ design, at least in the sense that the participants were almost always able to tell a coherent and interesting story about how their cases could be understood in relation to those dimensions.

(Hallin and Mancini, 2012b: 5)

However, other scholars evidently do not agree with the claim that they are ‘always able to tell a coherent and interesting story’. Responses to proposed models have produced a long list of variables that other scholars consider important for the study of media systems. McQuail (2005b) and Remington (2006) have mentioned country size and patterns of regionalism; others have suggested media consumption and market size (Hardy, 2012). Yakovenko (2000, cited in Koltsova, 2006) has an intense focus on media freedom, and Norris (2009) also repeatedly returns to press freedom and the enabling legal framework. Humphreys (2011) proposes a far more comprehensive list of variables, including: history (continuity/disjuncture); market size; levels of media concentration; ethnic/linguistic structure; ideological polarisation; majoritarian, or consensual governance on three dimensions (unitary/federal, party/government, interest intermediation); state tradition; influence of judicial law making/constitutional-legal rulings; and the legal tradition.

Such a large number of variables would be too much to incorporate into any reasonable analysis, but their perceived need delivers a clear message – that instruments used to study media systems should conceptually be able to take into account a wider range of factors when appropriate.

The debate also reveals a gulf of incomprehension between those who have formulated models and those who have sought to apply or analyse them. One possible explanation for the difference of opinion is that the analytical frameworks used, which are transplanted from a particular field – in this case, political communication – cover only some of the factors that one intuitively associates with the media. Take, for instance, observations on press freedom or independence of the media, which one might use while describing the characteristics of a media system. These are intuitive and undefined categories with a broad range, but they are represented narrowly in media

systems theory. The intuitive term independence of the media corresponds roughly with Hallin and Mancini's dimension of political parallelism, just as press freedom corresponds with their dimension of the degree and extent of state intervention. However, if one focused only on political parallelism, one would not be able to include commercial threats to independence. Or a focus on state intervention might result in neglecting other threats to press freedom. The tunnel vision of theory- or path-dependent analytical frameworks is responsible for the strong criticism of established models.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This chapter has considered the main features of dominant typologies of media systems with a view to gaining insights into their approach, assumptions, methods, strengths and limitations. It began by considering the seminal *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956), the features that made it iconic, and the criticism directed at it. The more contemporary framework proposed by Hallin and Mancini was then discussed, along with a detailed analysis of numerous critiques that emerged from attempts to validate, apply and further develop their immensely popular typology.

The review of literature made it apparent that media systems theory is contested in a manner so vigorous as to cast serious doubt over its claims of universal applicability and convergence. A number of deficiencies and inadequacies have been highlighted by scholars within as well as outside the Western world. These conceptual issues have been discussed in various places in the chapter and were summarised in the preceding section, Chapter 2.6. They included the definition of the terms 'media' and 'media systems'; the relevance of national boundaries; the approaches adopted by media systems theorists; their reference points; and the discipline-specific approaches that seem to constrict the choice of variables used to describe, explain and predict the behaviour of media systems. The first two of these – definitions and national boundaries – are not central to this thesis, but the rest are.

This thesis adopts the position that the shortcomings of media systems theory that have found mention in literature are central to its inability to provide an adequate

characterisation of dissimilar systems, and are responsible for it not being able to uphold its claims of descriptive and explanatory power. It is no coincidence, it is affirmed here, that nebulous adjectives such as ‘hybrid’ and ‘transitional’ are frequently used to classify media systems outside the Western world.

The research questions that guided this study emerged from these concerns and their bearing on analysing the behaviour of Indian media and the phenomenon of paid news. They reflect a prominent outcome of this review of literature – that media systems theory frequently fails at its first test, that of providing an accurate ‘feel’ of a media system recognisable to those who are familiar with it, and that this is especially pronounced in the case of non-Western media systems.

### **Research questions**

- RQ 1: How can the granularity and fidelity of media systems theory be enhanced with respect to the Indian media system and other non-Western media systems?
- RQ 2(a): What salient features and behaviour of the Indian media system are revealed by the system-wide phenomenon of paid news?
- RQ 2(b): Do these features suggest additional approaches or variables for incorporation into media systems theory to enhance its applicability to India and other non-Western media systems?

The first research question represents the overarching theoretical thrust of this thesis, while the two parts of the second question outline the inquiry undertaken to answer the first question. The first question steers the thesis, specifying the theoretical framework as media systems theory, as well as the broad empirical focus. The thrust of this question is on testing the adequacy of the theoretical framework in describing the behaviour of the Indian media system and on possible refinements that would enhance its descriptive and explanatory power. The second question stipulates the specific empirical focus on paid news and seeks to determine if the observed features and behaviour of the Indian media system suggest additional approaches and variables for incorporation into media systems theory to enhance its accuracy and depth in answer to

the first question. The two research questions thus act together, the first specifying the nature of the inquiry and the second laying out the path to be followed.

Taken together, the two questions represent the understanding developed on the basis of the review of relevant literature. They recognise that there is a question mark over the descriptive and explanatory efficacy of media systems theory when it is applied to non-Western media systems. They imply a search for factors that drive the behaviour of Indian media, but are not part of the analytical toolbox of media systems theory. The ambition is for this analysis of the Indian media system to yield suggestions for characterising media systems that go beyond the approaches and variables routinely deployed in media systems theory. The candidate approaches and variables emerging from the analysis will be defined with an eye on their potential possible wider utility.

The next chapter sets out the research design and methods that guided the empirical elements of the inquiry.

### **3. NESTED ANALYSIS: FINDING ANSWERS IN A ‘DEVIANT CASE’**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes and justifies the approach that underpins the search for answers to the research questions. A rationale is provided for the research design adopted in the light of the nature and context of the inquiry; the approaches and methods used to generate, analyse and triangulate data from a variety of sources are considered in their theoretical context; and their implementation is described in detail.

The research design emerged organically from the nature of the inquiry. The research questions stated in Chapter 2.7 pose a version of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s (1956) question ‘Why is the press as it is?’ with specific reference to the Indian media system. At their core, they ask how models and typologies can more accurately describe why the Indian media are as they are. The ‘how’ and ‘why’ nature of the questions impelled a qualitative and exploratory approach, while the contextual reality of the Indian media system demanded flexibility. These elements became the central pillars of the design of this study.

The review of academic literature presented in the previous chapter revealed numerous conceptual issues with the application of media systems theory, especially to non-Western media systems. This led to a central objective of this research project – examining whether an in-depth study would yield alternate approaches and variables to characterise the manifest behaviour of the Indian media system, and perhaps of other media systems as well. This implies a focus on uncovering appropriate variables – if they exist – rather than on testing or validating the variables contained in existing theory. The former analytical approach is termed ‘exploratory’ and the latter ‘explanatory’ in literature (see, for instance, Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2012; and Yin, 2009). Thus, the approach adopted by this research project is broadly exploratory as well as largely qualitative.

The empirical focus of research efforts was guided by the researcher's strong feelings about the phenomenon of paid news – the practice of allowing paid advertising content to masquerade as news in an underhand manner and without any disclosure to audiences. The impact of commercial interests on journalism is no longer a rarity in many countries, but this was exceptional, in an entirely different class from favourable film reviews, tourism-related puff pieces or promoting lifestyle products. The practice generated substantial attention and outrage when it emerged that newspapers and television news channels had been selling coverage for cash to candidates in elections and, indeed, coercing politicians into paying for space if they wanted any coverage at all. Paid news had been adopted across media all over India by the 2009 parliamentary elections and the combined outrage of the government, Parliament, political parties, the Election Commission of India, media regulators, civil society and concerned journalists failed to bring an end to the practice. Paid news was deemed suitable as a case study because it was determined to represent an ethical fault-line that was systemic. In fact, if one is to answer the question 'Why is the media as it is?', it is difficult to imagine a better case than paid news on which to focus, system-wide, deep-rooted and laden with the promise of revealing multiple significant aspects as it is. In one sense, the research project pivots around this choice.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

At the very outset, it became obvious that both the methods and boundaries of the inquiry would have to exhibit flexibility. A major factor was the challenge posed by the paucity of perspectives and relevant secondary data on the Indian media system. The Indian media system has received limited academic attention, both in general and within media systems theory. For instance, Hallin and Mancini's second book (2012b) specifically examines non-Western media systems, but, inexplicably, omits to consider the media of the world's largest democracy.

This dearth of academic attention goes hand in hand with a conspicuous lack of empirical data. There are significant gaps in the mapping of the Indian media system. Available statistics are notoriously thin, and those that do exist are often unreliable. To provide just one example, the data that is generally used to enumerate the number of

newspapers and periodicals in India is published by the Office of the Registrar of Newspapers for India. These figures show that there are 13,661 English-language publications. However, this is the number of publications registered, and less than one-sixth of them filed the required annual statements (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2015). A question mark over the status of nearly 85 per cent of the sample is a very large question mark to live with, and in effect means that there is no figure available for the number of active newspapers.

Similar problems of completeness and reliability plague other types and sources of data, whether official and regulatory or from within the media industry. Basic data on numbers or on organisational, financial and policy aspects either does not exist or is difficult to access. For instance, there is no estimate available of the number of journalists in India. None is available from journalists' bodies, industry statistics or the government. One estimate exists in academic literature – 25,000 journalists plus 'thousands more' stringers (Jeffrey, 2000: 140–141).

The sheer scale of Indian media plays a role, and its linguistic diversity is accompanied by diversities of scale, business models and professional practice. Thus, data similar or analogous to that available in the smaller and less diverse Western democracies, which would have permitted a meaningful comparative approach, simply put, does not exist. This lack of data is partly responsible for the exploratory approach discussed above – the dearth of comparable indicators made a search for theoretical convergences impractical and futile. Here, in the context of methods and boundaries, it meant that effort had to be expended on gathering basic data from various sources to first build a picture of the landscape.

Thus, notwithstanding a clearly defined case study, the research design was not unambiguously predetermined. It evolved in response to needs as they emerged from a continuous process of review and analysis. Methodological choices were tactical as often as strategic, and led to a multi-step approach where each step built on the data and analysis of the preceding stage. There was frequent need to collect data and often to then corroborate it or follow its logical direction. In this sense, the shape of this study was partly determined by the exploratory process of following evidence and arguments where they led. This resulted in a satisfactory sumptuousness of data, but it also carried

its own implications and costs in terms of effort. It was not always clear in advance whether following a particular line of inquiry would be productive. Though many such efforts yielded valuable results, others led into cul-de-sacs, wandered off topic, or just sputtered to an end because of missing data.

Though this study is qualitative at its core, it draws significantly on quantitative data from documents and statistics, with each adding valuable perspectives. Some literature on research methods and methodologies appears to consider quantitative and qualitative research as diametrically opposed to each other in their epistemological and ontological orientations and in how they conceive of the relationship of theory with research. Bryman (2012: 36) sees qualitative research as inductive, interpretivist and constructionist, distinct from the deductive-positivist-objectivist approach of quantitative research. Others, however, prefer to view the two as part of a continuum. Vogt *et al.* (2014: 448), for instance, call the quantitative-qualitative divide a ‘false dichotomy’ and declare that ‘the two are inevitably linked in actual practice’. Cresswell explains it thus:

Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual information rather than rely on a single data source. [...] Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This inductive process illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes. Then deductively, the researchers look back at their data from the themes to determine if more evidence can support each theme or whether they need to gather additional information. Thus, while the process begins inductively, deductive thinking also plays an important role as the analysis moves forward.

(Cresswell, 2014: 186)

This serves as a good description of the path that was followed in answering the research questions using a mix of quantitative and qualitative data and inductive and deductive logics.

Though the approach adopted for this study is largely exploratory, it does not ignore existing theory. The primary focus here is not on testing, applying or validating existing

sets of variables emerging from media systems theory, but they remain a definite guiding presence. This research constantly refers back to the central concepts of media systems theory while seeking an answer to whether there is a need to go beyond them to accurately and adequately depict Indian reality. In other words, the factors it explores arise from empirical reality, not from theory, but they do so in the light of the same broad frameworks. Thus, existing frameworks inform the analysis and provide valuable pointers, but they do not confine or define the inquiry.

The exploratory approach also means that a number of elements critical to comparative approaches are eschewed. According to Bryman, comparative design ‘entails studying two contrasting cases using more or less identical methods’ (2012: 72). He likens it to multiple cross-section studies conducted at about the same time. Esser and Hanitzsch identify four conditions for terming a comparative study ‘mature’ (2012a: 6–7): comparison should be at the heart of the research design from its initiation; the units of comparison and their contexts should be clearly delineated; the objects of analysis should be compared along at least one common, functionally equivalent dimension; and a common theoretical framework should guide the comparison. They term research designs that substantially meet these criteria ‘genuine comparisons’. This study does not claim to fulfil all these criteria. For instance, it does not satisfy Esser and Hanitzsch’s third condition about comparison along a functionally equivalent dimension. However, it does meet some criteria of what Esser and Hanitzsch call ‘implicit comparisons’ – ‘essentially mono-cultural analyses that place only little emphasis on the comparison itself but use existing typologies or other macro units as a yardstick to interpret and contextualize the single case at hand’ (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012a: 7). In these terms, this study is clearly an implicit comparison, as is media systems theory more generally. Unfortunately, Esser and Hanitzsch do not seem to consider implicit comparisons worthy of much attention, focusing instead on ‘genuine comparisons’.

It may seem somewhat paradoxical that this project does not explicitly employ comparative techniques and methodologies even though it locates itself within media systems theory; the latter, after all, draws heavily upon comparative methodologies. This is because, as stated, the focus of this inquiry is not the comparison of the Indian

media system with other media systems; rather, it is the quest for what determines its nature and behaviour, seeking to utilise this data in a wider context only at a later stage.

The case study was the tool most suited for the job. Here, the first task is to gain an understanding of the perspectives, relationships and influences that play pivotal roles in defining the behaviour of Indian media. Only after this is achieved will an attempt be made to reconcile the findings with the literature of media systems theory. The case study permits an appropriate level of focus on the specific reality of the chosen case, the Indian media. By not being restrictively comparative or explanatory, it offers an opportunity to explore issues to the required analytical depth.

There is support for the suitability of the case study approach, for instance in Stake's (2010: 27) assertion: 'Of the three methods – comparison, correlation, and case study – the crudest is the comparison. It ignores huge differences within the two groups.' Studying a case in depth also sidesteps the problem identified in Lijphart's perceptive assessment that the comparative method suffers from 'many variables, small number of cases' (1971: 685). One of Lijphart's suggestions for overcoming this limitation is to focus the comparative analysis on 'comparable cases' (1971: 67). This, indeed, was the approach taken by Hallin and Mancini (2004), but, as has been discussed, that approach is not appropriate here. Lijphart recommends considering the case study method – even when it employs a single case study – as an implicit part of the comparative method:

The great advantage of the case study is that by focusing on a single case, that case can be intensively examined even when the research resources at the investigator's disposal are relatively limited. The scientific status of the case study method is somewhat ambiguous, however, because science is a generalizing activity. A single case can constitute neither the basis for a valid generalization nor the ground for disproving an established generalization.

Indirectly, however, case studies can make an important contribution to the establishment of general propositions and thus to theory building.

(Lijphart, 1971: 691)

Bryman (2012: 69) draws a distinction between idiographic research (elucidating the 'unique features of a case') and nomothetic research ('concerned with generating statements that apply regardless of time and space'). The empirical part of this study

falls firmly within the idiographic approach, though there is an aspiration that some of the findings will be nomothetic in nature.

A detailed description of how this approach was implemented and the decisions taken is provided in subsequent sections of this chapter. This includes an account of how tactical, strategic and reflexive elements shaped the design of the case study. Attention is also paid to a number of other elements: theoretical considerations, triangulation, issues of credibility, reliability and validity, and the limitations of the research activities.

### **3.3 THE NESTED CASE STUDY DESIGN**

One possible choice of case study was the Indian media system. However, the lack of comprehensive or reliable data and statistics on Indian media presented two problems – one of feasibility and the other of sufficiency. The first problem was that substantial effort would be expended in attempting to collect relevant data and statistics, energies that could otherwise have been utilised at the analytical level. As has been indicated, the Indian media system is an organic conglomerate of about two dozen linguistic media systems. It is open to question whether there is a ‘national’ media system at all and, if there is, how it can be defined. The linguistic media systems are organically connected to each other by law, regulation, crossover patterns of ownership and the national economy. However, they vary widely in size, history, traditions and character, and display diverse norms, structures and behaviour. They are substantially independent of each other. They are not in any sense ‘subordinate’ to an ‘Indian’ media system, if there is such a thing at all – collectively, they are the Indian media system, but any or all of them can vary widely on a number of parameters. The complexity of the situation, described as ‘polycentric’ by Chakravartty and Roy (2013), combined with the lack of availability of data for the numerous linguistic media systems, has ensured that the Indian media system has never been comprehensively mapped either empirically or conceptually. Any attempt to analyse the Indian media system without taking into account the intertwining of the linguistic media systems would be flawed. Mapping the national-level system presented a problem in itself; collecting data on all the subsystems was, quite frankly, impossible. This was a central problem plaguing the research design. It was not possible to bypass this problem entirely because the research questions

demanded it. This consideration became integral to the design of the case study. The second problem was the likelihood of gaps being evident even when all available avenues of data collection had been exhausted. It was clear from the outset that data on many aspects did not exist. Data gaps were a matter of concern because they could render it difficult to develop analytical insights at a level of granularity sufficient to permit satisfactory answers to the research questions. This issue of rigour and validity was addressed by refining the research strategy to mitigate the effect of potential gaps in data.

The solution that emerged was a nested case study design, combining a sharp focus on paid news with a broader macro-level mapping of the media system as a whole. Acquaintance with the broad outlines of the phenomenon of paid news and knowledge of the media system made it clear that the two fitted well together. The richness of qualitative data from the study of paid news would provide detail to supplement data from the media system, and the latter would provide the necessary wider perspective on the specific phenomenon. The more the nested case study was considered, the clearer it became that this design overcame, or at least mitigated, issues with validity arising out of data scarcity. Paid news became the case-within-a-case. Thus, the study evolved into an inquiry into the Indian media system as a whole, along with an analysis of a specific manifestation of the system, with each level expected to contribute to the other. The two levels worked together and none of them was secondary to the other. The sharp focus nested within the exercise of mapping national-level characteristics came admirably together to provide breadth as well as depth to the study. This design of the research project was thus in harmony with the research questions that were specified at the end of Chapter 2:

RQ 1: How can the granularity and fidelity of media systems theory be enhanced with respect to the Indian media system and other non-Western media systems?

RQ 2(a): What salient features and behaviour of the Indian media system are revealed by the system-wide phenomenon of paid news?

RQ 2(b): Do these features suggest additional approaches or variables for incorporation into media systems theory to enhance its applicability to India and other non-Western media systems?

Yin (2009) talks of the case as a phenomenon that is studied within a certain context. Bryman is even clearer when he says: ‘The desired case should be some real-life phenomenon, not an abstraction such as a topic, an argument, or even a hypothesis’ (2012: 69). In this study, paid news took its place as a phenomenon worthy of examination and the Indian media system played the role of the context. Of course, in this case, the context also had to be constructed, necessitating analytical effort, and this resulted in the innovation of a nested approach with two levels of inquiry.

This nested design overcame some of the anticipated data-related problems in a surprisingly adroit manner. The nesting may not have entirely filled the gaps in macro-level data, but it definitely provided bridges across those gaps. When leads that emerged at one level were followed to the other, they usually yielded explanation and confirmation. More importantly, data from the inner case study provided valuable insights into structures, roles, influences and relationships – all aspects that would contribute to answering the research questions. This data not only had the potential to reveal why the media are as they are, it could also provide deep insights into the processes and events that made them what they are. It was an advantage that paid news is a contemporary phenomenon, but one with a few years’ worth of history. This facilitated a medium-term longitudinal focus on processes and trajectories, so that the forces that impelled chains of events could be followed back in time with a sufficient level of verification and accuracy. Contemporaneity also meant that the data was rich, coming not from statistics and archive material, but from key players in the media and its political environment. This insight and personal perspective were as valuable as macro-level data in understanding the factors that drive and characterise the Indian media system. Thus, the two cases, when analysed in a nested manner, revealed hidden layers and improved the chances of obtaining meaningful answers.

In practice, it emerged that the advantages of the nested approach extended beyond bridging gaps in macro-level data. One important element was the boundaries of the inquiry – a focus on the macro level of the Indian media system might have been too

loose and diffuse, one not entirely capable of revealing rich answers to the research questions. It would have suffered from the problem of not knowing where to begin to look for relevant variables, and not knowing when to stop looking either. The spotlight on paid news established clear boundaries.

The case study approach proved to be a good fit for the research questions. Several of the following factors identified by Gerring were immediately seen as applicable:

[C]ase studies are generally more useful (1) when inferences are descriptive rather than causal, (2) when propositional depth is prized over breadth and boundedness, (3) when (internal) case comparability is given precedence over (external) case representativeness, (4) when insight into causal mechanisms is more important than insight into causal effects, (5) when the causal proposition at issue is invariant rather than probabilistic, (6) when the strategy of research is exploratory, rather than confirmatory, and (7) when useful variance is available for only a single unit or a small number of units.

(Gerring, 2004: 352)

Yin (2009) argues that ‘the more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g., “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works), the more the case study method will be relevant’ [from Yin, 2009, Chapter 1; accessed as an EPUB book, no page numbers]. Yin also mentions two other advantages of case studies: they are useful for a focus on contemporary events and they do not require the researcher to have control over behavioural events. All these aspects applied to this research – the questions focused on the hows and whys of paid news, the case study was contemporary and it did not require the research to have control over behavioural elements.

There seems to be a clear recognition in literature that case study research is conceptually productive and amenable to generating theory, but there have been differences of opinion about whether its methods are adequately systematised. Gerring, for instance, calls it a ‘definitional morass’ and proposes to define a case study as ‘an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (*similar*) units’ [emphasis in original], where units are defined as ‘spatially bonded phenomena’ (Gerring, 2004: 342). If paid news is taken as a unit of intensive study, in Gerring’s terms, it opens the door to understanding of a higher level unit (the media

system) and, hopefully, extends even further to understanding of other media systems in a manner amenable to yielding contributions to media systems theory.

Yin's (2009) definition of a case study is wider in its scope and more comprehensive than Gerring's. It includes elements such as the presence of a real-life context, multiple sources of evidence and the convergence of data through triangulation. Interestingly, Yin pays special attention to the fact that in case studies, the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not always evident. This was certainly found to be the case in this research project – the phenomenon connected with the context in so many ways on multiple levels that the number of variables rapidly swelled. This is logical – one would expect a particular phenomenon to link to its context in practically every aspect that one might consider. In fact, the greater the number of aspects one considers, the more blurred is the boundary where the context ends and the case study begins. It was realised that there were no solutions evident to this question and, in any case, the existence of a clear boundary was not critical to answering the research questions.

As Yin (2009) points out, case studies can sometimes be seen to present methodological problems such as lack of rigour, limited potential for generalisation and difficulty in establishing causality. An influential and vigorous methodological defence of the case study has been presented by Flyvbjerg (2006), who meticulously demonstrates that this is not the case while demolishing the 'five common misunderstandings' about case study research, which are identified as:

[...] (a) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; (b) one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development; (c) the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; (d) the case study contains a bias toward verification; and (e) it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies.

(Flyvbjerg, 2006: 219)

Flyvbjerg (2006) goes on to say that well-executed case studies strengthen the social sciences because they provide depth, even if they do not encapsulate the breadth of bigger samples. Conversely, he declares, disciplines without a body of such case studies will be 'ineffective'. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007: 26) echo this when they say that

theory constructed on case studies will be ‘accurate, interesting, and testable’ since it is embedded in rich empirical data from which it develops constructs and testable propositions. Bryman (2012: 71) indicates that case studies can serve both purposes, theory generation as well as theory testing. As has been discussed, this study takes the former, exploratory approach.

Various typologies of case study research have been developed. At the broadest level, Yin (2009) conceives of four types of design for case studies on the basis of how many cases are considered and how many units of analysis there are in each case. Yin labels them ‘single-case (holistic) designs’, ‘single-case (embedded) designs’, ‘multiple-case (holistic) designs’ and ‘multiple-case (embedded) designs’. The single and multiple here refer to the number of cases considered, and the holistic-embedded distinction specifies whether or not there are multiple units of analysis per case.

In terms of Yin’s classification, this research project does not strictly follow any of these four designs. In one sense, the inner, nested case is equivalent to a single case considered holistically. Indeed, it was treated as such during this process. Yin would have called the outer case the context, but significant gaps in available data demanded that it be treated more like a case. This nesting, however, does not amount to the ‘embedding’ to which Yin refers. The two levels of the nested case study are not multiple units of one case, they are manifestly different cases and at different levels, though with multiple radial connections. Neither can this study’s design be described as one with multiple cases. Yin (2009) explains that multiple cases are chosen for ‘replication logic’ – their ability to either reveal results similar to previous data (‘literal replication’) or those that present a contrast, but for a predicted reason (‘theoretical replication’). It is evident that multiple cases primarily serve an explanatory or theory-testing purpose, which is not the thrust of this study.

Yin (2009) also provides five rationales for choosing single cases, which result in the following types of cases:

- The ‘critical’ case, suitable for testing the limits of theoretical propositions;
- The extreme’ or ‘rare’ case, which is deemed worthy because it is unique;

- The ‘representative or typical’ case (which Bryman (2012: 70) calls ‘exemplifying’);
- The ‘revelatory’ case that has previously been inaccessible; and,
- The longitudinal case, which is studied over time.

Rohlfing (2012) performs a more detailed analysis focused on causality and distinguishes between ‘distribution-based’ and ‘theory-based’ strategies used in selecting cases. In the former, cases are chosen for where they lie along a range of causes or outcomes, and in the latter, for their predicted potential for confirming or contradicting a theoretical proposition. According to Rohlfing, the distribution criterion leads to case types that can be labelled typical, diverse and deviant. Similarly, the categories that emerge from theory-based selection are the ‘most likely’, ‘least likely’, ‘failed most likely’ and ‘passed least likely’ types of cases (Rohlfing, 2012: 61–62). It should be noted that Rohlfing, and thus these classifications, focus largely on explanatory approaches.

In this study, the case study of paid news hews most closely to Yin’s classification of ‘extreme case’ and to aspects of Rohlfing’s ‘deviant case’. Here, paid news was the deviant case that illustrates widespread violation of acknowledged and proclaimed norms. It links to every aspect of the media system from regulatory powers to ownership patterns and corporate performance, and thus presents the opportunity to examine processes, relationships and forces instrumental in creating and sustaining a phenomenon that is deviant in normative terms, but mainstream in terms of its widespread adoption across Indian media and its linguistic subsystems.

### **3.3.1 Documents and interviews as sources of data**

The two cases had different needs, so they were approached differently, and distinct strategies of data collection and analysis were deployed. In the outer case, the mapping exercise aimed to construct a more comprehensive map than hitherto available. The attempt was to define the contours of the national media system while simultaneously identifying contextual factors most relevant to the phenomenon of paid news.

The data collection for the outer case study adopted a wide-angle approach, collating, cross-referencing and pursuing leads from an extensive range of sources, of which the most manageable was academic literature. The data analysed originated largely in documentary sources, primary as well as secondary. Interviews conducted for the inner case also provided invaluable pointers. A wide-ranging search netted large amounts of information, some of which was not directly relevant to the inquiry at hand and was thus set aside. A mountain of data remained, demanding protracted and arduous analysis, but ultimately producing a coherent map rich in perspective. The sources that informed the mapping exercise included:

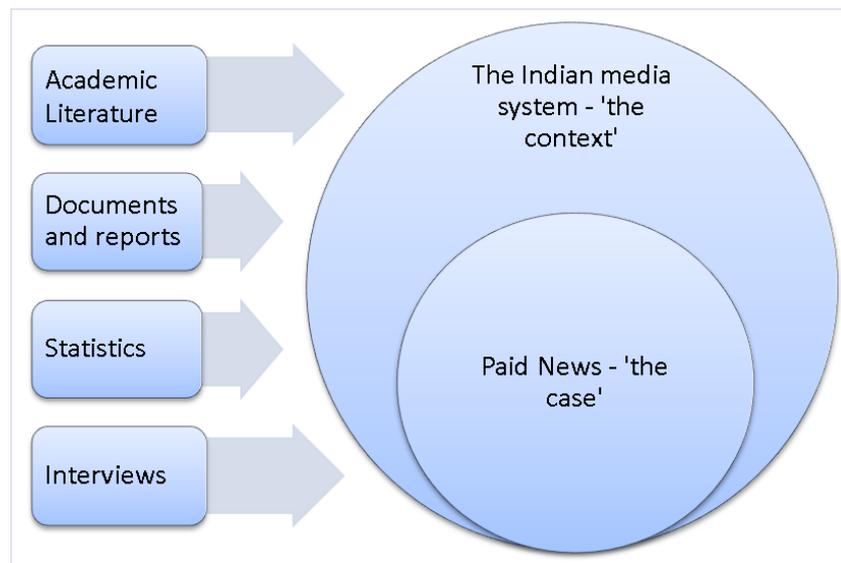
- Government bodies such as the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and organisations operating under its umbrella;
- Parliamentary Committees;
- Autonomous and regulatory bodies including Press Council of India, Advertising Standards Council of India, Election Commission of India, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, and Securities and Exchange Board of India;
- Media industry associations such as Editors Guild of India and Indian Broadcasting Foundation;
- Self-regulatory bodies such as News Broadcasters Association and Broadcasting Content Complaints Council;
- Industry publications and newsletters, sector analysts, professional bodies, annual reports and websites of media companies;
- Macroeconomic data from the Indian government and international/ UN bodies;
- Census data;
- News reports and analyses; and
- Other documents and reports.

This gave the project its breadth.

The inner case study provided depth. The data here was obtained largely from semi-structured interviews with key individuals who possessed first-hand knowledge and expert insider perspectives on the phenomenon. The interviews and their analysis were informed by data and wider perspectives from the outer case study. Similarly,

interviews from the inner case study cross-fertilised the collection and analysis of the outer case. Thus, though the two cases employed different primary methods, they both used multiple sources of data. This made triangulation a central feature of the nested case study.

**Figure 3.1: The nested case study design and sources of data**



### 3.3.2 Triangulation as a feature of the design

Many discussions of triangulation emphasise deploying two different methods for cross-validation and corroboration, and often focus on mixed methods approaches combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Others, such as Bryman, recognise that triangulation can be performed using different types of data, describing triangulation as ‘using more than one method or source of data’ (Bryman, 2012: 392). Yin (2009) expands the discussion to four types of triangulation: data triangulation; investigator triangulation (comparing the results of different researchers); theory triangulation (different theoretical perspectives); and methodological triangulation.

The nested case study in this project utilised data triangulation extensively, bringing qualitative data from in-depth interviews together with quantitative data and statistics. This not only addressed issues of validity, it created a more complete picture of the phenomenon, its context, and linkages between the two. To provide an example, an

early interview yielded a perspective that claimed a causal relationship between the global economic downturn of 2008 and the proliferation of the practice of paid news. This provided the impetus for an examination of financial data. Several years' of annual financial reports of large media companies were analysed, and profitability was plotted as graphs – Figures 4.28, 4.29 and 4.30, presented in Chapter 4.5.1. This visualisation of balance-sheet data generated valuable insights, added a dimension and enhanced understanding. Quantitative and qualitative data fed into each other numerous times in this manner. Flyvbjerg (2006: 242) says that 'good social science is problem driven and not methodology driven in the sense that it employs those methods that, for a given problematic, best help answer the research questions at hand'. Here, part of the problem was the paucity of data, and what began as a strategy to fill gaps ended up sharpening focus, identifying productive avenues, adding depth and creating meaningful convergence of the inner and outer cases.

Baxter and Jack (2008: 544–545) argue that the use of varied sources of data is inherent in qualitative case studies, and this 'ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood'. Jick (1979: 609) also singles out the role of qualitative methods in triangulation: 'The researcher is likely to sustain a profitable closeness to the situation which allows greater sensitivity to the multiple sources of data'. Triangulation has several advantages, including enhanced accuracy and confidence in results; the ability to uncover deviant dimensions; theory testing, creation or synthesis; and stimulating the creation of inventive methods (Jick, 1979: 608–609). Several of these benefits made their presence felt during this study. To use the words of Bryman (2012: 633–635), qualitative and quantitative data taken in conjunction yielded context, confirmation, discovery, completeness, explanation and credibility.

### **3.4 INTERVIEWS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

Interviews presented themselves as the logical choice for exploring paid news, both at the intuitive level and upon later, deeper, consideration of the availability of data.

When this research project was first conceived, the existence of the practice of paid news had been revealed by the media, and its ethics strenuously questioned, but it had not yet been documented or analysed in any detail. Early explorations of available information demonstrated that little additional information had become available, or was becoming available, after the initial revelations of its existence. Accusations were made, fingers were pointed, and some energy was focused on identifying the villains of the piece, but little proof or additional detail had emerged. The first inquiry into the phenomenon documented cases of paid news (Press Council of India, 2010b), but made little progress in identifying or bringing to book culpable individuals. One reason was that the subcommittee of the Press Council of India adopted a journalistic approach and did not have the power to go beyond collecting data. Another reason rapidly became obvious – those who were active participants in promoting or adopting paid news had adopted a defensive posture and closed ranks. Those at the heart of the practice were not likely to render themselves vulnerable by talking about it; indeed, they actively sought to suppress information. The nature of the phenomenon was that transactions had taken place in unaccountable cash and deals were made verbally, so it was also apparent that no documentary proof was likely to emerge. As a target of investigative journalism, the story had run into a wall of silence and had run its course.

Yet, many of those who worked in the media had observed it happening around them and knew a lot about it, probably more than they individually recognised. Friends and professional contacts of this researcher had seen it developing within their organisations and were cognisant of its processes and manifestations. However, in conversation, it was difficult to get beyond standard platitudes of distancing or abhorrence. Substantial information about paid news was within reach, but it had to be extracted through processes more structured and situations more formal than friendly conversation. In the absence of documentary evidence, amalgamating multiple perspectives from multiple individual witnesses became the route to a more complete picture.

The chosen method of primary research – interviewing – was both the logical choice and also eminently feasible. It was logical because that was the most direct route to obtaining perspectives from within the media to establish the trends, influences and forces that shaped events. It was feasible because of this researcher's familiarity with

the Indian media system. Though this researcher's career as a mainstream journalist morphed into that of an independent documentary filmmaker approximately 15 years before the beginning of this research, a network of potentially useful contacts in mainstream media existed. A few friends and some acquaintances in key positions in the media served as an ideal entry point to a wider pool of possible respondents. Extensive experience of conducting interviews as a journalist and filmmaker also meant that conducting research interviews would not present major obstacles.

At the theoretical level, this research project is about the Indian media system. The objective of interviews was to gain an understanding of its behaviour by studying a particular system-wide phenomenon. This dictated that the interviews should be focused, in-depth and semi-structured. The desired data spanned a number of areas: key processes and landmarks in the development of paid news; the forces and considerations that enabled, guided, restricted or otherwise affected its development; the actions and attitudes of key individuals and organisations; and relevant contextual factors. The interviews were thus focused on a particular phenomenon, but simultaneously in-depth and wide-ranging within it.

### **3.4.1 Focused, in-depth, semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are usually defined in opposition to structured interviews. Structured interviews are in effect questionnaires to be administered face-to-face or in an alternative interview setting. They are designed to eliminate any flexibility or deviation from the script on the part of the interviewer to eliminate researcher bias. For instance, they usually demand that the list of questions contained in the interview schedule be asked in the same order and with the same words. Fontana and Frey (2005: 72) liken structured interviews to a 'theatrical script to be followed in a standardized and straightforward manner'.

Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, allow the researcher to 'make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee' (Brinkmann, 2014: 286). Such interviews are also often described as qualitative interviews in

literature, for they are ‘probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research’ (Bryman, 2012:469). Tracy (2013: 132) says that qualitative interviews ‘provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and oftentimes energizing’.

Weiss links qualitative interviews to the research design and the research objectives:

Interviews that sacrifice uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development of information are properly called qualitative interviews, and a study based on such interviews, a qualitative interview study. Because each respondent is expected to provide a great deal of information, the qualitative interview study is likely to rely on a sample very much smaller than the samples interviewed by a reasonably ambitious survey study. And because the fuller responses obtained by the qualitative study cannot be easily categorized, their analysis will rely less on counting and correlating and more on interpretation, summary, and integration. The findings of the qualitative study will be supported more by quotations and case descriptions than by tables or statistical measures.

(Weiss, 1994: 10–11)

In this study, the choice of semi-structured interviews arose organically from the research design and the nature of the inquiry. The inquiry sought to trace the process of the emergence of paid news as a means of identifying the forces that were instrumental in the process. Existing accounts of paid news and years of personal experience of the Indian media system provided strong indications of instrumental reasons and processes, but these were by no means either definite or definitive. Semi-structured interviews were a natural choice for the exploratory nature of the inquiry. Brinkmann defines a semi-structured interview as ‘an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena’ (2013:21). This fits the research design for this project well, as does Bryman’s association of semi-structured interviews with an inductive approach:

‘[...] semi-structured interviews are used so that the researcher can keep more of an open mind about the contours of what he or she needs to know about, so that concepts and theories can emerge out of the data. This is the inductive approach to theorizing and conceptualization.’

(Bryman, 2012: 12)

Thus, semi-structured interviews permitted adequate follow-up of the leads and explanations proffered by the respondents. If one were to use the vocabulary of journalism, one could say that the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions were clearly an important element of the mix. These open questions were expected to yield unanticipated responses, which would necessarily have to be followed up. This following of leads or search for detail was an important characteristic of the research interviews in this project.

Ironically, answers to the less complex closed questions – the ‘who’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ – proved to be more elusive. From the pre-interview stage it became apparent that respondents were unable or, in some cases, reluctant to provide concrete facts such as names, dates and amounts. Their inability was understandable – only the central actors knew the exact details. As research progressed, some conclusions could also be drawn about their reluctance – the considered surmise is that they were hesitant to specifically incriminate friends, contacts or their own organisations, especially without documentary evidence of wrongdoing. At the same time, it must be said that the interview respondents overwhelmingly came across as open and honest in their responses.

Denzil and Lincoln say the interview is a ‘conversation, the art of asking questions and listening’ and that semi-structured interviews produce ‘situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes’ (Denzil and Lincoln, 1998: 36). Tracy adds:

‘The less structured the interview, the more skill, expertise, and knowledge are required of the interviewer. To be able to probe effectively, the interviewer must understand the research goals and know the relevant literature. In order to pick up on emotional cues, the interviewer must have skills in empathy and relating. These skills require more training than a quick overview of an interview script, and therefore unstructured interviews are inappropriate if you must rely on research assistants new to qualitative methods.’

(Tracy, 2013: 140)

Weiss also states that interviewing requires specific skills:

‘The style of the qualitative interview may appear conversational, but what happens in the interview is very different from what happens in an ordinary

conversation. In an ordinary conversation each participant voices observations, thoughts, feelings. Either participant can set a new topic, either can ask questions. In the qualitative interview the respondent provides information while the interviewer, as a representative of the study, is responsible for directing the respondent to the topics that matter to the study.'

(Weiss, 1994: 16)

The strengths of interviews as a method of data collection have been listed variously in literature, and most of those perspectives were immediately identifiable as applicable to the interview data collected for this research. Lynch (2013: 36) points out that the 'overt content' of interviews is ideal for analysing 'recurrent themes, issues and relationships', which was certainly the case here. Yin (2009: Chapter 4) mentions the abilities to focus directly on the case study topic, and to be insightful by providing causal inferences and explanations. Mosley (2013: 6–7) says that interviews can 'yield a range of observable implications', including information about actions and attitudes. Martin (2013:113) emphasises their utility in process tracing to obtain information about the unfolding of events and Lynch adds that interview data has particular strengths often missing in other types of data:

Well conducted interviews give access to information about respondents' experiences and motivations that may not be available in the public or documentary record; they allow us to understand opinions and thought processes with a granularity that surveys rarely achieve; and they can add microfoundations to events or patterns observed at the macro level.

(Lynch, 2013: 37)

According to Weiss (1994: 17–19), qualitative interviews such as semi-structured interviews can fulfil a range of research objectives, including developing detailed descriptions; integrating multiple perspectives; describing process; developing holistic description; learning how events are interpreted; bridging intersubjectivities; identifying variables; and framing hypotheses for quantitative research. Creswell (2014: 191) adds that participants can provide historical information and the method allows the researcher a measure of control over the line of questioning.

Several limitations are also recognised and acknowledged in literature, among them the objectivity or reliability of data, the time and resources demanded, and problems with generalisation (Lynch, 2013: 37). Lynch suggests that interview data should be supplemented with other forms of data to make arguments and test hypotheses, and this was adopted as a central part of the iterative research strategy employed here, for instance through the use of statistics and other secondary data.

The limitations of interviews identified by Yin (2009) are: bias resulting from poorly articulated questions; response bias; inaccuracies due to poor recall; and reflexivity (respondents providing answers that they believe the interviewer wants to hear). The first of these was mitigated through extensive research and preparation for the interviews, including a close reading of available reports, analyses and documents, as well as the cumulative knowledge from preceding interviews. This preparation also helped to counteract the second factor of response bias by facilitating the formulation of relevant follow-up questions as appropriate. The third factor was sought to be compensated by expanding the sample to achieve a comprehensive view of the case study from different perspectives and viewpoints. As for the fourth, there was no occasion to believe that respondents were providing answers that did not reflect their own beliefs, opinions and perspectives.

Creswell (2014: 191) also lists a set of disadvantages of the interview method, including that they provide indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewee, they provide information in a designated place rather than the natural field setting, that the researcher's presence may bias responses, and that not all people are equally articulate and perceptive. All of these limitations are acknowledged in this research project. Some of them were accounted for relatively easily others were accepted as a natural corollary of the methods used.

A significant element of the research design was the extent and composition of the sample. One perspective is that one should focus on those that are likely to be the most productive:

When constructing a case study to investigate causality in a particular case, one looks for the smoking gun: one cares less about getting a representative

sample of the individuals who may have been affected by an event than about identifying the individuals or institutions responsible for causing the particular action. When one engages in process tracing to get information about how events unfold – how a specific bill becomes a law – one speaks with the relevant actors (in this case, lawmakers, lobbyists, or congressional aides), and sampling is less important.

(Martin, 2013: 113)

In this case, it must be admitted that the search for Martin's 'smoking gun' required strenuous effort. As noted earlier, those thought to be core movers and participants in the practice of paid news were reticent. Several individuals and media organisations who were approached because they had been implicated in media reports, or were otherwise thought to be complicit, did not accede to interview requests.

In terms of the taxonomy normally applied to sampling (see, for example, Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2009; and Teddlie and Yu, 2007), this research employed purposive sampling. Many of these definitions are detailed and classified into several types and sub-types – Teddlie and Yu (2007: 81), for instance, list 15 separate purposive sampling strategies classified into four distinct categories. However, for the purposes of this research, the formulation that fits best is the broad definition of Lynch (2013: 41), who describes purposive sampling as 'a form of non-random sampling that involves selecting elements of a population according to specific characteristics deemed relevant to the analysis'.

### **3.4.2 Choice of interview respondents**

Just as data was assembled from a wide range of documentary sources in the case of the outer case study, a broad array of respondents was interviewed for the inner case study. It was considered important to gather data from a number of different groups of respondents who were familiar with paid news and the working of the media from their unique points of view. These groups included those within the media in senior editorial and management positions, the heads of regulatory bodies, and keen observers of the media such as former journalists, heads of journalism schools, commentators and public intellectuals. The final list of respondents included the following categories:

- Nine television journalists and newsroom heads, including the editor-in-chief of a prominent group of news channels, the editorial director of another group of news channels, a managing editor, India's best-known current affairs interviewer and three senior editors;
- Fourteen newspaper editors and journalists, including four current or former editors of large national newspapers, the editor-in-chief of a national wire agency, and several other senior journalists in positions of responsibility;
- Two owner-editors of major newspapers, including the chief executive officer (CEO) and editor of India's largest newspaper group and the publisher of a respected regional group of newspapers and magazines;
- Two journalists who have moved to PR or have become publishers, including one of India's top PR professionals and the editor-publisher of a respected magazine;
- Four senior managers of news organisations, including the executive vice-president of a respected group of news channels and the CEO of another;
- Three officials and policy makers, including senior officials from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India;
- Four officials and members of the Press Council of India, including its chair, the author of the first report into paid news, and a member who went on to be the minister for information and broadcasting;
- Four officials from the Election Commission of India, including its chief election commissioner, a former chief election commissioner, its director-general and the chief electoral officer of a major state;
- Three heads of major journalism schools; and
- Two public intellectuals, a political psychologist and a sociologist who is a member of news television's self-regulatory body.

Several of the individuals mentioned above head, or have headed, journalists' or editors' associations and self-regulatory bodies; others have held other public positions such as ambassadors or press and communications advisors to the prime minister. Most of them have also held multiple senior roles in different news organisations. In addition, some of the heads of journalism schools have been senior journalists or heads of news

channels in the past. The respondents are eminently qualified to provide information about the inner workings of the Indian media system, to defend and explain it, and, where necessary, to pass judgement on it. Their interviews represent personal perspectives, but collectively they are the institutional memory of the Indian media system.

An interview log is provided in Appendix 1. It sets out the complete list of interview respondents, their designations and details of the interviews such as the date, location, mode of conducting the interview, length of the interview in minutes and any noteworthy remarks.

Respondents were usually approached over email or telephone to request an interview and were simultaneously informed of the subject and nature of the research. A total of 47 individuals were interviewed across all the categories mentioned above. Friends and personal or professional contacts of various levels of acquaintance accounted for approximately one-third of the respondents. These include four friends, those relevant to the case study with whom a fairly close social relationship existed; eight personal acquaintances, which includes former colleagues of the researcher or his spouse and friends of friends; and five professional contacts, those the researcher had previously met for professional reasons a handful of times. The other interview respondents were chosen for their relevance to the research and usually approached directly.

It was recognised that interviewing friends and personal acquaintances could present question about validity and reliability. These concerns were sought to be mitigated through a number of steps aimed at setting a professional tone during the interview. A conscious decision was taken to avoid interviewing friends and contacts in social settings; in almost all cases the interviews were conducted at the work place of the respondents. It was helpful that all of the respondents were well versed with the conduct of interviews either as interviewers or interviewees, often both. There was thus no awkwardness in switching from a friendly tone before the interview to a professional tone during the interview, even with friends. The equipment used for the interviews – a professional stereophonic audio recorder and a set of professional microphones – also helped in this regard. The setting up of the equipment and preliminaries such as testing of audio recording levels served to clearly signal a professional encounter.

Consent was obtained from all interview respondents. A clear explanation was provided of the status of the researcher, the nature and focus of this doctoral research and consent was obtained for the use of the product of the interview for academic analysis and publication. An audio recording of the process of obtaining consent exists for most interviews. Most respondents were comfortable with their views being attributed to them, but two respondents requested that they not be named in the research outputs; they are referred to as Respondent A and Respondent B. The names and designations of the other 45 are provided in Appendix 1.

In some cases, names were suggested by previous respondents in what is termed snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012: 424). In at least eight cases, interviews with respondents considered important were obtained only because a friend or a contact put in a word, but some of these interviews did not yield the information that was expected. In one such example, this researcher was referred to a respondent who was said to have participated in their organisation's sale of news space, but this interview was among the least productive. It took repeated telephone calls for the respondent to agree to be interviewed, and during the interview, the respondent was very wary that he was being subjected to a 'sting operation' for use in the media rather than for academic purposes.

Some other interviews were not very fruitful because they pursued an angle that was not eventually included in this dissertation. One such interview was with the former Chief Election Commissioner of India, T.N. Seshan, which was undertaken in pursuit of additional viewpoints in what Bryman calls a 'sequential approach' to sampling (2012: 418). This researcher travelled more than 1,000 miles to interview Seshan because the emergence of paid news is linked with strict controls on election spending, and he had begun strictly enforcing limits on election spending in the 1990s. He is known for his intellectual acuity and was also once a candidate to be President of India and it was hoped that he would provide insights about longer-term processes related to paid news during election time, but this did not prove to be the case.

Several potential respondents who were approached either refused to be interviewed, stalled indefinitely, or just did not respond to interview requests. They included politicians, senior professional editors with substantial financial interests in their organisations, and media managers, including those working in organisations expressly

identified as being implicated in the practice of paid news. It is assumed that many of them were actively unwilling to talk about the subject, but others probably merely saw no reason to make time for an interview.

Nevertheless, except for the absence of those directly implicated in the practice of paid news, there is a high level of confidence that the strategy adopted has resulted in data that adequately covers the topic at hand. This assertion of reaching saturation is made on the basis that within each category of respondents, it was apparent that no new themes were emerging and no new leads were being offered. There was ample confirmation of information and perspectives from multiple respondents – there is scarcely any aspect covered by less than half a dozen respondents.

### **3.4.3 Conducting the interviews**

The interviews were conducted in person, except for three conducted over Skype and one over the telephone. All interviews, including the two with respondents who requested anonymity, and those conducted over Skype or telephone, were recorded, usually on a professional quality audio recorder with stereophonic microphone and often using lavalier microphones. The interviews yielded a total of 2005 minutes of audio recording. The average length of recorded interviews was 42 minutes 45 seconds. In two cases there was a recording failure for part of the interview, caused by the researcher inadvertently neglecting to press the record button after testing audio levels at the beginning of the interview or after replacing the recorder's batteries during it. The only explanation that can be provided is a certain level of distraction while being absorbed in the interview or pre-interview conversation. Only the recorded portion of the two partial recordings has been considered in this dissertation. The rest of the recordings were complete and, in most cases, of good quality. If the two incomplete recordings are excluded, the average length of recording was just short of 44 minutes. The shortest complete interview was 20 minutes in length and the longest was 83 minutes.

Most of the interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, covering a range of issues. In some cases, the interviews ranged far wider than paid news, which means that

not all of the 2005 minutes of recording relate to the inner case study. Some time was inevitably spent on wider issues that did not relate directly to paid news but informed the outer case study. In some cases, other research angles were also explored, not all of them productively.

A keenly appreciated advantage of semi-structured interviews was the flexibility that permitted improvisation in response to the particular circumstances of each interview. The topics covered were substantively similar, but it was, for instance, possible to vary the opening and overall direction of each interview according to the respondent's relationship to the topic. Examples of the first question posed to different respondents at the beginning of the interview are provided below to illustrate how this flexibility was put into practice:

- An early interview with an owner-editor of a newspaper in Bengaluru (earlier Bangalore):  
Mr. Shanth Kumar, [after preamble establishing a definition of paid news], have you come across the practice of paid news in Karnataka as well?
- To the author of the report on paid news on behalf of the Press Council of India:  
Paranjoy, you looked into the issue of paid news. Let us begin at the beginning. Did politicians buy the news space?
- To the President of the Editors Guild of India:  
Rajdeep, how has the Editors Guild dealt with the issue of paid news?
- To the former Chief Election Commissioner of India, who was central to raising concerns about paid news and a focal point of the response to the phenomenon:  
Dr. Quraishi, among all the important tasks that you took up as Chief Election Commissioner during elections, how do you rate the importance of the issue of paid news?
- To the Chairman of the Press Council of India:  
Justice Katju, what has happened to media ethics in India?

Similar flexibility was a prominent feature throughout the body of each interview. The large number of interview respondents was instrumental in enabling each interview to

develop according to its own conversational logic within the framework of the topic, which is also perhaps reflected in the length of the interviews. The differentiated profiles of the respondents meant that it was neither feasible nor advisable to adhere to a strict schedule of questions. It was more appropriate to use a looser interview guide, described by Bryman (2012: 472) as ‘a brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered’. This researcher’s background as a journalist and filmmaker ensured a high level of comfort with the process of interviewing and a confidence that no critical elements would be overlooked or forgotten. It thus became possible to cover areas relevant to each respondent’s profile and to approach issues from their perspective as well as to tailor each interview according to the existing or developing relationship with the respondent. Flexibility was also useful when following up points of interest as they emerged, seeking further detail, challenging assertions or adjusting emphasis.

Overall, the composition and size of the sample, the flexibility afforded by semi-structured interviews, a level of comfort with interviewing, and background knowledge of the Indian media system ensured that the interviews yielded a rich set of data for analysis.

#### **3.4.4 Thematic analysis of interview data**

Data collected through interviews was categorised and systematically analysed using thematic analysis. The principles and procedures of thematic analysis served as an ideal foundation for cataloguing the data and the subsequent extraction of meaning because they permitted a degree of flexibility that suited the exploratory nature of the inquiry and, at the same time, matched the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews.

Maxwell and Miller (2008: 466) describe thematic analysis as a ‘categorizing strategy’. Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015: 95) term it ‘a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterned meanings of “themes” in qualitative data’. They also maintain that its status as a ‘method rather than a methodology’ renders it uniquely flexible:

Most other approaches to qualitative analysis *are* methodologies – they provide a theoretically informed framework for collecting *and* analysing qualitative data. TA [Thematic Analysis], by contrast, only specifies

analytical procedures, centred on coding and theme development. This means that it can be used to address most types of qualitative research questions [...]; analyse most types of qualitative data (from qualitative interviews to secondary sources); analyse data generated by both homogenous and heterogeneous data sets [...]; and analyse both smaller and larger data sets.

(Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2015: 96–97; emphasis in original)

Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015: 95–96) link the emergence of thematic analysis to attempts in the 1960s and 1970s to formalise analytical methods for qualitative research. Over the decades, the term has appeared in a number of avatars and is used to refer to dissimilar approaches ranging from something akin to quantitative content analysis to the interpretative analysis of interview data. It was not until the 1990s that procedures for thematic analysis began to be discussed and formalised, they say.

Bryman (2012: 580) similarly asserts that, despite its popularity in the analysis of qualitative data, thematic analysis is ‘a remarkably underdeveloped procedure, in that there are few specifications of its steps or ingredients’. He goes on to specify that a theme is a category that is identified by the analyst; builds upon coding of the data; and is related to the research focus. This is similar to the concept of ‘categories’ used by Gillham (2000). Themes, according to Bryman, should provide the basis for theoretical understanding of the data that is being analysed for the purposes of making a contribution to knowledge. Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015) link themes to ‘clusters of codes’ and ‘patterned meaning’, and specify that themes should be coherent, consistent and distinctive. The ideal number of themes to work with is two to six, they say, though themes can have sub-themes.

Ryan and Bernard recognise the abstract and fuzzy nature of themes. Drawing upon their understanding that themes ‘come in all shapes and sizes’, they suggest a simple test for recognising themes: ‘You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, What is this expression an example of?’ (Ryan and Bernard, 2003: 87–88). Themes can be discovered in many different ways, they say, and recommend looking for the following when searching for a theme: repetitions; indigenous typologies or categories; metaphors and analogies; transitions; similarities and differences; linguistic connectors; missing data; and theory-related material (Ryan and Bernard, 2003: 88–94).

During the course of this research, the two recommendations from Ryan and Bernard that proved most useful were: repetition, and similarities and differences. Of these two, the former was more prominent than the latter, and this was rooted in the fact that the questions posed to respondents were located within a very specific context. According to Maxwell and Miller (2008), thematic analysis conducted within a case study has the added benefit of being located within a specific context, and this helps ensure that contextual relationships act as a guiding framework to ensure the coherence of the analysis.

Maxwell and Miller specify that although themes arise from a process of classification and categorisation, they are at least one level removed from the primary codes applied to data:

The theme *itself* often has an internal connected structure: a relationship between two concepts or actions, a proposition or belief, a narrative or argument, or other, more complex sets of relations. However, its identification and establishment *as* a theme – showing that it is more than an idiosyncratic occurrence – is inherently a categorizing process.

Also, as is the case for linking categories, the relationships among the components of a theme are *generic* relationships, not ones between actual data.

(Maxwell and Miller, 2008: 466–467; emphasis in original)

Attride-Stirling conceptualises three levels of themes (2001: 388–389) – basic themes, which are ‘simple premises characteristic of the data’; organising themes, which are middle-order themes derived by organising basic themes into ‘clusters of signification’; and global themes, which are macro themes that group together sets of middle-order themes that ‘encompass the principal metaphors in the data as a whole’ and present an argument.

Though this differs in detail from others’ characterisations of thematic analysis, the underlying principle is similar to those other descriptions – thematic analysis is based upon an initial coding of data, but the analysis does not end at that level; it is extended through further levels of clustering and categorising to facilitate the emergence of what Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015) call ‘patterned meaning’.

The first step in undertaking a thematic analysis of the interviews was to comprehensively code all interview data. For this purpose, the complete recordings of all the interviews were first transcribed. The recordings, totalling more than 33 hours, yielded several hundred pages of transcripts. These were then coded inductively, that is, relevant sections of interview transcripts were assigned labels that described their content. The codes thus assigned performed the function of describing and categorising specific factors, concepts, events, processes or linkages identified by interview respondents.

Coding receives a lot of attention in grounded theory, and these perspectives served as a valuable guide. Charmaz (2006: 3) says coding not only distils data, it is the basis for comparing different sets of data: 'Your codes show how you select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them.' During the analytical phase of this research, in keeping with the recommendations of Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015), efforts were made to ensure that the codes were thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) distinguish between three types of coding – open, axial and selective. However, in later editions of their book (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 198), they concede that open coding (delineating concepts) and axial coding (relating concepts to categories or broader concepts) go hand in hand and are in fact two parts of a unified iterative process. Charmaz (2006) distinguishes between only two types of coding – initial, and focused or selective. These categories fairly accurately describe the process of coding during this research project. The initial coding was detailed and comprehensive, sometimes even resulting in two codes referring to different aspects of a single sentence. However, as the ascription of codes to segments of data progressed, patterns began to emerge and coding became more selective. Interview transcripts coded earlier in the analytical process have a larger number of codes assigned to data. Interviews coded later in the process have fewer codes assigned to data in numerical terms. Some of the initial codes were dropped, while others gained prominence by appearing more often, revealing more about the data, or by bearing greater significance in relation to the research questions. Different types of codes emerged from the initial broad approach. They described topics, concepts, linkages and situational logics.

The initial coding of the data resolved itself into themes in a relatively painless manner, though the process did demand some iteration as well as refinement or rearrangement. This can be attributed to the fact that, though sometimes lengthy, the interviews were focused on exploring a variety of different aspects of the case studies.

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006: 9) suggest a six-stage analytical procedure for thematic analysis: 1) Developing the code manual; 2) Testing the reliability of the code; 3) Summarising data and identifying initial themes; 4) Applying template of codes and additional coding; 5) Connecting the codes and identifying themes; and 6) Corroborating and legitimating coded themes. Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015: 100–107) set out a different six-phase procedure: 1) Familiarisation with the data; 2) Coding the data; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; and 6) Producing the report.

Both of these describe a similar process, of course with different points of emphasis. The analytical process in this research project approximated both of these with some minor variations. It was found that when thematic analysis is conducted in practice, the procedure is not a set of discrete sequential steps. Instead, as indicated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), it is an integrated process with an in-built iterative mechanism that revisits steps out of order and sometimes even muddles the boundaries between them while engaged in establishing the emerging patterns of meaning.

In this research project, the themes emerged through a three-step process of 1) coding, 2) categorisation, and 3) identifying the themes. The first step was to code the interview data. The interviews were reviewed and coded on hard-copy printouts of the complete transcripts of the interviews. The coding at this stage was open in nature. The codes assigned to data segments were short, succinct labels designed to capture ‘a key analytical idea in the data and convey this to the researcher’ (Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2015: 100). As suggested by them (2015: 101), the effort was to encapsulate the focus of the data segment as well as, where appropriate, the respondent’s position on it. The initial codes were deliberately kept descriptive rather than interpretative – they summarised what the respondent stated in that segment of the interview rather than representing any analytical insight originating with the researcher.

The process of coding resulted in a vast dataset of 1,152 codes that were assigned to the 47 interviews, averaging about two dozen codes per interview. Inevitably, some interviews were more productive than others. The highest number of codes assigned to an interview was 55; there were six others with 40–49 codes. The lowest number of codes assigned to a complete interview was 14, while one incomplete interview during which there had been a recording failure yielded only six codes.

Each code represents a single thought, argument or opinion expressed by the respondent. The assigned codes variously refer to a part of a sentence, a complete sentence or a group of sentences that convey a specific point. Collectively, the codes represent all data points thought to be of relevance to the current research project, including many that may not have been used in these chapters. A sample of a productive coded interview is provided in Appendix 2.

The second step in the thematic analysis was to organise the codes into categories, akin to what Attride-Stirling (2001: 388–389) have called ‘middle-order themes’ representing ‘clusters of signification’. The process of categorisation was axial, requiring the researcher to constantly refer back, reconsider and reclassify. The intention was to organise the data conceptually and facilitate the reading of patterns and meaning so that it could be represented in a structured manner in the findings chapters that follow this chapter. The transcript of the coded interview in Appendix 2 also sets out the categories to which individual open codes were assigned.

The volume of data – more than 2,000 minutes of recorded interviews – resulted in a lengthy list of categories that grouped together related descriptions, arguments and opinion provided by respondents relevant to this inquiry. Categories were assigned after the codes were transferred from hard copy transcripts onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. A spreadsheet was chosen because the format renders data amenable to relatively easy categorisation, searching, sorting and filtering according to various criteria and keywords.

The third and final step in the thematic analysis was to further refine the list of categories into broad themes that could guide the presentation of findings. Appendix 3 lists the 37 categories that emerged from the organisation of the initial codes into

Attride-Sterling's 'clusters of signification' (2001). It also shows how they were further classified into themes. The final list of five themes that emerged from the three-step thematic analysis is:

- 1 Growth of the media;
- 2 Competition and business models;
- 3 The emergence and practices of paid news;
- 4 Regulation and external influences; and
- 5 Pressures on journalism and journalists.

The themes are varied in their nature and focus as well as in the level within the media system that they examine. The first theme is largely contextual, it covers developments at the system level as well as the forces and influences that drive them. The second theme describes processes, relationships and forces that are operational at the level of media organisations; in one sense it represents how system-level developments manifest themselves at the organisational level. The third theme covers paid news. It combines descriptive and analytical elements, for it includes details of the emergence of paid news, how it is conducted, precursor trends and underlying forces and factors. The fourth theme – regulation and external influences – encompasses a range of factors and issues related to the profession of journalism relevant to paid news. This theme includes the description and analysis of behaviour, attitudes and practices at various levels from the system down to the individual level. The last theme – pressures on journalism and journalists – focuses largely on the newsroom and individual levels.

The next two chapters elaborate upon these five themes. Broadly speaking, Chapter 4, which largely deals with the outer case study and the Indian media system, covers the first two themes listed above. The other three themes inform Chapter 5, which presents and discusses the research findings related to the inner case study, paid news.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has considered the theoretical basis, context, rationale and implementation of the research design. The aim of the research design was to gather and analyse

empirical data in a manner that would yield answers to the research questions. In essence, the research design aimed to study the Indian media system and the phenomenon of paid news in a manner that could contribute to the study of media systems.

The methods of data collection were determined by the exploratory nature of the study, the need for qualitative data and the lack of comprehensive data on the contours of the Indian media system. A nested case study design was adopted, with the outer case study mapping the Indian media system on the basis of a large selection of documents, reports and statistical data. The inner case study examined the phenomenon of paid news in detail, based largely on focused, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of different categories of relevant respondents. There was substantial cross-fertilisation of the two levels of the nested case study. Interview data suggested important focal points for the mapping exercise and, similarly, data from documents and statistics enriched the interviews by indicating specific questions and follow-up questions. This iterative research process combined data from multiple sources and enabled a robust analysis by facilitating the pursuit of significant avenues of inquiry as well as the triangulation of findings.

In effect, this study exemplified what Creswell (2014) calls ‘emergent design’:

The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data. For example, the questions may change, the forms of data collection may shift, and the individuals studied and the sites visited may be modified. The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information.

(Creswell, 2014: 186)

It was apparent from the beginning of this study that there were numerous potential pitfalls, rooted both in the topic of inquiry and its context. The case study presented the problems of paucity of system-wide data and the clandestine nature of the forces and processes implicated in paid news.

Bryman (2012: 405–406) points out that qualitative research is subject to criticism for being too subjective and difficult to replicate, its lack of transparency, and for presenting problems relating to the generalisation of results. Though access to data and interviews was a problem, it is felt that subjectivity was not. This project recognises the researcher's status as one who has been part of Indian media system at various levels of interaction, and one who is concerned about the practices of paid news. This served as a positive impetus to fairness and balance and to a continuous effort to take a strictly evidence-based approach and examine all data for its veracity. It is hoped that this will be apparent in subsequent chapters where data is analysed and presented. The other elements listed by Bryman are also addressed below.

Concerns about the quality of research designs are often expressed through the terms, validity and reliability. Validity is conceived as a combination of construct validity, internal validity and external validity. Yin (2009) defines construct validity as identifying appropriate 'operational measures for the concepts being studied'; internal validity as 'seeking to establish a causal relationship'; and external validity as 'defining the domain to which a study can be generalised'.

In this study, construct validity was addressed by carefully considering methods of data collection and choosing multiple sources of data in a manner that was suitable to the overarching aims of the study. The internal validity of the data collected through interviews was a recurrent concern. Deliberate deception, inadvertent errors and inaccurate recollection were all strong possibilities. Triangulation was an important element of managing this risk and allaying concerns in this regard. Equally important was the interviewer's long association with the Indian media system, which provided reassurance of the validity of the answers. There was no occasion to doubt the veracity of any of the answers in any of the interviews. In reality, interview responses led to data and documents that helped to verify the perspectives of respondents.

Mosley's description of the process of assuring validity fits this project very well indeed:

The researcher can guard against this threat to validity by considering a given interview in the context of other information – something that

becomes easier to do as the research project progresses. Researchers can use what they have learned in previous interviews to check the validity of future interviews. Indeed, one of the benefits of interviews is that the researcher is aware of the context in which they are conducted, and of how informants might attempt to frame their answers or evade certain questions. The interview can use this metadata to assess validity; one of the advantages of interview data is that the researcher usually has a sense of the internal consistency of the interviewees' answers, the biases revealed by the interviewee, and the points of hesitation during the interview. This is much more information than users of quantitative indicators, especially those from other sources, usually have.

(Mosley, 2013: 22)

With regard to external validity, the issue was whether the study of the Indian media system and paid news was relevant to the study of media systems in general.

Preliminary testing of the results of this research with theorists in personal discussions and during conferences has confirmed the belief that the research design and assumptions are appropriate and relevant. This has led to a level of confidence in the robustness and relevance of the map of Indian media that this study creates. The second aspect was the question of whether the study of paid news can reveal characteristics of the Indian media system in answer to the research questions. This is a basic assumption of this dissertation. It is asserted here that paid news is a systemic – if deviant – phenomenon by virtue of its institutionalisation, pervasiveness and persistence. Paid news is thus a prominent example of the behaviour of the Indian media system, capable of revealing important characteristics of the media system as a whole. No claim is made that the forces and processes at work in paid news represent the whole of the Indian media system, but there is no doubt that they represent significant elements of it. An affirmation is made in this dissertation that paid news does, indeed, reveal critical aspects of the Indian media system, and theorists' informal reviews of the results of this research have confirmed the validity of this affirmation.

The criterion of reliability, often also interpreted as replicability, was addressed by using official and authoritative sources of data, verifying data through continuous triangulation, maintaining detailed documentation of all interviews, including complete recordings and transcripts, and being transparent about the assumptions made in the research design and data analysis.

Bryman (2012: 390) argues that the criteria of validity and reliability apply largely to quantitative research, and suggests ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ as equivalent criteria applicable to qualitative studies. Bryman says that trustworthiness is a composite of credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (equivalent to external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (which parallels objectivity).

The second major category, authenticity, incorporates elements such as fairness, and ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity, according to Bryman (2012: 393). However, the definition of these terms makes it clear that they bear affinity to research approaches such as action research, which were not adopted here – catalytic authenticity, for instance, refers to whether the research has provided impetus to members to act to change their circumstances, while tactical authenticity seeks to assess whether the research has empowered members to engage in action. Thus, even as the four elements of trustworthiness are relevant here (and have been discussed as the elements of validity above), the criteria of authenticity – except for fairness – are not.

Yardley (2000: 219) contends that ‘traditional criteria for research quality are often inappropriate, and the ethos and plurality of many QMs [quantitative methodologies] is incompatible with fixed, universal procedures and standards’, and proposes an entirely different set of criteria to assess research quality. These are: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. These are considered relevant to this research project.

Sensitivity to context encompasses the sociocultural setting, participants’ perspectives, ethical issues and relevant theory. This researcher was acutely mindful of the context, having worked in the Indian media system, and this was responsible for a conscious attempt to respect participants’ perspectives and not impose any particular viewpoint. The other criteria were met similarly – the strong journalistic training of the researcher ensured commitment and rigour, transparency has been maintained, and robustness and rigour was facilitated by the researcher’s detailed knowledge of the workings of the Indian media system. In this manner, a strong element of reflexivity shaped the whole of the research process.

An important example of the efforts to maintain research quality was the decision to abstain from using latent content from interviews and analyse only the overt content available as audio recordings or transcripts. Lynch (2013: 35) describes latent content as ‘information we glean from an interview that is not directly articulated by the interviewee in response to our questions’. The examples provided include the length of time respondents take to answer a question, the connections they make in their answers, the things they omit and ‘even our own observations about the apparent truthfulness of respondents when answering particular questions’ (Lynch, 2013: 35). Here, keeping in mind the researcher’s personal views on the practice of paid news, no latent content was used in the analysis.

This chapter has presented a detailed account of the approaches, processes and considerations in the design and implementation of the research. As has been described, strenuous attempts were made to maintain a high quality of research, whether it is described as validity and reliability or trustworthiness, fairness, transparency or replicability. The findings from these endeavours are presented in subsequent chapters.

## 4. MAPPING THE INDIAN MEDIA SYSTEM<sup>2</sup>

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

To call India the Wild West of the media is to stretch the metaphor only a little, and that too mainly because the geographical indicator is not appropriate. For the most part, the metaphor applies. The Indian media, especially the news media, are characterised by rapid growth, high energy and a spirit of adventure. There are virgin lands still to be claimed and frontiers to be expanded, but, like in the Wild West, behind the romantic picture lies a reality that can be gritty and rough, reckless and just a little lawless.

In this, the first of two chapters that present and discuss the findings of this research project, the Indian media landscape is mapped. This chapter, which covers the outer case study described in Chapter 3, also provides the context for the inner case study to follow next in Chapter 5. It first establishes the dimensions of the growth of the Indian news media and the factors that continue to fuel it. Next, it looks beyond the growth of media sectors to the strong currents of competitive tension that drive the dynamics of individual news organisations. It charts in some detail how relationships in the media industry, competition and the quest for profitability in a crowded market have led to the emergence of a distinctly identifiable set of business models and business practices. No detailed description or analysis exists of the business context and institutional culture within which Indian journalism is practised. This chapter begins to fill that gap in knowledge by systematically mapping the contours of the Indian media and analysing how they influence the business environment and dominant business models.

The business practices and models described here are not static; they evolve rapidly and with a strong market-driven logic. This chapter pays special attention to trends that began in the mid-1980s, accelerated in the mid-1990s and were embedded as industry-

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter includes data and information published in: Jain, S. (2015) India: Multiple Media Explosions. In: Nordenstreng, K. and Thussu, D.K. (eds) *Mapping BRICS Media*, Abingdon: Routledge, 145–165.

wide practices in the subsequent decade and a half. The trajectory of these developments has been influenced by the policy and regulatory environment, macroeconomics, technology, the contours of the media system as well as by personalities. The business of Indian journalism continues to change and a stable state of equilibrium is not yet in sight. Instead, several current or imminent structural changes and pressures from other actors and institutions indicate that the news media in India will continue to be in a state of flux for several years.

India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world, with a GDP that grew at an average of more than 7.8 per cent per annum in real terms between 2003 and 2012 (World Bank, 2014). The relatively low growth rate of 4.4 per cent in 2013 is projected to again take an upward trend, reaching 6.8 per cent by 2016 (IMF, 2014: 184). Given the context of India's rapidly growing economy, it is to be expected that its media would have also expanded rapidly in recent years. In fact, the growth of the media sector has been faster than the economy as a whole. Media growth has consistently outstripped GDP growth by several percentage points in the last decade, achieving growth rates in the double digits (Thussu, 2012; FICCI, 2006, 2008; FICCI-KPMG, 2010, 2011, 2012). This growth is projected to continue at rates of up to 16 per cent per annum (FICCI-KPMG, 2013, 2014, 2015). The result is one of the largest – and probably the most energetic and vibrant – media landscapes in the world, and also one that sharply deviates from the pattern of shrinking or static mainstream media markets that is seen in most of the developed economies.

There is no doubt that Indian media are significant – they serve one of every six humans, the largest democratically governed population on the planet. Even with low penetration rates, Indian newspapers reach more people than in any other country. Many of the statistics for Indian media are an order of magnitude larger than other countries, and rising steadily. For instance, there were more than 105,443 publications registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India at the end of March 2015 (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2015), compared to 99,660 the year before (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2014) and 94,067 in March 2013 (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2013). Other media show similar or higher growth figures in terms of numbers of outlets and audiences as well as revenues.

However, the story of the growth of Indian media is one of the great untold – or less told – stories. It has not received as much international scholarly attention as the national media systems of many other countries. India's relatively sheltered economy and, in particular, barriers against international investment in India's news media undoubtedly have a role to play in this seeming lack of interest. Language differences and the Indian media's limited international reach and impact in the West outside the limited sphere of diasporic audiences are also important factors. In addition, Indian media are hard to understand or even describe. Data is often unavailable, but, more than that, the rapidly multiplying and expanding newspapers, television channels, radio stations and mobile networks reflect a continental scale and diversity. For instance, Bollywood may be the most prolific film factory in the world, but it is merely one of more than a dozen thriving regional and language-specific film industries in India. The scale and diversity are such that compartments into which various segments of the Indian media can be neatly boxed and categorised do not readily become apparent.

Across media, multiple languages and geographies weave a web of intertwining and divergences that defies patterns as soon as they are established. On the one hand there are one-man operations producing content on obsolete equipment in a language spoken by a few hundred thousand people, and on the other hand there are large diversified corporate entities that, among other businesses, own large newspapers, radio stations, web operations and television channels reaching hundreds of millions and making profits in the billions of rupees. Unlike many other countries, corporatisation and the political system do not appear to be dominant homogenising factors, and neither do shared legal and regulatory frameworks create a predictable orderliness. Media operations vary widely along every conceivable parameter, including scale, financing, patterns of ownership, relationship to power and politics, methods of production, genre and approach.

This diversity of media operations and the dozens of languages in which they operate make it difficult to classify Indian media as one media system. They behave not as one system, but as a multilayered complex of differentiated but actively interconnected systems that are difficult to untangle. The contrasts are more pronounced than

similarities, to the extent that an effective typology of Indian media system(s) has not yet emerged.

## 4.2 THE HISTORICAL PHASES OF INDIAN MEDIA

Building upon traditional communication traditions, news media in modern forms have a history of nearly two and a half centuries in India. The first printing press arrived with the Portuguese in 1556 and was largely used for the printing of religious literature by Jesuit missionaries based in Goa on the western coast of peninsular India (Vilani, 2005: 51). The first printed newspaper dates back to 1780, during the colonial period, when an Englishman, James Augustus Hicky, launched the weekly *Bengal Gazette*, also known as the *Calcutta General Advertiser*, in Calcutta (now Kolkata). Hicky's *Gazette*, described as a 'witty and scurrilous newspaper' that carried items of scandal and gossip (Parthasarathy, 1997: 19), had a short life span. Hicky was sued for defamation by the Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings, fined, imprisoned and subsequently deported, and the newspaper ceased publication less than two years after its launch. However, even in this period, other newspapers had already made an appearance, the first of them being the *Indian Gazette*, which was launched a mere few months after Hicky's newspaper. Within a few years, Calcutta had four weeklies and a monthly. The other two Presidencies (settlements) of British India, Madras (now Chennai) and Bombay (now Mumbai) were slightly slower off the mark, but the weekly *Madras Courier* began publication in 1785 and the *Bombay Herald* in 1789. Within half a century, there were nearly 50 publications being published in different parts of the country. A majority of them were in English, and catered to the needs of an expatriate population. Newspapers in Indian languages began to be published several decades after the early beginnings. The first such newspaper, *Digdarshan* [World Vision], first published in 1818, was started by missionaries and it mainly concerned itself with religious matters, but it was soon followed by many others in a number of languages.

Newspapers in colonial, pre-1947 India displayed three strong, persistent trends – those of resistance to the oppressive legal and governmental regimes, furtherance of social reform campaigns, and a strong tradition of political activism. The first of these, an antagonistic relationship with the government, began with Hicky's *Gazette* in 1780.

Parthasarathy (1997) chronicles the long history of active resistance by both British and Indian editors in the face of repressive licensing and legislative regimes, and the prosecution and deportation of British editors (the tactics of resistance often included appointing editors of mixed Anglo-Indian descent who could not be deported). From the very earliest days, newspapers exhibited a strong streak of watchdog journalism, exposing financial and administrative scandals of the East India Company. They commented strongly on governance and policy issues, even as they took prurient delight in exposing personal scandal. It is noteworthy that many of the issues of authoritarianism and governmental control faced by newspapers in the early decades persisted through the colonial experience and into Independent India. The post-colonial elite preserved the colonial legacy of media laws, regulations and systems of control, either by default or design (Thomas, 2010: 36–37).

The most prominent early exponent of the second persistent trend – that of social reform – was Raja Ram Mohun Roy, under whose influence the first Indian-owned newspaper in English, the *Bengal Gazette*, began publication in 1816. Roy went on to launch and inspire several other newspapers in the Bengali and Persian languages. One of the major social reform campaigns he inspired is the one against *sati*, the practice of the immolation of a widow on the pyre of her dead husband. Ironically, many of the progressive and reformist newspapers suffered a decline in readership after the abolition of *sati* in 1829 (Parthasarathy, 1997: 36). Roy also championed other causes, including freedom of expression and of the press. Several other newspapers in different parts of the country followed Roy's lead, making social reform a noticeable trend. Attempts to modernise India and Hinduism through appeals to logic and rationalism persisted well into the twentieth century.

It is also recognised that the intellectual base of Roy's social and religious activism laid the base for the more emotionally charged trend that later became manifest as the third prominent movement in pre-Independence media – that of political activism. Indian newspapers played a major role in promoting a spirit of nationalism and directly supported the independence movement, especially after the failed First War of Independence (also called the Sepoy Mutiny) in 1857. Ram (1997, xiii–xiv) characterises the press' support to the anti-imperialist cause as Stage 2 of the history of

Indian journalism, stretching from 1868 to 1919. It includes the founding of several long-lasting newspapers that achieved a reach beyond their regions, including *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1868–1986), *The Statesman* (1875 to the present day) and *The Hindu* (1878 to the present day). Ram (1997) defines Stage 3 as the period between 1919 and 1937, which sees the differentiation of the press into moderate and radical, a reference to their positions with regard to the strategy and tactics of the freedom movement. This phase encompassed the launch of *Hindustan Times* and *The Indian Express*, both of which continue to be published today. Stage 4, from 1937 to the achievement of independence in 1947, sees the maturing of assertive tendencies in the press, according to Ram (*ibid.*). Many leaders of India's independence movement, including the Father of the Indian Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, and India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote and published extensively, and newspapers were a critical element of mobilisation and activism in the first half of the twentieth century. When India gained independence in 1947, there were several mass-circulation newspapers both in English and Indian languages, even though less than one-fifth of Indians were literate.

India's independence represented a discontinuity in political and governance terms, but not with regard to the media, which continued to exhibit many of the tendencies from the colonial period. The tradition of watchdog reporting, support for social reform and nationalistic zeal continued, albeit in modified forms and to differing extents across the vast and diverse media sector. In the immediate post-Independence era, that is, in the 1950s and 1960s, many newspapers consciously adopted a watchdog role, especially in view of the parliamentary majority enjoyed by the ruling Congress Party (Parthasarathy, 1997). Veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar attributes the developments to the democratic credentials of independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru: 'See, Nehru thought, when we got independence, Nehru said, there is no opposition, so I want the Press to be the opposition' (Nayar, Interview). Freedom of the press is not expressly enshrined in the Indian Constitution. However, the Supreme Court of India has interpreted it as being implicit within the freedom of speech and expression, which are guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution (Liang, 2004: 434–435).

In the early decades of independent India, even as they espoused a watchdog role, the media remained an integral part of the nation-building project. This is perhaps also a

reflection of the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and the values of ‘Gandhian journalism’ that he inspired. Newspapers understood their role to be one that incorporated development journalism. Sunil Saxena, Director of the Amity School of Journalism, Jaipur, characterises journalism in the post-Independence era as being driven by idealism:

Those days are certainly never going to come back because that was a different era [...] See, when you talk of journalism as a mission, we spoke of nationalism, to set up a paper like *The Hindu* for instance, to set up papers like *Amrita Bazar Patrika* or *Anandabazar Patrika* which were kind of extensions of the national movement, the idealism that burns through them was not for commercial reasons but purely for national interest. That is the legacy that was carried on in the post-Independence period till the Emergency.

(Saxena, Interview)

Public radio and television – All India Radio and Doordarshan – were expressly mandated to perform a positive social role. All India Radio had emerged in the 1930s from an amalgamation of radio clubs and experimental services (Page and Crawley, 2001) and television broadcasting began in New Delhi in 1959, with a second station being opened in Mumbai only after a gap of 13 years. The initiation of colour broadcasting for the 1982 Asian Games was an important step in television transitioning to its status as a mass medium. A missionary zeal that included residual nationalism and multiple elements of social reform is evident in the media output of this period, equally in journalism, broadcasting and the emerging film industries in different languages.

During this phase – the post-Independence nation-building phase – newspapers were headed by eminent editors who robustly and loudly guarded their freedom. This came to an abrupt, if temporary, halt when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended democratic process and fundamental rights during the state of emergency from 1975 to 1977. Stringent censorship was imposed and journalists were among those arrested along with activists of opposition parties. Nayar (Interview) calls the Emergency a ‘watershed’ in Indian journalism, a period when ‘the proprietors of the old press all caved in’. Lal Krishna Advani, a political leader who became Information and Broadcasting Minister after the Emergency, famously said to editors: ‘You were merely asked to bend, but you chose to crawl’ (quoted in Ninan, 2007: 273).

However, once the Emergency was over, the media reasserted its independence with a vengeance and entered an era of aggressive journalism, fuelled by newspapers such as *The Indian Express* and the newsmagazines, *India Today* and *Sunday*:

There was a very major change after 1977 or 1978 when the Emergency ended and suddenly there was a great desire to go in for investigative journalism. The country witnessed newspapers breaking big stories. *The Indian Express* was of course in the forefront when it got rid of the chief minister of Maharashtra, A.R. Antulay, with its exposé and another chief minister of Karnataka with a story that was exposed by the *Express* Editor. That was a very exciting time in the lives of Indian journalists, especially young journalists, when technology brought about a huge revolution and there was [a lot of] thinking about the way news reports should be written. Magazine journalism also played a major role here and we had the one-rupee *Sunday* which did the Moradabad riots stories, the Bhagalpur blinding story. These were all very new to Indian journalism at that point of time. This was largely in the 1980s, this excitement which happened.

(Saxena, Interview)

Senior journalist and journalism educator Sadanand Menon thinks of this as a golden period in the history of Indian journalism and media:

From 1975–90 – about 15 years – the media profession was highly ideologised. There was a certain idealism to it plus an ideological stance people were willing to take, willing to come out of academics, come out of activism, and enter the media and create a space there which would certainly make a difference to a whole lot of things that were happening in that time from environmental issues, to gender issues, to Dalit issues, and really populated the media with this new idea, which created a new language and a new sensitivity.

(Menon, Interview)

Doordarshan and All India Radio, though ostensibly granted autonomy as independent public service broadcasters under the Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Act, 1990, found it more difficult to emerge from under the yoke of governmental control over content. They remain, for all practical purposes, state broadcasters. The government substantially funds the public broadcasting corporation and also plays a role in the appointment of officers in key executive roles. It thus continues to exercise financial, administrative and editorial control. The public broadcasters continue to be

cast in the role of tools for development, and serve as instruments to weld the nation together (Mehta, 2008: 25).

The first half of the 1990s was an inflection point for Indian media. If one were to conceive of phases of Indian media, there is no question that this period was the beginning of a new and distinct phase that continues to the present time. This phase represents a far-reaching qualitative change, but the analysis conducted here indicates that the fundamental driving force is a sustained and rapid quantitative change. This phase is simply described here as the *phase of explosive growth*. The markers of the phases of Indian journalism proposed here are:

- i) The *formative phase*, extending from the first newspaper in 1780 to 1919, encompassing social and spiritual as well as political concerns (stages 1 and 2 as defined by Ram, 2012).
- ii) The *nationalist phase*, from 1919 to the attainment of Indian independence in 1947, marked most prominently by anti-colonial, pro-independence activism (stages 3 and 4 of Ram's classification).
- iii) The *nation-building phase* from 1947 to the end of the Emergency in 1977, marked most prominently by developmental concerns.
- iv) The *aggressive journalism phase* from 1977 to the early 1990s, marked most prominently by investigative journalism and assertion of the media's role in demanding accountability.
- v) The *phase of explosive growth*, a substantive disjuncture from the past in numerous dimensions, including practices, structures and norms. This phase began in the early to mid-1990s and shaped today's media system. It is mapped in some detail in this chapter and the next.

Several events and circumstances combined to create the conditions for the phase of explosive growth. Chronologically, the first of these was the tentative advent of independent factual television in 1990. The independent current affairs newsmagazines

*Eyewitness*<sup>3</sup> and *Newstrack*, which were initially circulated on VHS videocassettes marketed through direct subscription and neighbourhood video libraries, began to break the monopoly of Doordarshan on visuals of news events. With high journalistic standards and production values, they introduced audiences to the immediacy of television visuals, whetted their appetites and firmly established the power of media.

The second factor was technology. India was introduced to satellite television through CNN's broadcasts during the first Gulf War in early 1991 and immediately fell in love. In 1992, the first private television station, Zee Television, ushered in the era of satellite television. The independent journalism introduced by *Eyewitness* and *Newstrack* found an echo in news bulletins that began to appear on the entertainment-focused private channels by the mid-1990s. The first 24-hour news channel was launched in 1998, leading to developments that irrevocably altered the size, reach and character of the media landscape. Before long, digital transponders on satellites drastically lowered transmission costs and led to the television boom. Similarly, digital technology facilitated rapid expansion of newspapers through facsimile and remote editions.

Third, and central to the media explosion, were the economic reforms of 1991–92 that followed on from the near bankruptcy of the Government of India in 1991. Liberalisation marked a break with the command economy of previous decades and resulted in rapid economic growth, which in turn led to the emergence of a vast middle class with substantial spending power.

This is the age in which Indian media currently exists – an era of sharp growth in media outlets and revenues, energetic but chaotic individualism and market-led journalism.

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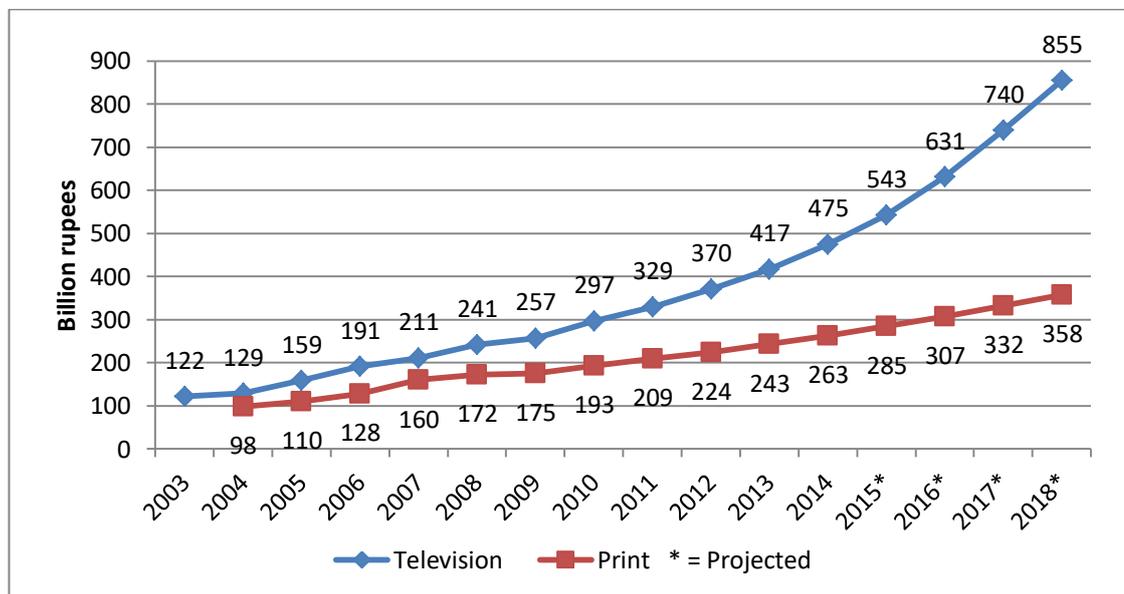
<sup>3</sup> Declaration of interest: This researcher worked as a correspondent and later as the producer of *Eyewitness* between 1990 and 1995.

### 4.3 RAPID GROWTH AND DIVERSIFICATION

As the world’s largest democracy and second most populous country, it is perhaps no surprise that India also has one of the most vibrant media environments. About two decades into its phase of explosive growth, India boasts more newspapers and 24-hour television news channels than any other country. The ‘argumentative Indian’ (Sen, 2005) evidently continues to display a hunger for news, and rapidly growing audience numbers combine with a widening economic base.

Double-digit growth rates for many sectors of the media have become normal over the past several years. The projections of industry analysts are that between 2014 and 2019, the television industry will experience a cumulative annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.5 per cent, with the print industry growing at 8 per cent, films at 10 per cent and radio at 18.1 per cent (FICCI-KPMG, 2015: 2). Figure 4.1 shows the growth trajectory of the print and television industries extending several years before and after the period during which this research was conducted.

**Figure 4.1: Growth of television and print industries**



Source: FICCI-KPMG, 2015; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008, 2009, 2011

### 4.3.1 Newspapers

About two decades ago, Robin Jeffrey wrote:

In most of the industrialised world, the past 15 years have seen a reduction in the number and circulations of daily newspapers. But in India daily newspapers in Indian languages have grown remarkably since the late 1970s. That growth has varied from one language to another, but overall, circulation appears to have increased by roughly 140 per cent in 12 years [...] No other country – indeed no other continent – in the world has a newspaper industry as complex and highly developed as India's.

(Jeffrey, 1993: 2004)

What Jeffrey saw was the beginning of the boom. Since then, the Indian newspaper market has overtaken China's to emerge as the largest (WAN-IFRA, 2011) and *The Times of India* has become the largest-circulated English-language quality newspaper in the world. According to the Indian Readership Survey, the newspaper is read by 7.6 million people every day. However, there are as many as seven newspapers in other Indian languages with far greater reach. As Table 4.1 indicates, newspaper readership continues to grow at a healthy pace.

**Table 4.1: Top 10 dailies**

Average issue readership (AIR) in '000s			
Publication	Language	IRS 2013	IRS 2014
<i>Dainik Jagran</i>	Hindi	15,527	16,631
<i>Hindustan</i>	Hindi	14,246	14,746
<i>Dainik Bhaskar</i>	Hindi	12,857	13,830
<i>Malayala Manorama</i>	Malayalam	6,565	8,803
<i>Daily Thanthi</i>	Tamil	8,156	8,283
<i>Rajasthan Patrika</i>	Hindi	7,665	7,905
<i>Amar Ujala</i>	Hindi	7,071	7,808
<i>The Times of India</i>	English	7,254	7,590
<i>Mathrubhumi</i>	Malayalam	6,136	6,020
<i>Lokmat</i>	Marathi	5,601	5,887

Source: Indian Readership Survey, 2014 (IRS measures readership, not circulation)

Indian newspapers reach only a fraction of the populace. About 500 million Indians speak Hindi, but the average issue readership of all Hindi newspapers combined is only about 68.4 million (Indian Readership Survey 2011 Q3). The multilingualism statistics from the 2011 census are not yet available, but the 2001 census showed that about 125 million Indians speak English as their first, second or third language. However, the average issue readership of all English newspapers combined is only 22.1 million (Indian Readership Survey 2011 Q3). These statistics reveal huge potential for growth.

Jayant Mammen Mathew, Director of the Malayalam newspaper, *Malayala Manorama*, which reaches nearly 9 million readers, estimates the Indian print industry has got 15 years of growth ahead of it, at least until the time 'Internet penetration reaches 50–60 per cent' (FICCI-KPMG, 2012: 45).

For Sanjay Gupta, CEO of the media giant controlled by his family, Jagran Prakashan, and Editor of *Dainik Jagran*, the newspaper at number one in Table 4.1 above, a slowdown is when growth falls to 8 per cent:

Nowadays it's very slow, this year very slow, but it's not dead. Newspapers in India are not dead and not a sunset industry. So, once I say slowdown, still I'm growing at 8 per cent.

**Q:** So, growing at 8 per cent is a slowdown?

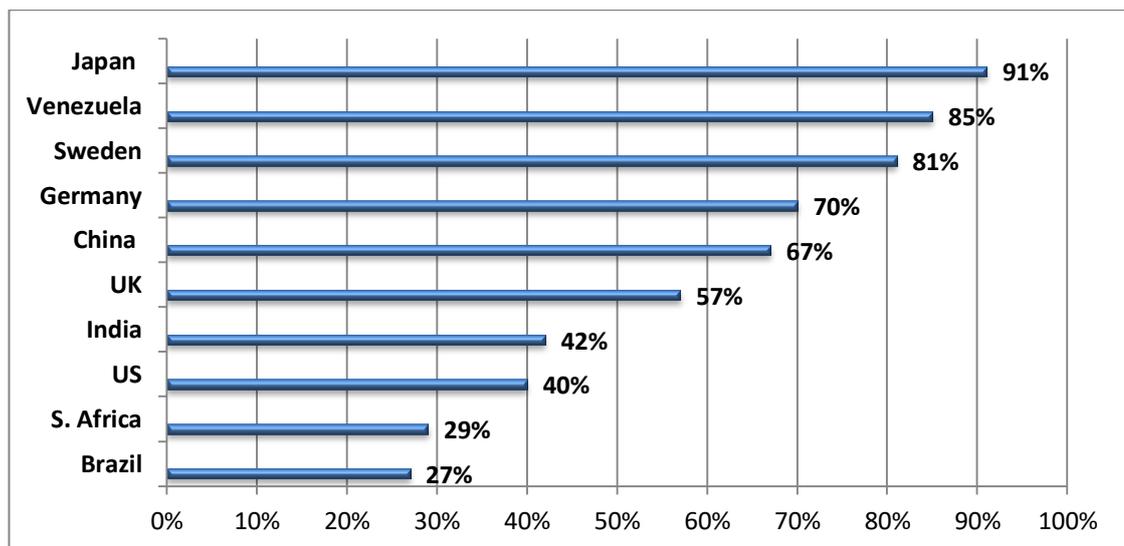
**A:** Yes. I was just talking to my CFO one hour back and he said, Sir, we'll be closing at 8 per cent this six months [period]. We target at 20 per cent, so that's slow for us. Therefore, I'm saying it's an industry where I am yet to see a slowdown because a huge market is still untapped.

(Gupta, Interview)

Over the past 15 years, Gupta has used liberalised foreign investment norms to fund geographical expansion of his company, escalating rapidly from operations in just one state to 11 of India's 29 states. At the same time, *Dainik Jagran* has deepened penetration by launching local editions with one central masthead, but carrying pages customised to areas as small as one city or one district within a state. Similar localisation and the launching of multiple editions are now the norm for all large newspaper groups.

India had a newspaper penetration of 42 per cent in 2010 (Figure 4.2), which is about the same as the US, more than Brazil and South Africa, but far less than the UK, China and Japan. While there is ample scope for expansion, circulation growth will of course depend on consumption patterns as well as developments in the Indian market.

**Figure 4.2: Comparative newspaper reach in different countries**



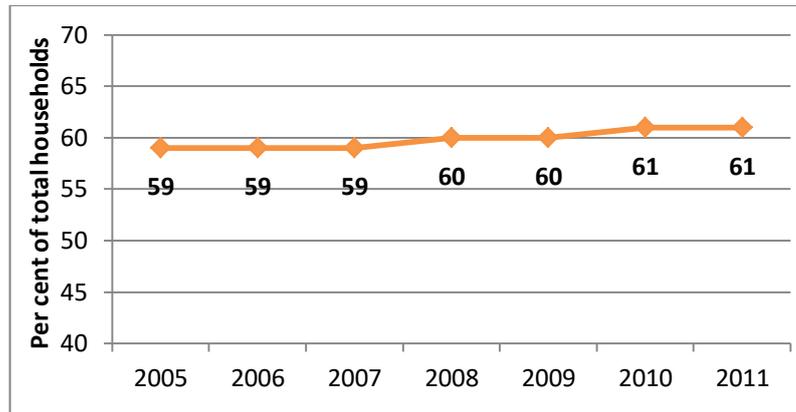
Source: World Press Trends, 2011

### 4.3.2 Television

Television is one of India's fastest growing sectors, not just in media but among all sectors of the economy, with double-digit growth both attained and forecast. Television follows the commercial model rather than the public service broadcasting model seen in Western or Northern Europe. The state broadcaster, Doordarshan, is the sole terrestrial broadcaster. It broadcasts 35 channels in different languages (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2012: 126), but its once captive viewers have moved to private satellite channels in large numbers. The vibrant television news environment is dominated by private broadcasters, many of whom are parts of larger media empires that encompass newspapers and other sectors of the media.

More than 61 per cent of India's households (143 million households out of a total of 233 million households) have television sets (Figure 4.3).

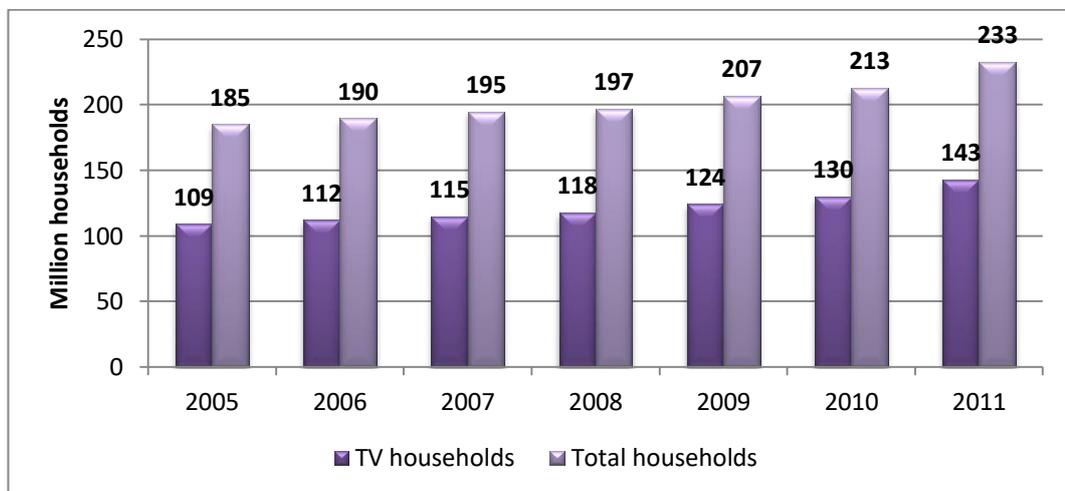
**Figure 4.3: TV households as a percentage of total households**



Source: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

Though in percentage terms the growth seems to be slow, in reality millions of additional households tune into television every year (Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4: Growth in the reach of television**

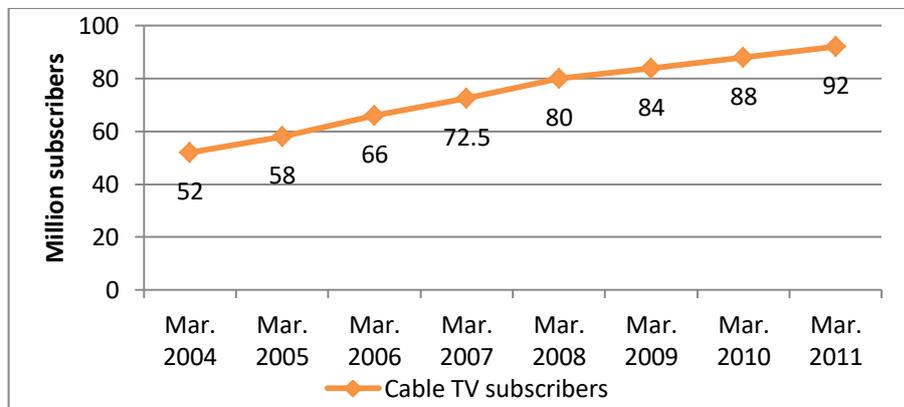


Source: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

More than 64 per cent of these – 92 million households – have access to hundreds of channels via cable and satellite services (Figure 4.5); the rest can receive only terrestrial signals from the state broadcaster, Doordarshan.

The average Indian household is of five people, so television reaches more than 700 million people, of whom more than 450 million can watch cable and satellite channels. They are served by about 6,000 multi-system operators who download and supply signals from satellites and 60,000 cable operators (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2012) who provide the last mile connectivity through physical cables strung from trees and telephone poles. This is a fast-growing sector of the television industry, though one that will witness a large-scale reconfiguration of its business models with the digitisation programme currently under way.

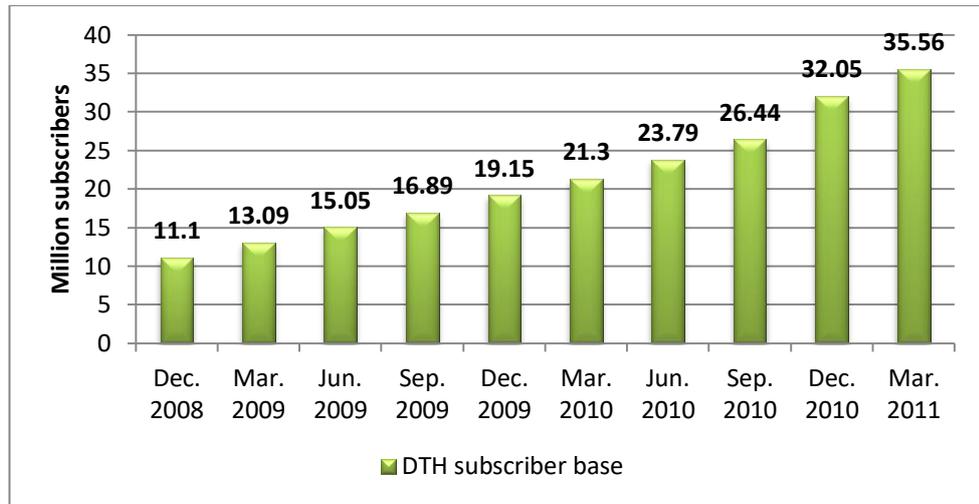
**Figure 4.5: Cable TV subscribers**



Source: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

Another fast-growing area is that of direct-to-home (DTH) television services. There are six major DTH providers who enable subscribers to access satellite signals through Ku-band satellite dishes similar to those of Sky in the UK, and using either MPEG2 or MPEG4 compression. As Figure 4.6 shows, the number of DTH subscribers has nearly trebled in the two years between 2009 and 2011.

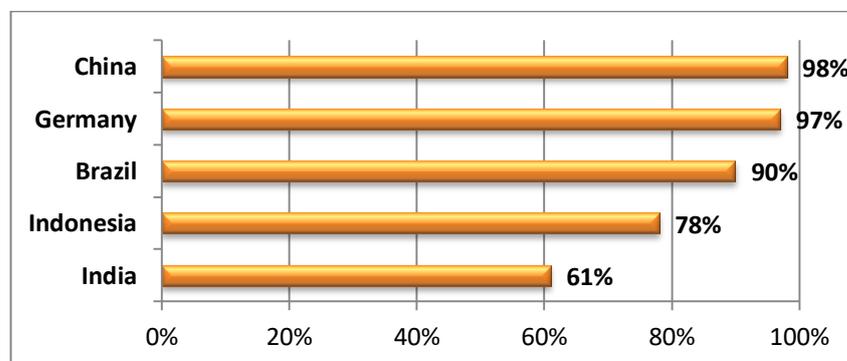
**Figure 4.6: Growth in DTH subscriber base**



Source: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

Business models of various players in the television industry are changing rapidly, but it is also clear that there is substantial scope for expansion and growth. Figure 4.7 shows TV penetration in India in comparison to other countries. It is interesting to note that a fellow BRICS country, Brazil, had a much lower newspaper reach than India (Figure 4.2), but a substantially higher TV penetration rate. Of course, Brazil is a mid-income country, while India is a low-income country. India has a nominal per capita GDP of about \$1,500 and a GDP per capita PPP of about \$3,600 (World Bank, 2011), compared to Brazil's nominal per capita GDP of about \$12,500 and a PPP figure of \$11,700 (World Bank, 2011).

**Figure 4.7: Comparative TV penetration**



Source: KPMG Analyses; KPMG, 2012

S.Y. Quraishi, former Chief Election Commissioner of India and former Director-General of public broadcaster Doordarshan, says that though the electronic media boom is a recent phenomenon, television has overtaken all other forms of media in reach and impact (Quraishi, Interview). Khurshid Ahmed Ganai, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, says:

We have a population of more than 1.25 billion, nearly 1.30 billion people. Now all these people are hooked on to some form of media, some are watching Doordarshan, some are listening to radio, which is a very big number particularly in the rural areas, another substantial number is watching the private channels in the towns, small towns, big towns and also some well-connected rural areas which have electricity.

(Ganai, Interview)

#### **4.3.3 Radio, mobile and the Internet**

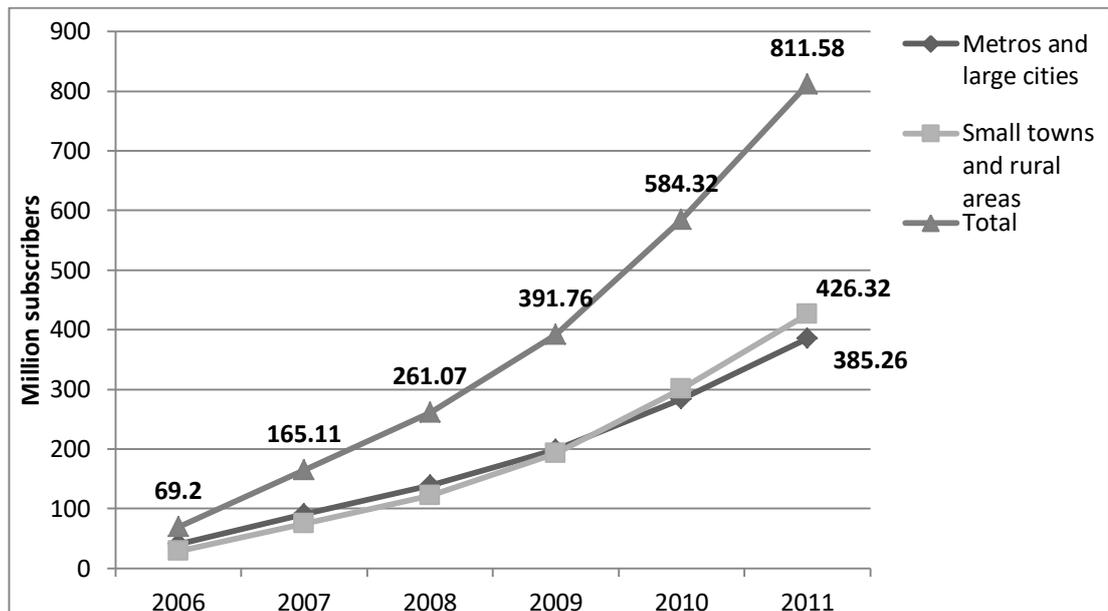
An overwhelming majority of advertising revenue flows to newspapers and television, now being called legacy media in many media systems, but still ruling the public sphere in India. This is because of structural and historical as well as economic factors. As things stand, print and television continue to get the lion's share of advertising revenue, with radio and the Internet commanding a miniscule share. As a result, newspapers and television in India have not yet begun to experience the shifting of advertising revenue.

State-owned All India Radio has a geographical coverage of about 92 per cent and it reaches more than 99 per cent of the population with its 237 medium wave, short wave and FM broadcasting stations. In addition, 130 community radio stations and 245 private FM stations covered about 37 per cent of the geographical area of India at the end of March 2011 (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2011). Private FM stations are music stations for the most part; they are not, as yet, allowed to broadcast any news other than the feed of All India Radio. Private radio grew 24 per cent in 2010–11, and local advertising represents about 40 per cent of their advertising revenue (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2011).

The big growth story in India in recent years has been the mobile – from an interpersonal communication point of view, but not from a media perspective in the

time period that is the focus of this study. As Figure 4.8 shows, by March 2011, there were 811 million mobile-phone subscribers in India, an addition of 227 million over a year, representing a growth rate of 39 per cent. For the first time, mobile-phone subscribers from small towns and rural users outnumbered those from large cities. This will undoubtedly influence the direction and nature of business models and approaches in this sector.

**Figure 4.8: Mobile-phone subscribers in India**



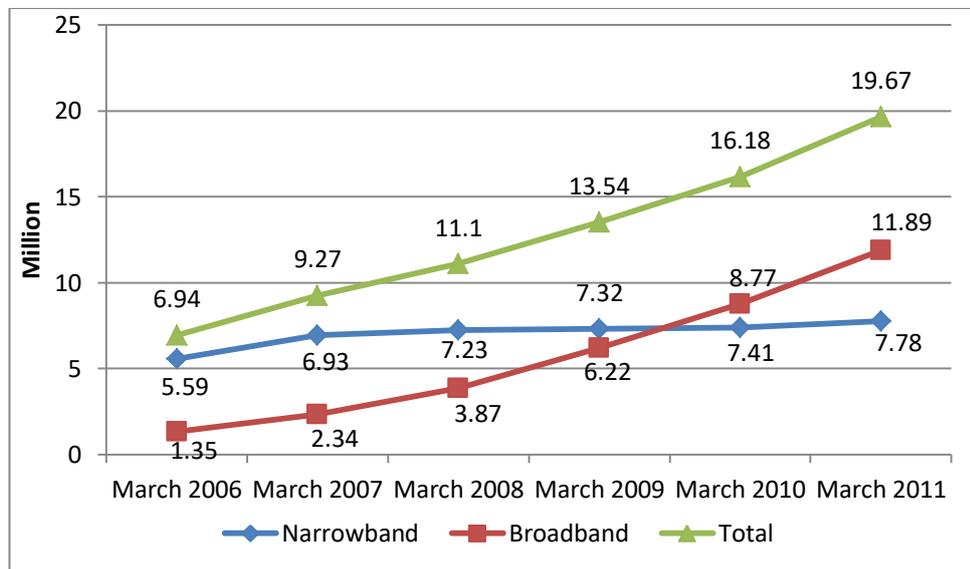
Source: Compiled from reports of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

There is – as yet – very little commercial or media activity on mobile phones. 3G connections are still relatively expensive compared to calling rates, which have dropped drastically from Rs.32 per minute in the mid-1990s to less than Re.1 per minute (the latter figure comes to about £0.012, or 1.2 pence, at the October 2012 exchange rate). Because of the high rates for 3G connections, few Indians accessed the Internet over their mobile phones in the time period under study.

Compared to voice segment’s 39 per cent spurt in numbers, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) describes growth in the Internet as slow. The number of Internet subscribers grew from a little over 16 million to 19.67 million in 2010–11 (TRAI, 2011), which represents a growth rate of 21.6 per cent. Most of this growth was

in broadband connections, and if one considers broadband alone, the growth rate was about 35.6 per cent in 2010–11 (see Figure 4.9). Thus, the growth rates are not small in themselves, but the size of the sector and the comparison with other countries do make it seem insignificant in relation to other media sectors. The low penetration of the Internet is attributable to infrastructural issues (TRAI, 2011). While the total number of Internet connections in India is only about 20 million, the number of Internet users is estimated to be between 120 million (TRAI, 2011) and 135 million (KPMG, 2012), which is about 10 per cent of the total population.

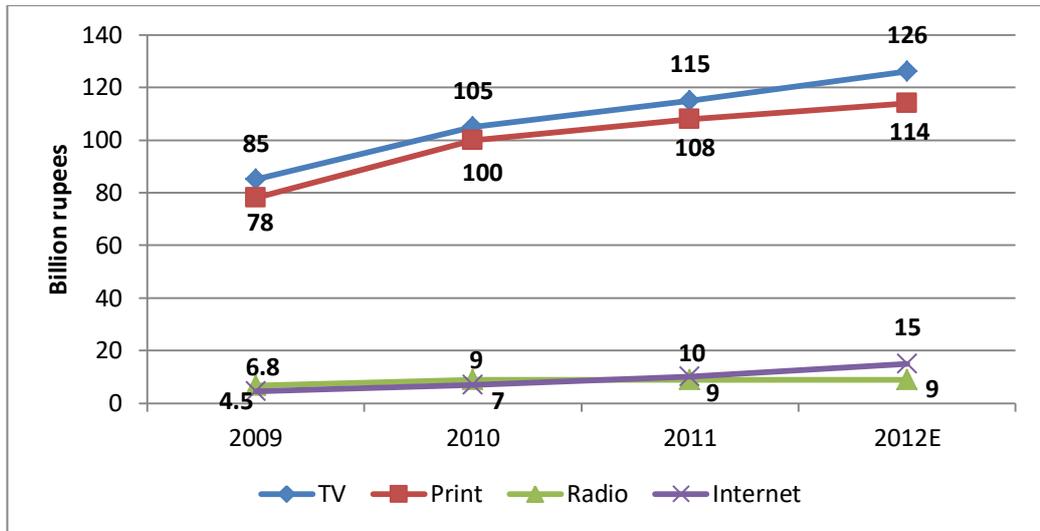
**Figure 4.9: Internet subscribers**



Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

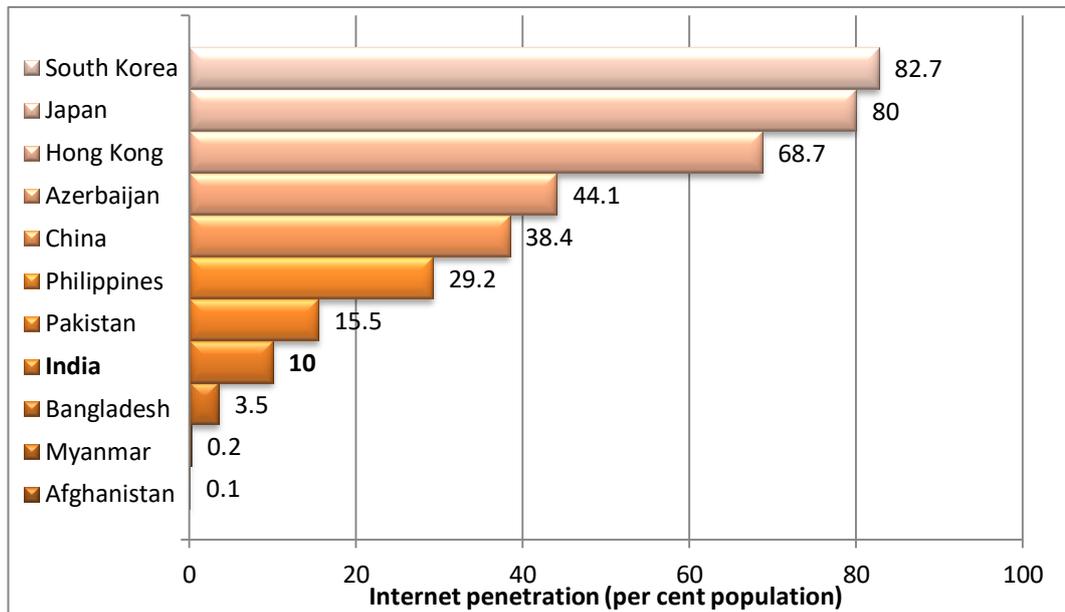
Though the Internet has not yet begun to have a reach sizeable enough to impact the fortunes of the newspaper and television industries, advertisers have begun to notice it. This segment of the media has begun to attract advertising revenue faster than its growth, partly because it represents a desirable demographic for advertisers. As Figure 4.10 shows, the value of advertising on the Internet is growing rapidly, at rates of up to 50 per cent per annum, but it remains a fraction of that in the television or print industries. There is substantial scope for growth, and the position of India vis-à-vis chosen Asian countries is represented in Figure 4.11.

**Figure 4.10: Advertising revenue by media**



Source: Pitch Madison Media Advertising Outlook, 2012; Roy and Bahirat, 2011

**Figure 4.11: Internet penetration in Asian countries**



Source: Boston Consulting Group

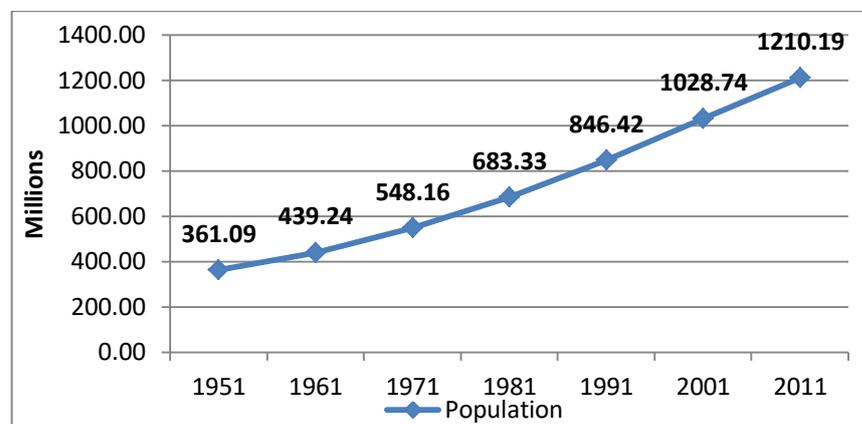
So, while print and television revenues are growing, the Internet is beginning to make some inroads into advertising revenues. As Internet penetration increases, this trend will be more pronounced and will be reflected in the business models of the print and

television industries. At the same time, it must be stated that because of factors such as the size and stratification of the Indian market, industry insiders believe it will be a long time before the bottom lines of the legacy media are seriously hit.

#### 4.3.4 Engines of growth: Population, literacy and the economy

India is the seventh largest country in the world, 13 times as large as the UK, with a population of 1.21 billion (Census of India, 2011). The sheer size of the population (Figure 4.12) is a major driver of media growth.

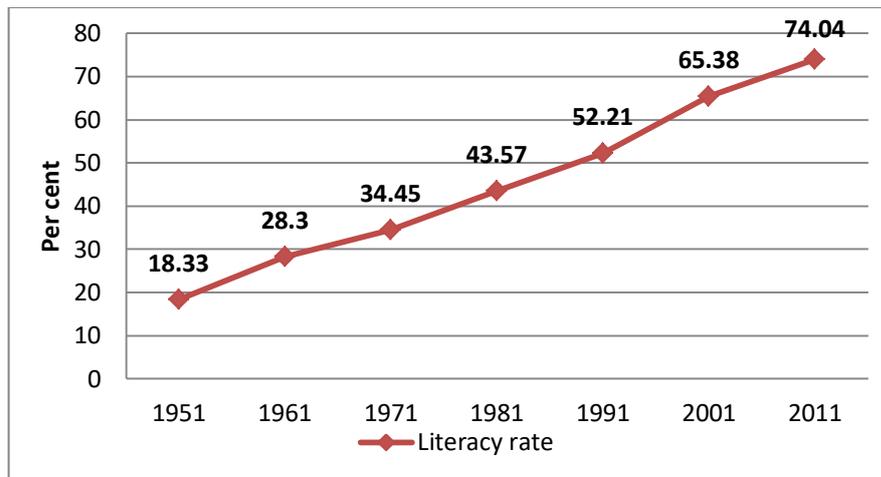
**Figure 4.12: India population growth**



Source: Census of India

Along with the growth in number of people, literacy rates are rising. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, literacy rates as recorded by the Census of India were very low (5.35 per cent in 1901 and 5.92 per cent in 1911). Substantial progress in literacy in the last 60 years (Figure 4.13) has been instrumental in increasing the audience for news media. There are substantial differences in literacy between different states in India and also between men and women. For instance, in 2011, though 82.14 per cent men were literate, less than two-thirds of women were able to read and write, leading to a male–female literacy gap of nearly 17 per cent, but as these differentials reduce, larger media audiences will be available.

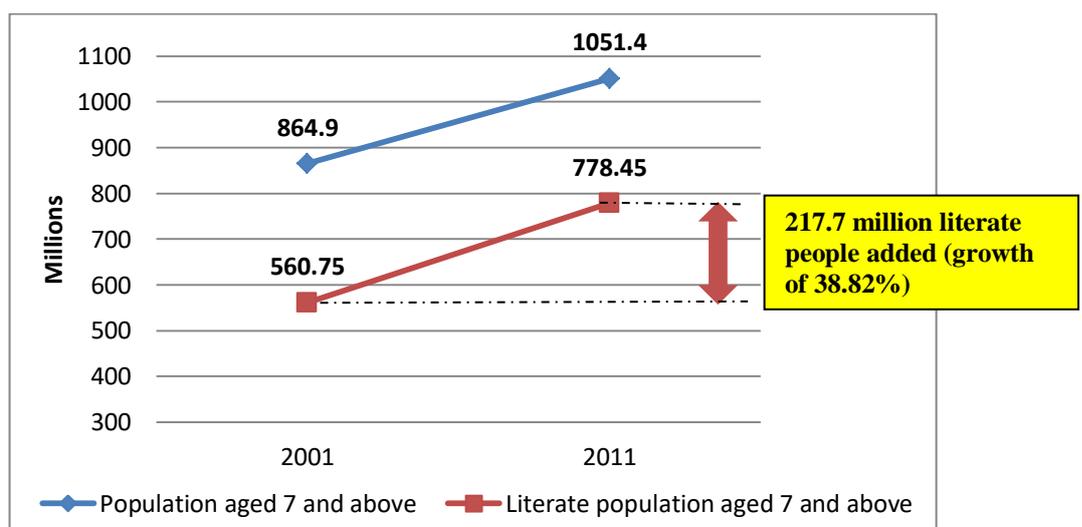
**Figure 4.13: Literacy rates**



Source: Census of India

In the last decade alone, India has added more than 217 million people to its literate population (Figure 4.14). With the audience for news growing at such a rapid pace, Indian media have several years of growth ahead of them before they reach saturation levels. Large numbers of Indians remain in a ‘media-dark’ zone – for economic reasons, among others. Thus, opportunities for growth of the news media will continue to exist for decades.

**Figure 4.14: Addition to literate population aged more than seven years**

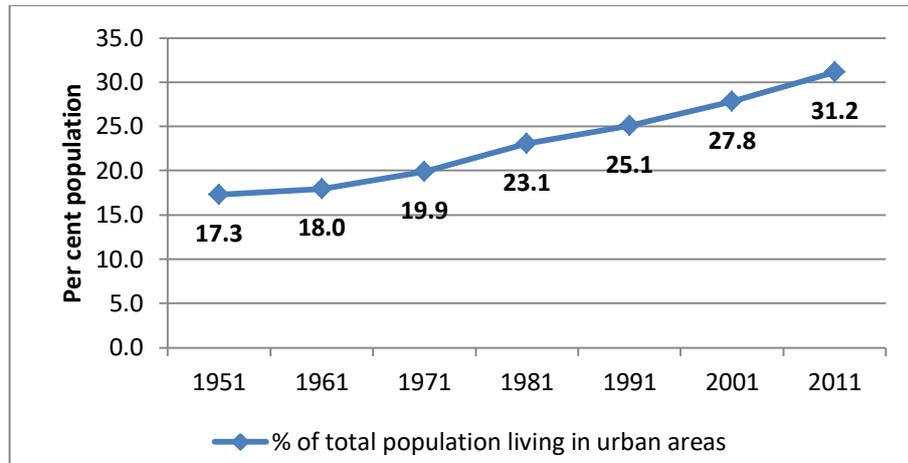


Analysis based on data from the Census of India

At the same time, it must be pointed out that ‘literate’ does not necessarily mean being educated well enough to read a newspaper. The detailed tabulation from the 2011 census is not yet available, but in 2001, out of the 562 million Indians aged 20 and above, less than one-third had finished middle school and/or gone on to secondary school and higher education. The other two-thirds were classified as educated to primary level, literate below primary level, literate without any educational level or illiterate (Census of India, 2001) – categories where consumption of the news media can reasonably be expected to be low. This low level of education among those classified as literate is a limiting factor for the reach of the media – and, of course, it also has a bearing on the media’s approach and treatment of news. However, with a greater thrust on education including the ‘Education for All’ initiative in recent years, it is expected that the educational levels of literate Indians will rise to a level that brings larger numbers into the catchment area of the news media.

The growth in audiences of news media is also related to migration from rural to urban areas. The trend of urbanisation is shown in Figure 4.15. In 1901, only 10.8 per cent of Indians lived in urban areas; this increased to 17.3 per cent in 1951 and 31.2 per cent in 2011 (Census of India, 2011). While India has 640,867 villages, which can be remote and hard to access for news media, it now has nearly 8,000 ‘urban units’, which is what the Census calls towns and cities. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of urban units increased from 5,161 to 7,935, a jump of about 54 per cent in a span of merely 10 years. The Census defines urban areas as all residential agglomerations that have a population of at least 5,000, a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre, and where at least 75 per cent of male ‘main workers’ are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. This clustering of people and the movement from agricultural to non-agricultural livelihoods has obvious implications for the penetration and delivery of news media, whether newspapers or television. There are now 53 cities in India with populations of more than one million. The largest of these – called the four ‘metros’ in India – are the National Capital Territory of Delhi (16.3 million), Greater Mumbai (earlier Bombay) at 18.4 million, Kolkata (earlier Calcutta) with 14.1 million residents, and Chennai (earlier Madras), which comes in at 8.7 million. Several other cities, including Bengaluru (8.5 million), Hyderabad (7.7 million), Ahmedabad (6.4 million) and Pune (5 million), are not far behind.

**Figure 4.15: Urbanisation in India**



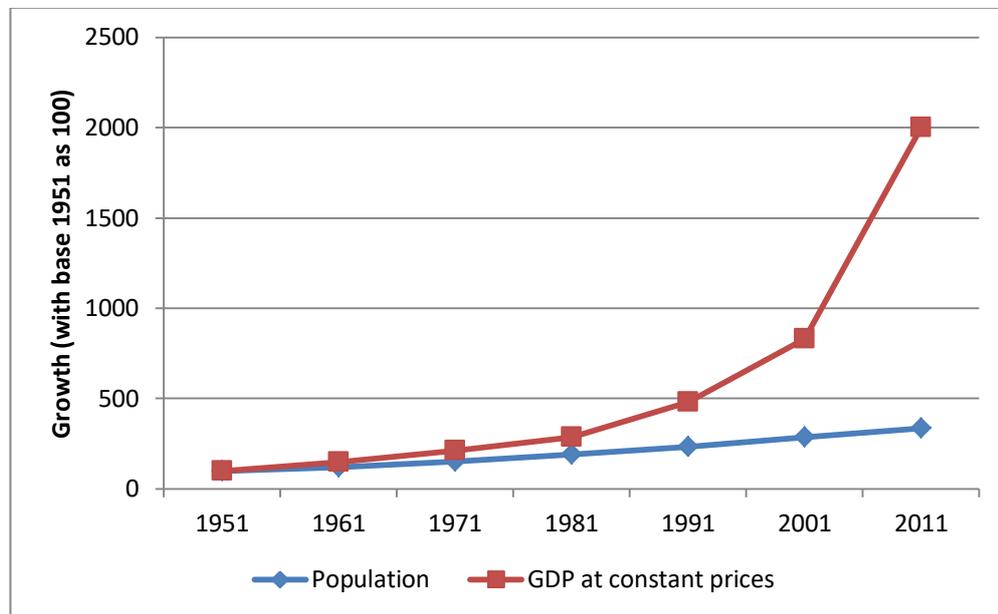
Source: Census of India

Media consumption has also risen along with income and an upward swing in standards of living. Poverty in India continues to remain at abysmal levels. About one-third of all Indians – that makes about 400 million – live under the national poverty line defined by the Planning Commission of India. At the same time, India has a huge middle class, estimated to range in size from 30 million to 300 million, depending on how the term is defined. Over the past decade and more, India has been experiencing some of the highest growth rates in the world, and this economic prosperity has had a role to play in the growth of the media industries. The 1990s began on a low note with a GDP growth rate of 1.4 per cent in 1991–92. This was a watershed, preceded by a balance of payments crisis and tided over with major economic reforms. As a result of these reforms, the GDP growth rate jumped to 5.4 per cent in 1992–93 and rose every succeeding year to hit 8.0 per cent in 1996–97. In the last decade, growth rates have remained consistently high, exceeding 9 per cent in many years. The year 2011–12 was considered a slump year – the GDP grew at only 6.9 per cent!

Over the last 60 years, India's GDP growth has outstripped its population growth. Figure 4.16 shows the relative growths of population and the GDP, the latter considered at constant prices indexed to the base year 1951. In the two decades since the launch of economic reforms in India, the growth of GDP has accelerated. Between 1991 and 2001, the decadal growth of population was about 21 per cent, but the GDP grew more

than 72 per cent. In the decade 2001–11, population grew by 17.7 per cent, while GDP climbed by 141 per cent.

**Figure 4.16: Relative growth of GDP and population**



Source: Census of India

Thus, it is evident that the growth of news media in India is inextricably tied up with the macro picture of demographics and the economy, including population growth, higher literacy rates, increasing urbanisation and rising standards of living. The average Indian is becoming richer (or less poor), more educated and moving to cities, and this process of empowerment and greater engagement with local and national processes is the core engine that is fuelling growth in the media. For the most part, the benefits of this growth are accruing to the newspaper and television sectors, which have not yet begun to feel the effect of growth in the mobile and Internet sectors as other media systems have.

#### **4.3.5 Multiple media systems and shifting audiences**

The potential is great, let me tell you. If the national market does slow down and national means national advertisers, the regional market is still there which we have yet to tap properly, let me tell you.

(Gupta, Interview)

It is a seldom recognised fact that India has not one but multiple media systems. The characteristics that differentiate these media systems include language, reach and scale.

Hardy studies how the phrase ‘media system’ has been used and says that media systems are generally taken to comprise ‘all mass media organized or operating within a given social and political system (usually a state)’ (2012: 185). Hallin and Mancini (2004) point out that media systems are not homogenous and can contain different ‘journalistic cultures’. McQuail (1994) also points out that in most countries the media do not form a single system with a unified purpose or philosophy. Thus, these conceptions of media systems cater for certain kinds of diversity, such as those of scale, reach, language, ideology, style, genre and medium. However, they incorporate an element of essential unity related to the cultural homogeneity that exists within the geographical boundaries of nation states. They also infer commonalities – structural, operational and regulatory as well as those related to the political, social, macroeconomic and historical environments – and it would be reasonable to say that a majority or state language is also implied, for that is the nature of states.

The Indian situation is different from most other countries because its diversity, which is on a continental scale, often seems to overpower the commonalities of political, legal and macroeconomic systems. India is not a nation state; it has variously been described as a ‘civilisation-state’ (Kumar, 2000) and a ‘multinational state’ (Stepan, Linz and Yadav, 2011). Geographical spread and diversities of language, culture, state-level politics, economic status and, sometimes, history combine in identifiably distinct ways, which are then reflected in the existence of differentiated media systems. From Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) to Hallin and Mancini’s recent book, *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (2012b), academics have not considered a complex cluster of differentiated but interlinked media systems such as India’s, which collectively account for the most number of news television channels and newspaper titles, and the largest aggregate newspaper circulation (WAN-IFRA, 2010).

Reach and scale are an important distinguishing characteristic. In television news, for instance, there are channels that have a national footprint, those that have a state-wide footprint, then those that have a city-wide presence, but also a fourth category – news channels run by local cable operators and distributed over analogue cables to a small

local network. The last category – there are about 60,000 cable operators in India (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2011) – often operate under the official radar totally unregulated, according to Pankaj Pachauri, former Editor, Special Projects, at the respected broadcaster NDTV and Communications Advisor to the Prime Minister of India (Pachauri, Interview). The Managing Editor of the English news channel, CNN-IBN, Vinay Tewari, characterises the different layers of television as distinct enough for their combination to result in ‘insanity’ (Tewari, Interview). A similar differentiation on the basis of scale and reach characterises the newspaper market.

Geography often also places state-level media systems in closer touch with state-specific political polarisations or cultural narratives that differentiate them from other state-level systems, loosening the bonds of commonalities at the national level. One example is that of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where Tamil-language television – both news and entertainment – is dominated by politically owned channels. However, the major newspapers of the state, having learnt to keep a distance from politicians, apparently occupy a different world altogether. Another example is that of Gujarat, where the Editors Guild of India found that state-level media often supported the 2002 pogrom against Muslims that resulted in more than 3,000 deaths, in sharp contrast to the strong condemnation voiced by the national media (Patel, Padgaonkar and Verghese, 2002).

Perhaps the most prominent distinguishing characteristic of Indian media systems is language. India’s 28 states and seven ‘union territories’ encompass a linguistic diversity – accompanied by a diversity of culture, food and dress – that is greater than that of most continents. Hindi, the language most spoken and understood across the country – and the language of Bollywood films – is the designated official language of the Republic of India, but it is spoken by only 41 per cent people as their first language, and about 53 per cent if one counts those for whom it is a second or third language (Census of India, 2001).

There are many other prominent languages in different parts of the country. The eighth schedule of the Constitution of India lists 22 of them, including Hindi, but excluding English, which is an important secondary official language for all practical purposes. Each state and union territory designates its own official language, and only 12 of them

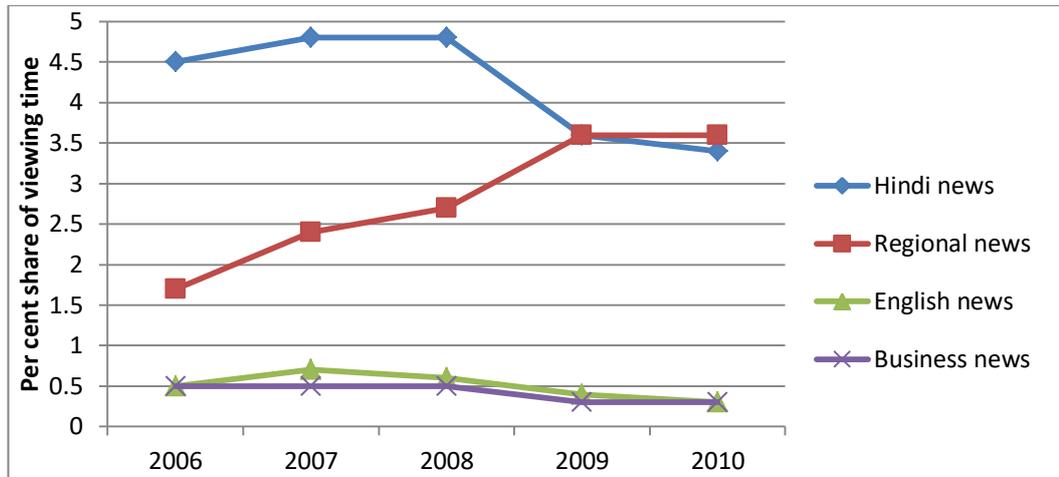
list Hindi among their official language(s). At least nine states and union territories include English as an official language or an officially recognised language; three of them have English as their sole official language. The Census of India lists 122 languages and more than 200 other ‘mother tongues’ that are variants of these languages. In all, 14 languages are spoken by 10 million or more people, 29 languages by more than a million people, 60 by more than 100,000 and 122 by more than 10,000 people (Census of India, 2001). Thus, viable media markets exist in many languages.

In the wake of the economic growth witnessed since the reforms of the early 1990s, India’s multiple media systems in different languages and with varied footprints have grown and developed in both reach and content. A series of articles by Robin Jeffrey in the *Economic and Political Weekly* showed how regional newspaper markets in different languages had adopted diverging trajectories under the influence of local forces and cultures (Jeffrey, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d, 1997e, 1997f, 1997g, 1997h, 1997i and 1997j).

Trends and developments in these regional media systems can be independent of the ‘national’ English media system and the not-quite-national Hindi media system that plays a prominent role in about a dozen states and union territories. The expanding market is yet to settle into any kind of equilibrium. As regional media systems develop, their offerings change and they exhibit the ability to draw audiences away from the English and Hindi media systems. This is facilitated by the fact that 255 million Indians are bilingual and 87.5 million speak three or more languages (Census of India, 2001). This ability of audiences to shift not only within media systems, but across media systems, has added to the competitive pressures in Indian media and has been deeply unsettling for news organisations.

Figure 4.17 shows that news viewership is shifting from English and Hindi to regional languages. This shift from national-level channels to state-level channels is reflective of, among other things, the rise of the role of state-level political parties as coalition partners in national governments.

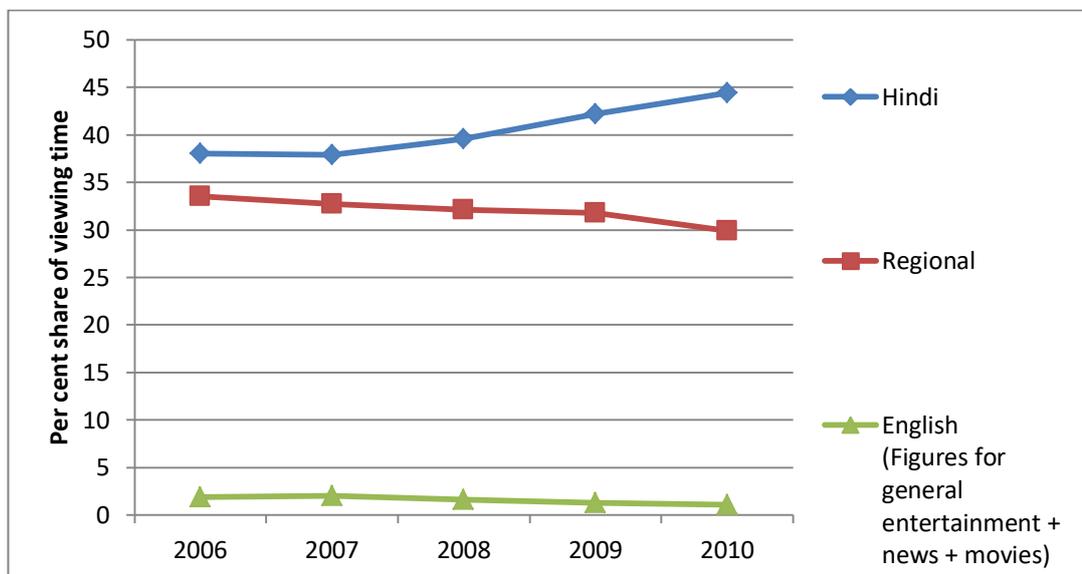
**Figure 4.17: News viewership in different languages**



Source: TAM Peoplemeter Systems (KPMG, 2011)

Interestingly, this shift of audiences is not mirrored in entertainment television. When one takes general entertainment and movies also into account, the shift is in the opposite direction, from regional to Hindi (Figure 4.18).

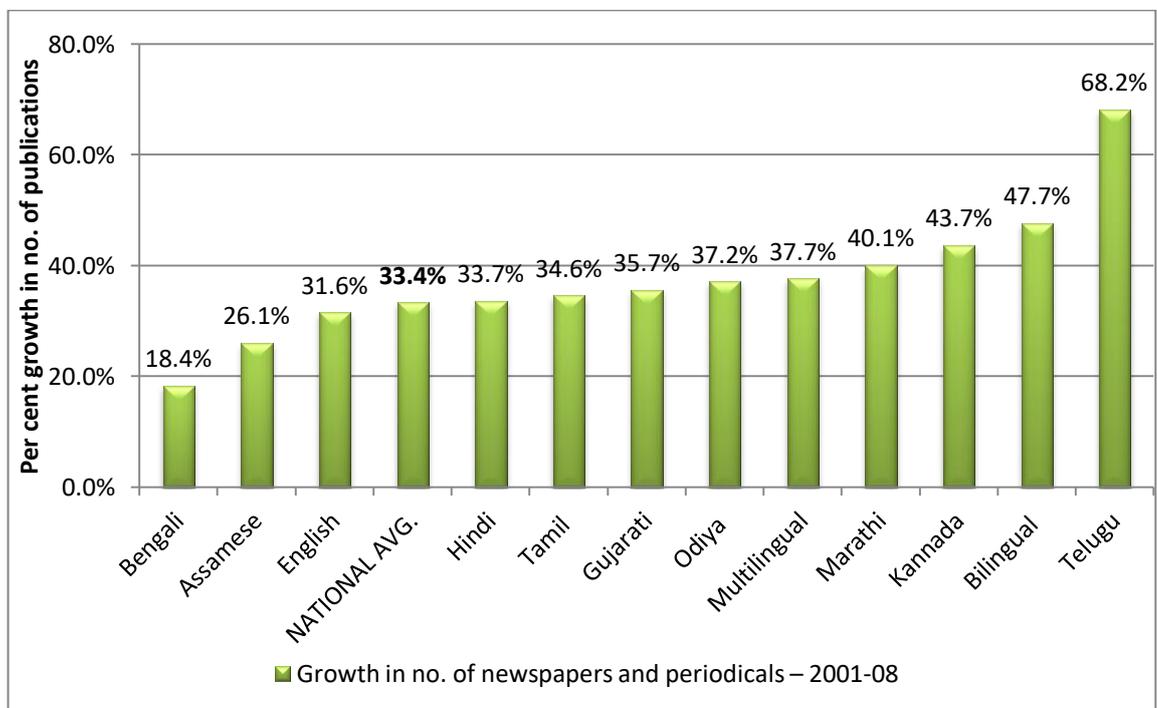
**Figure 4.18: Television viewership by language  
(general entertainment + news + movies)**



All India; Source: TAM Peoplemeter Systems, Universe: CS 4+years (KPMG, 2011)

In newspapers, the shift parallels that of news television. Newspapers in all languages in India continue to grow, both in numbers and in reach, but media systems in several Indian languages are growing faster than those in Hindi and English. The largest number of newspapers and periodicals continues to be published in Hindi (32,793 in March 2011), followed by English (11,478), but the pace of growth in several other languages is faster. This differential growth is depicted in Figure 4.19, which shows that between 2001 and 2008, while the numbers of Hindi and English newspapers and periodicals grew at roughly about the national average of 33.4 per cent, many languages grew much faster.

**Figure 4.19: Differential growth in numbers of print media by language**



Analysis based on data from the Registrar of Newspapers for India

At one level, the growth of regional-language news is a reflection of economics. Advertisers, looking for new markets beyond the large cities, have turned their attention to small towns and even rural areas as they look for new consumers in the ‘consumption hubs’ represented by these markets to fuel their ‘next level of growth’ (KPMG, 2012: 6; Das, Interview). This is a critical element in the gathering momentum of regional language media.

At another level, the shift from the ‘national’ languages of Hindi and English to regional languages in the news sphere reflects momentous trends in Indian politics. Indian politics contains a large element of identity politics. Religion, caste and ethnicity have played a large role, as has language, both before and after the redrawing of state boundaries along linguistic lines by the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. Many political parties, including those that are increasingly active at the national level, have geographical footprints that are largely restricted to one state and thus to the language groups defined by state boundaries. The Election Commission of India lists only six national parties, but 52 state parties and 1,112 other smaller parties (state parties are those that obtain at least 6 per cent of the vote or a minimum number of legislators in a state; those that meet these conditions in at least four states are designated national parties) (Election Commission of India, 2010). In the first 42 years of independent India, 1947–89, most national governments were formed by a national party with a clear parliamentary majority. In contrast, in the quarter century from 1989 to 2014, almost all national governments in New Delhi were multi-party coalitions in which state parties played an important role. This, in turn, has resulted in an expansion of the national public sphere to include a larger number of inputs and influences from politics and cultures specific to particular language groups.

The political and economic shifts that have resulted in the regionalisation of the media sphere have begun to erode, if not threaten, the pre-eminent position of Hindi and English news media. This is also reflected in a slow but steady drop in the premium on advertising rates enjoyed by them for reaching desired target groups of influential consumers. Between 2007 and 2009, English newspapers commanded an advertising premium of 10X, which meant their advertisement rates would be 10 times the amount that a newspaper in a regional language could command for reaching the same number of readers. By 2012, this premium had come down to approximately 8X, and is expected to fall further to 4X–5X (KPMG, 2012: 41). Hindi and English news television are seeing a similar drop in the advertising premiums they command.

As discussed in this section, India is in that rare and enviable position of hosting a growing newspaper industry. Television is growing even faster but the growth rates of radio, online and mobile outstrip everything else, though of course they start from a far

smaller base. Driven by a combination of demographics, literacy, urbanisation and increasing prosperity, Indian media are witnessing explosive growth. They are also witnessing fragmentation and regionalisation. This creates its own pressures.

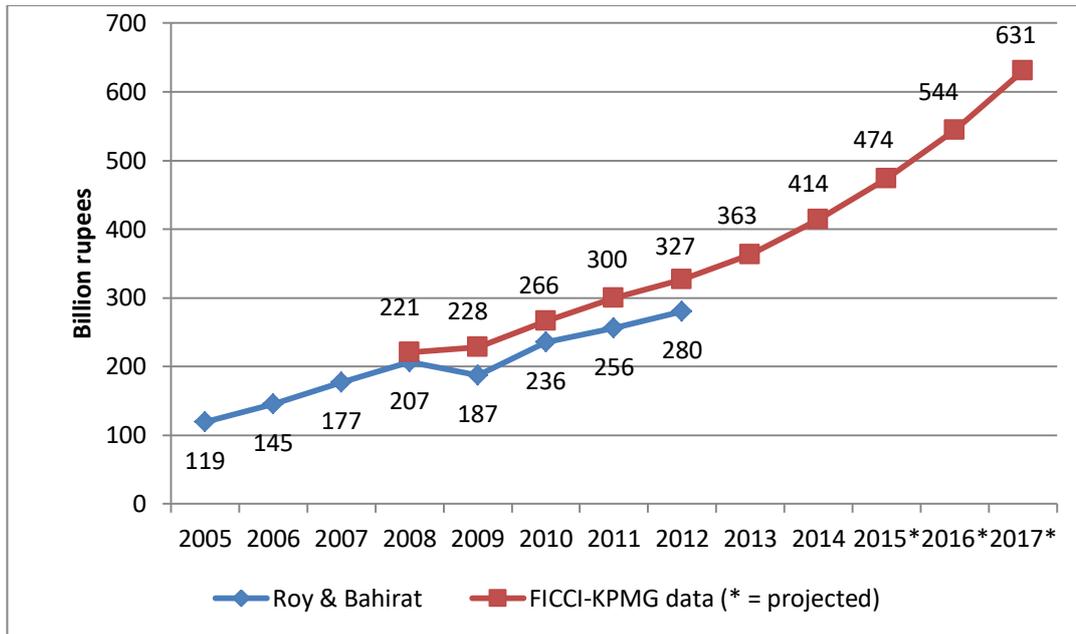
#### **4.4 COMPETITIVE PRESSURES ON REVENUE**

It would be easy to assume that the high growth rates depicted in Figure 4.1 indicate robust all-round health. The growth rates depict sector-wide macro-level statistics which are largely compiled by consulting companies such as KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers. They have been bullish about the media for several years and, even though real growth can be a few percentage points below their projections, the trend they describe is not in question.

However, the reality is more complex. Paradoxically, the rapid growth and expansion of media sectors does not translate into financial health at the level of media organisations. Indian media is not a monolith. It is composed of many interlocking segments of language and scale, and not all of them are healthy. The news media are a relatively small segment of the Indian media, especially in the case of television, where news is dwarfed by entertainment. They often also struggle for survival. In the celebration of overall growth figures, the pressures of competition and profitability on the news business are often overlooked. They will be considered in the rest of this chapter in some detail.

It is true that overall advertising spend has been growing. Figure 4.20 shows the increase in India's total advertising pie according to two sets of data. The advertising pie doubled in value between 2005 and 2010 despite the dip in advertising in 2008–09 caused by the global economic slowdown and continues to grow rapidly thereafter.

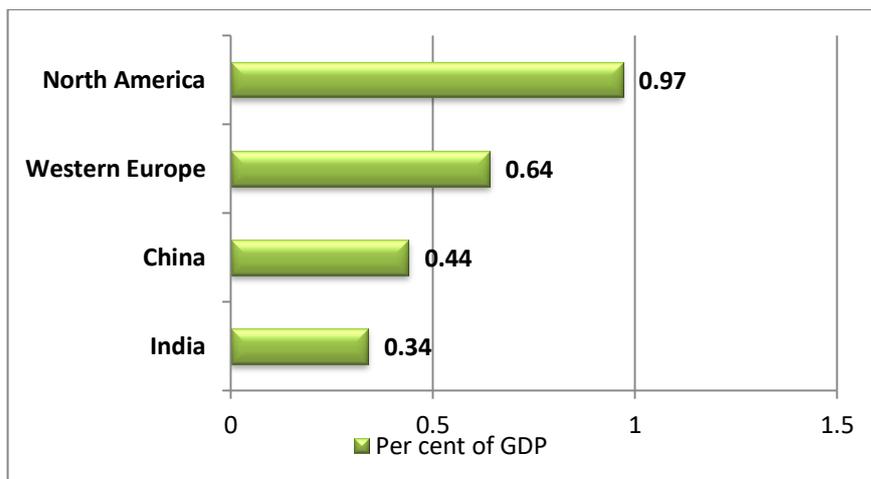
**Figure 4.20: Rise in advertising spend**



Source: Roy and Bahirat, 2011; FICCI-KPMG, 2015

The total advertising spend in India as a proportion of GDP is also relatively low in comparison to many other countries and regions (Figure 4.21). Combined with overall economic growth, expectations that this ratio will rise are a significant factor in the optimistic growth forecasts for Indian media.

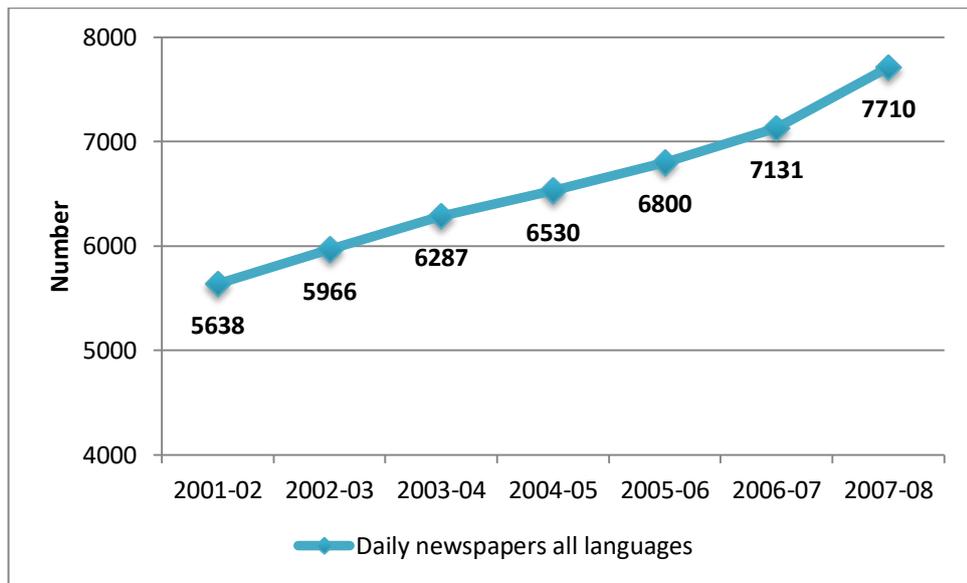
**Figure 4.21: Advertising spend as a percentage of GDP**



Source: Ernst & Young, 2011

However, what these statistics hide is the institution-level situation within the news media. There are intense levels of competition caused by the rise in the number of daily newspaper titles competing for the advertising pie (Figure 4.22) in the years leading up to the 2009 elections when paid news became rampant.

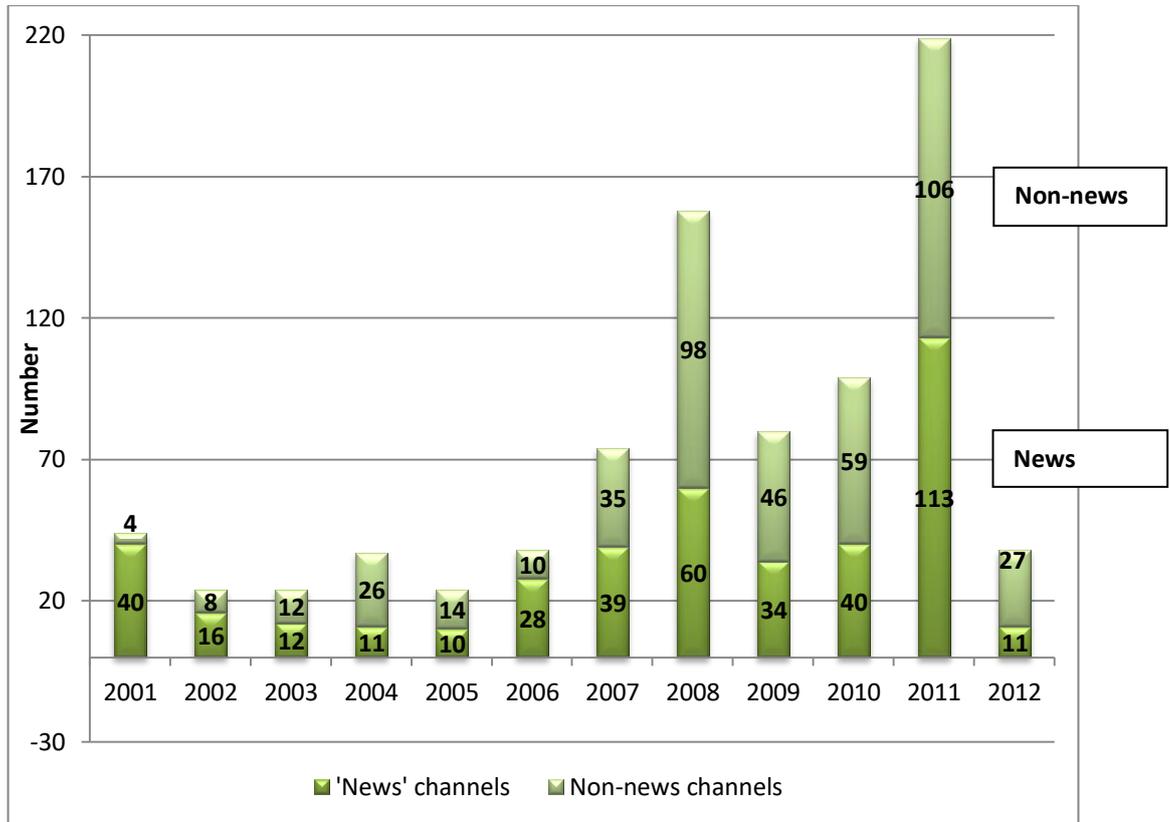
**Figure 4.22: Number of registered daily newspapers in India 2001–08**



Source: Registrar of Newspapers for India

Competition is most severe in the television news industry, where about 800 channels received permission to begin operations from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting between January 2001 and early March 2012 (Figure 4.23).

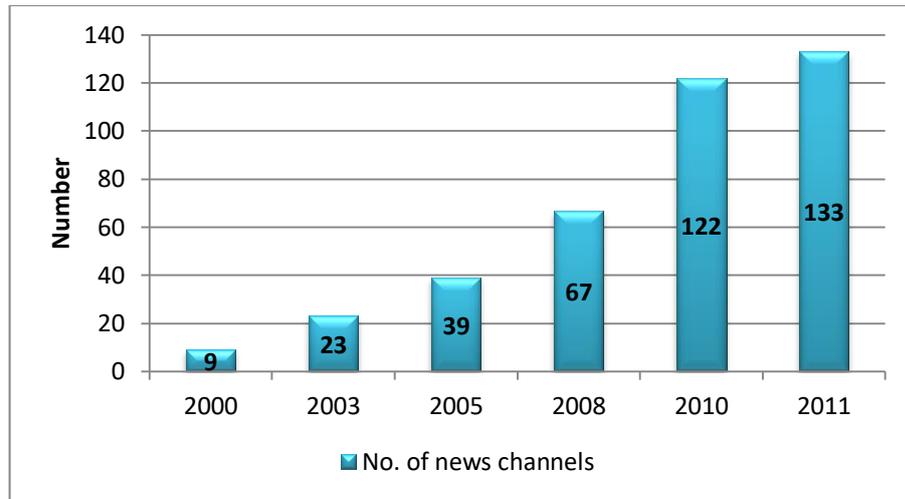
**Figure 4.23: Proliferation of news and non-news channels**



Permissions given to satellite television channels for uplinking or downlinking.  
 Source: Compiled from data from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

The figures include channels allowed to uplink content as well as a few foreign channels that are only allowed to downlink, but not uplink. By the end of 2011, 821 private satellite television channels had received clearance from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting – 419 ‘non-news’ channels and 402 ‘news and current affairs channels’. The latter category includes all channels that have any new and current affairs content. The audience measurement company, TAM Peoplemeter Systems, on the other hand, counts only those that have 24-hour news or a majority of news content, and their figures show that India had 122 news channels in 2010 (Figure 4.24), a number that cannot be imagined in any other country.

**Figure 4.24: Proliferation of news channels**



Source: TAM Peoplemeter Systems

Vinay Tewari, managing editor of the prominent English-language, 24-hour news channel, CNN-IBN, feels that the technology led the government down a path that it was not ready to travel:

2005 is when I believe it became a little insane when you had this huge explosion of number of channels. Principally there wasn't anything wrong with the booming market, but the problem was the government didn't realise the impact of this boom, they didn't understand technology. Governments usually are behind in terms of understanding technology and they didn't understand that this could lead to some extremely uncomfortable situations and that's what finally happened. [...] The boom was good in certain aspects, but it was terrible in some other aspects and I think we were late in recognising that and we are still learning the lessons from that.

(Tewari, Interview)

#### **4.4.1 The newspaper business**

The newspaper sector in India has been marked by a rapid multiplication in the number of publications jostling for public attention as demonstrated by figures published by the Registrar of Newspapers for India. The total number of titles registered has risen from 77,369 in March 2010 to 105,443 in March 2015 – a rise of 36 per cent in five years.

Simultaneously, newspapers have launched multiple localised editions to achieve deeper penetration and engage with local readers in the vast country. Traditionally, even the newspapers that considered themselves national in character and influence operated within restricted geographical areas. Among the large English newspapers in the 1980s, *Hindustan Times* had the highest circulation in New Delhi; *The Times of India* was number one in Mumbai and influential but second in New Delhi; Chennai belonged to *The Hindu*; and *The Statesman* and *The Telegraph* competed in Kolkata. Some newspapers had multiple editions in other cities – *The Hindu* was influential in several south Indian cities including Bengaluru (earlier Bangalore) and Hyderabad, and *The Indian Express* had almost a dozen editions, a majority of them in the four states of south India. However, because markets were dominated by the newspapers in the language of each state or region – usually termed ‘regional languages’ in India – and consumer buying power stretched to only one newspaper, English newspapers usually played second fiddle to regional language newspapers. *The Times of India*, for instance, had editions in the cities of Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Jaipur, Lucknow and Patna by 1986, but all of them were minor players locally.

This has changed. Large newspapers in India no longer rely on one centrally produced product for their entire geographical footprint. *The Times of India* jumped from 12 to 33 editions in the four years from 2010 to 2014 (Registrar of Newspapers in India). The aggressive expansion into new territory is driven by the desire to offer advertisers the attraction of single-window access to audiences across states. *Dainik Jagran*’s Editor-in-Chief and CEO speaks the language of advertising and marketing when he talks about offering advertisers display and interactive services through its network:

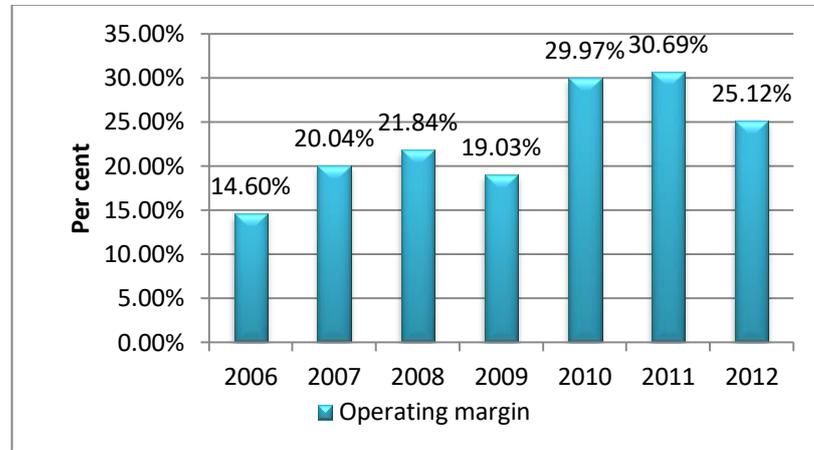
As a company we are structured into outdoor and below-the-line activation also. They contribute a significant amount of revenue. That was basically thought of by me as a 360-degree solution to marketers. So it’s a one stop shop. You come here and, apart from television, we give you everything.

(Gupta, Interview)

Jagran Prakashan is one of India’s more profitable media companies, with margins that would be the envy of media businesses anywhere in the world (Figure 4.25). The group publishes 111 editions across 11 titles in five languages reaching 69 million readers in

15 states, and also owns several websites and other media businesses devoted to digital media, outdoor advertising and ‘brand activation’ (Jagran Prakashan, 2012).

**Figure 4.25: Operating margins – Jagran Prakashan Ltd**



Source: Jagran Prakashan Annual Report 2011–12

*The Times of India* group is said to enjoy similarly high margins (Auletta, 2012), but, as India’s largest media company (Kohli-Khandekar, 2010), it is far larger than the Jagran group.

With more than half a dozen large newspaper players simultaneously seeking rapidly to expand and deepen their footprints, the newspaper business is intensely competitive. Tarun Basu, Editor-in-Chief of Indo Asian News Service, thinks the market is not big enough to accommodate so many players:

There might be growth for some newspapers and magazines, but I don’t think the advertising pie is growing corresponding to the growth in the industry. So, finally, at the end of the day advertising chases target markets. Target markets are the middle class market and the middle class market is really not growing that much. The figures vary from 150–300 million. So, basically, everybody is targeting that market.

(Basu, Interview)

Even as each sector of the media grows (as depicted in Figure 4.1), each slice of the advertising pie is fiercely contested, and the less muscular players stay hungry. In each region or market, the leaders are profitable, but smaller newspapers struggle. Data from

the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2011 Q3 shows that in the state of Gujarat, the top three newspapers command 85 per cent of the audience; in Rajasthan, the top two take 74 per cent; and in Andhra Pradesh, the top two take 65 per cent, leaving slim pickings for the other hundreds of smaller newspapers.

Even though big players such as *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Dainik Jagran*, *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Malayala Manorama* dominate their home markets, they often struggle in the fresh markets that they seek to enter. The strategy of choice is to hurt existing market leaders in their wallets by starting a price war. It is perhaps noteworthy that it is inspired by Western media systems, notably business strategies adopted by Rupert Murdoch. Soon after Murdoch initiated a price war in the UK by dropping the prices of *The Sun* and *The Times* in the early and mid-1990s, *The Times of India* also dropped its price in Delhi, where it was trying to unseat *Hindustan Times* as the market leader (Whitaker, 1994; Malhan, 2013). Today, price wars, especially when an outside newspaper attempts to break into an established market away from its home, are standard business practice in the Indian newspaper industry. Senior journalist Vivian Fernandes explains:

*The Times of India* wanted to outstrip the *Hindustan Times* in circulation in New Delhi. That is why they started the invitation pricing strategy of selling the newspaper for Re.1 or Rs.2 and the intention was to inflict a greater loss on *Hindustan Times*, since it had a bigger print order.

(Fernandes, Interview)

The head of the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai, Sashi Kumar, describes how this tactic has been perfected over the years:

The leading newspaper, which is *The Times of India*, whose advertising revenues are probably slightly more than No.2 and No.3 put together, so that is the kind of leadership position it's got. So, when that newspaper moves into new turf, it cuts the subscription price to below the cost of production of the paper, Re.1 for a paper. [...] The others have to follow because they have no choice. Otherwise you are left out. They come and take over a turf, there is a price cut and war of undercutting prices, and newspapers that used to charge a cover price of Rs.3 bring it down to Re.1 and then Re.1 becomes the norm.

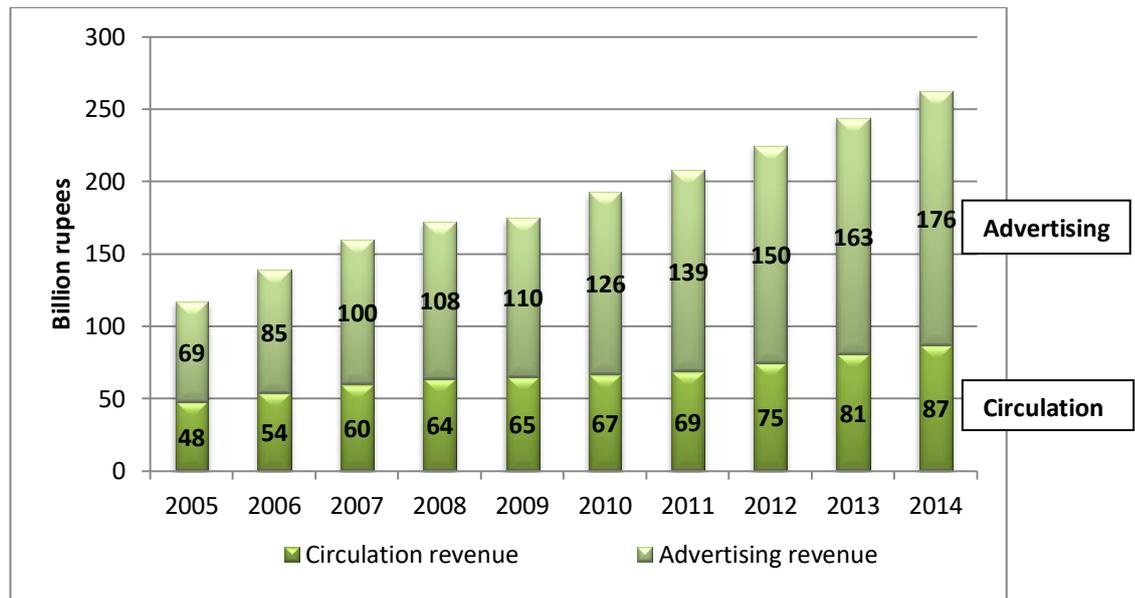
(S. Kumar, Interview)

The practices at the national level or in state capitals and large cities are replicated at other levels. R. Poornima, Assistant Editor of *Mayura* in Bengaluru, describes the media as existing at three levels within each state: ‘In every state, we have a three-tier journalism actually – state level newspapers, district level newspapers and taluk [sub-district] level newspapers’ (Poornima, Interview). As newspapers from the ‘metros’ (a term used to refer collectively to New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, and sometimes extended to include Hyderabad and Bengaluru) expand into state capitals, state-level newspapers in turn expand laterally into other states or vertically penetrate the lower tiers of the media system with customised local editions.

As a result of repeated price wars, newspaper cover prices have settled at levels that are sustainable only by the leaders in each market, the top two or three who attract the bulk of audiences and an even larger proportion of the advertising. In India, the price for a 24- or 32-page broadsheet newspaper delivered to your doorstep is typically between Rs.1.50 and Rs.3. At the equivalent of £0.02–0.03, that is 2 or 3 British pence (2015 exchange rates), the selling price barely covers the cost of the printing ink used. Each copy is sold at a substantial loss, and the more copies that sell, the more money the publisher loses. Probably the only reason newspapers are not given away free is that they would disappear during distribution and would not reach the reader, being sold instead in bulk for recycling (in India, the price for newspapers as ‘*raddi*’ or scrap for recycling has varied between Rs.3 and Rs.5 per kg over the last two decades). There are other interesting sidelights such as the practice of printing thousands of extra copies to boost circulation figures to impress advertisers. These extra copies go straight from the printing plant to the scrap dealer. The former Editor-in-Chief of *The Hindu*, N. Ram, describes this practice of dumping copies as ‘systemic’ (Ram, 2012).

Figure 4.26 shows that revenue from circulation has been falling as a proportion of the total revenue for print.

**Figure 4.26: Print industry – advertising and circulation revenues**



Source: KPMG Analysis (FICCI-KPMG, 2011, 2012, 2015)

For the industry as a whole, circulation revenue from the cover price now stands at only about a third of the total, with advertising accounting for two-thirds. However, for the dominant players in each market, advertising has an even larger share of their total revenue. Sashi Kumar of the Asian College of Journalism, closely associated with *The Hindu*, says about 85 per cent of the revenue of an English newspaper comes from advertising (S. Kumar, Interview). Gupta of *Dainik Jagran* puts the share of advertising as '75 to 80 per cent' (Gupta, Interview).

K.N. Shanth Kumar, Director and member of the family that publishes several newspapers including the *Deccan Herald* in Bengaluru, says this business model has made newspapers vulnerable to advertisers – any variation in their spending could create waves for publishers:

If you look at it 25 or 30 years ago and you look at it now, you find a very distinct change. As you know, newspapers have two revenue streams. Probably 20, 25, 30 years ago, circulation and advertising revenue streams were more or less equal so we were not over-dependent on any one of them. So, if you had a problem with advertising, let us say for some reason – economics or whatever – and you had a slight drop in advertising revenue and it wouldn't really concern you too much because you had a fairly decent

circulation revenue and vice versa. But what has happened over the last many years, due to reasons which are well known, newspapers are overly dependent on the advertising revenue and the circulation revenue is becoming less and less important. Virtually you know, newspapers are selling at Rs.2 or Rs.3 in this country, these guys are actually giving it away free. I don't know any other country in the world where newspapers of this pagination, similar pagination, are sold at this price. Therefore, newspapers are becoming extremely sensitive to any slight variation in advertising revenues, and it impacts the bottom line in a huge way

(Shanth Kumar, Interview)

Fernandes (Interview) goes further to say that '*The Times of India's* invitation pricing strategy actually broke the business model of print journalism'. Others, such as Sashi Kumar (Interview), also point out that this business model makes newspapers vulnerable to the pressures of advertisers, a factor that is considered in greater detail in the next chapter.

Thus, data from statistics and interviews shows that though newspapers in India are rapidly expanding in reach and numbers, they exist in an environment that is intensely competitive. This state of hyper-competition is caused by a very large number of players simultaneously diversifying into each other's geographical and linguistic markets so that they can offer wider reach to advertisers. In addition, prevailing business practices such as never-ending price wars have skewed the business model so that it is heavily dependent on advertising. This revenue model defines the business model, and these in turn help identify the pressures on newspapers and their resultant vulnerabilities. These factors are considered later in this chapter and will also inform the discussion on the inner case study in the next chapter.

#### **4.4.2 The business of news television**

If newspapers seem to be constantly in search of profitability in a high-pressure market, the pressures on news television are even greater. This is a relatively new sector, no more than 20 years in the making, but also extremely crowded, as has been shown in Figures 4.23 and 4.24.

Many of the factors that rule the newspaper market apply to television as well in the period under study – hyper competition caused by a large number of players; strenuous efforts by big players to expand into other geographical and linguistic markets to attract advertisers; unbalanced revenue streams leading to unstable business models; and an overwhelming dependence on advertisers. These factors play out in a manner different from the newspaper sector, but there are distinct similarities, which are also evident in the role of news television in the inner case study, paid news.

Explosive is perhaps an understatement for the rate of growth in Indian news television. Pankaj Pachauri, formerly Communications Advisor to the Indian Prime Minister and senior broadcast journalist, says the advertising pie is being sliced ever thinner:

The media market has grown so fast and has become so big that it has become unviable financially. In 2000, we had five television channels in the country, now we have more than 700 and if you look at the numbers in terms of advertising revenue increase, it has not kept pace with the increase in the volume, so right now we are in a situation where in the last four years the revenue generation increased 13 per cent a year, but volume increased 26 per cent a year, so the [growth rate of] volumes are double of revenues, so naturally, most of the media companies are in the red. And if they are not in the red, they are working on very low margins. Now, of these 700 channels, India is the only country which has more than 300 news channels. Out of the 300 news channels, about 150 news channels are 24x7 news channels which are in 18 languages. So, in terms of news density we are one of the most dense markets, say, if you compare it to the US where for their entire population there are about a dozen 24-hour news channels. China has 36 channels.

(Pachauri, Interview)

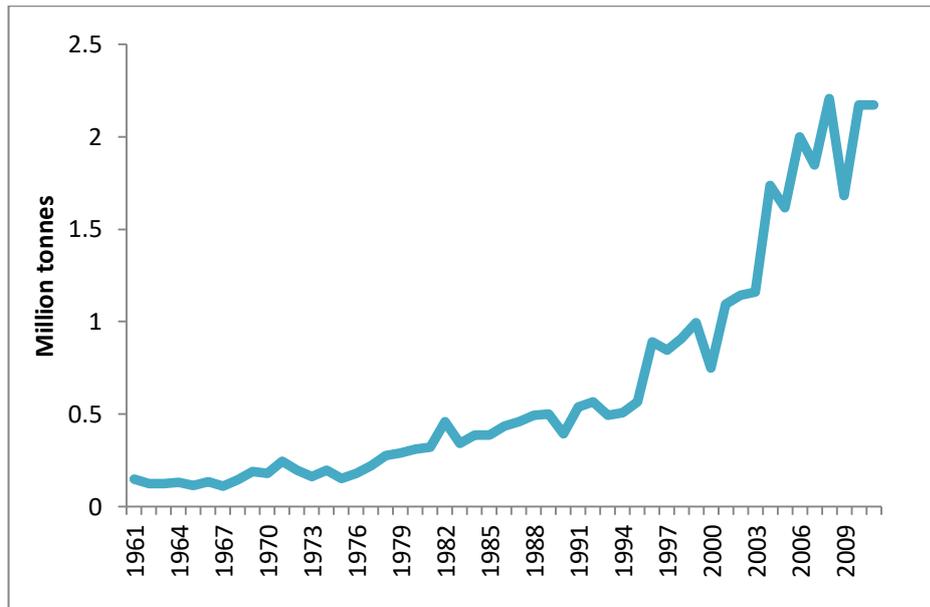
An interesting sidelight is that the rapid growth of television news is also credited with being instrumental in the growth of the newspaper market; the CEO of Jagran Prakashan makes the argument that television fuelled the appetite for news:

The TV was a proper catalyst for news. The way TV grew...with TV, the newspapers grew. They were feeding the appetite for news in a common man's home, for the news basically. To develop an idea of what really is news, and then going for the newspaper.

(Gupta, Interview)

Of course, television news was not the only factor. As discussed earlier, growing literacy and growing prosperity were also central. Data on newsprint consumption in India bears this out with a distinct upward trend from the mid-1990s when independent news started being broadcast (Figure 4.27)

**Figure 4.27: Newsprint consumption in India**



Source: Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)

In the newspaper market, relatively few fresh entrants have attained scale. In the much younger news television business, however, there is a constant stream of new entrants seeking to establish themselves. As new players crowded the news television market, older broadcasters sought to consolidate their position by becoming bigger, launching more channels and expanding into other languages and niches. Fernandes, who works with the Network18 group, which broadcasts a ‘bouquet’ of channels including news in English and Hindi and financial news, says that rapid expansion is no more than a basic strategy for survival: ‘TV groups like ours are over-leveraged because of quick and massive expansion. This is a necessity of the marketplace. If you are small, you perish’ (Fernandes, Interview).

Newspapers, as seen previously, suffer from an imbalance between advertising revenue and circulation revenue. News television has a similar imbalance between advertising

revenue and subscription revenue, again with the former dominating. Newspapers have lost circulation revenue because of price wars, but news television has never been able to gather subscription revenue for two reasons – leakage of revenue and high distribution costs.

Both these problems are related to the persistence of legacy analogue technology in parts of the system. Broadcasting in India is digital – in fact, it exists in its present crowded form entirely because digital transponders on satellites caused transmission costs to plummet in the early 2000s. Despite efforts to introduce digitisation since about 2010, parts of the distribution network are only partially digitised. Many of the cable operators that distribute signals through coaxial cable strung across neighbourhoods still use analogue equipment. In addition, there are a large number of analogue television sets within viewing households. Both of these analogue systems affect subscription revenue.

The first problem, high distribution costs, arises from a large number of channels competing to get on to the limited bandwidth that is available on homes with analogue television sets. Distribution networks charge channels high ‘carriage fees’, says Zee News CEO Barun Das:

Today, even with digitisation, more than 80 per cent of the television households in this country are analogue driven. When you have an analogue system, you have a capacity constraint. An average television set cannot show you more than 50 channels clearly, but there are 450 channels. So that has given a rise to a phenomenon called – which is there across the country – phenomenon called carriage fees. When 450 channels want to be seen in the top 60 frequencies, there is a price to pay for it. So, the entire equation, compared to the rest of the world and of advanced economies where 70 per cent of the revenue comes from subscription, the entire equation got reversed. The subscription side is actually one of the biggest cost centres of television industry because of carriage fees.

(Das, Interview)

Carriage fees represent a major head of expenditure, but they have to be borne for the sake of visibility in a crowded landscape, explains Abhay Ojha, Vice-President for advertising sales in the TV9 group:

Distribution is almost about 40–50 per cent of the top line, which is huge and it is growing, plus you have inflation, so running a news channel is no more a very profitable proposition. The only source of business revenue is advertisements. Very few channels are paid channels as in being paid for viewing. [...] Most of the channels are still free to air because you can only become a pay channel provided you are part of the bigger bouquet and not many channels are part of the bigger bouquet. Therefore, they are free-to-air channels so that by paying certain amount of money to MSOs – multi-system operators – and local cable operators, at least the news is disseminated. And at times what happens is that you have to pay some incremental money to the operators so that you are there in the tuneable bands so that the audience can see you. There is a common saying you know, *jo dikhta hai, woh bikta hai* [that which is visible, sells].

(Ojha, Interview)

The second problem – leakage of revenue – occurs because cable operators under-declare the number of households from whom they collect subscriptions, as Executive Vice-Chairman of the leading news broadcaster, New Delhi Television (NDTV), and President of the News Broadcasters' Association, K.V.L. Narayan Rao, explains:

Commercial broadcasters have been denied our share of subscription revenues over the last so many years, which includes things like under-declaration by the local cable operator of the number of homes that he actually services. [...] Once we go digital we will have numbers that are credible, we will have to be paid for the homes that we send our signals to and once that happens, once we start reaching the world trend then yes, then the dependence on advertising will be reduced dramatically.

(Rao, Interview)

Though the television sector as a whole generates substantial subscription revenue, news television sees only a small fraction of it, says Rao:

So far as subscription revenue is concerned, the three top entertainment players –entertainment and sports, we put both in the same category because sports like cricket also make a lot of money – the top players take something of a 95 per cent of the total amount of revenue of subscription and 5 per cent is shared by the rest and not everybody gets subscription revenue. So, among news broadcasters, for example, I may be one of the few who is actually getting some subscription revenue, and even that amounts to just about 10 per cent of my total.

(Rao, Interview)

Broadcasters, especially news broadcasters, are banking on the digitisation of distribution to solve the problems of leakage of subscription revenue and high carriage fees.

In the print media there is an inordinate dependence on advertising because newspapers are sold virtually free. This started with *TOI's* [*Times of India*] invitation pricing strategy. In TV, the business model is broke because of massive under-reporting of subscriptions by cable operators and huge carriage fees that the distributors charge. This would hopefully change with digitisation.

(Fernandes, Interview)

Digital set-top boxes, also called the conditional access system, installed in homes allow greater clarity in the billing of consumers. They also obviate the need for channels to compete for a limited number of 'tuneable channels' (see Ojha, Interview, above) on analogue television sets. They thus address both of the problems that prevent broadcasters from receiving legitimate subscription revenue. Similar advantages accrue from the adoption of direct-to-home (DTH) technology charted in Figure 4.6, but DTH technology requires the installation of a small dish akin to the Sky dish in the UK and subscription can cost the viewer 30–40 per cent more than receiving the signal from a neighbourhood cable operator.

The process of digitisation of cable operations was begun in 2012 with the compulsory switchover to digital set-top boxes or conditional access systems (FICCI-KPMG, 2013). Digitisation is being undertaken in four phases moving outwards from Mumbai and Delhi into smaller towns. About 30 per cent of Indian households have been digitised in the first two phases, which had been completed by 2015 (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2015), but the proportion was much lower in the period being studied here.

As a result of the virtual absence of subscription revenue, advertising is the dominant revenue stream for news broadcasters. It skews the business model and, of course, it makes survival difficult:

The global trend is that you get about 50 per cent of your revenue from advertisers and 50 per cent from subscription. In India it is something in the

region of 90:10, so all of us are actually being pushed against a wall at this moment, some are struggling to keep afloat.

(Rao, Interview)

Rao goes on to explain that, in any case, news channels get only a small share of overall advertising revenue in television as a whole. Many broadcasting companies subsidise news with profits from entertainment television:

Now, so far as the advertising is concerned, news earns very little in comparison to entertainment. In entertainment, the big players like STAR Plus, Zee, Colors and Sony make huge revenues. If you are in that position in entertainment, it means that in about two years you will be profitable and generate enough profits to run the rest of the businesses. STAR certainly does that, Zee certainly does that. We have similar plans.

(Rao, Interview)

News channels account for approximately half of all channels operating in India, but they command only 13.5 per cent of the total advertising across television genres (KPMG, 2011: 20). In addition, the larger and more popular broadcasters corner advertising revenue, as happens in the newspaper sector. Zee News Limited, which runs the Hindi news channel, Zee News, the Hindi business news channel, Zee Business, and six other news channels in other Indian languages, is one of the few news organisations to turn a profit. Zee News has, of course, benefited in the past from being part of a larger group that includes popular entertainment channels. The Sun TV network, which broadcasts 21 channels in four south Indian languages, is another profitable market leader. The TV Today Network, which produces four channels in Hindi and English, has shown small profits in the last few years, but other prominent broadcasters, including NDTV (three news channels, a lifestyle channel and other media holdings) and Network18 (five news channels and several other channels, among other media holdings), have shown losses for the last several years, the annual reports of the companies show. Smaller, less popular broadcasters and channels are almost all in the red.

This is despite the fact that news channels command a premium on advertising rates – Hindi news channels, for instance, command 4.07 per cent of the viewership across genres, but get 8.51 per cent of all television advertising, leading to a ‘power ratio’ of

2.09 (KPMG, 2011: 20). For English news channels, with 0.4 per cent of the total viewership but 3.56 per cent of advertising revenue, this power ratio is almost 9.

Rao says that most news channels are loss-making: ‘News itself doesn’t generate that kind of revenue. Most of us are loss-making companies today, which means that your shortfall per channel is somewhere in the region of Rs.10–12 crores [\$2–2.4 million]’ (Rao, Interview). He reveals that the bare bones operational costs of a small news channel are in the range of Rs.30–40 crore (\$6–8 million) and that most news channels are in the red. The CEO of Zee News has similar figures:

If I give you a ballpark figure, about 500-odd channels are being produced by 170 companies in the country. Some companies are in multiple channels and some companies, one to two channels. I don’t think more than 15 or 20 of them will be making money at this point in time.

(Das, Interview)

Overall, the picture that emerges of news television is a sector struggling to generate enough revenue to sustain itself. It is overshadowed by entertainment television in terms of both advertising and subscription revenue. The news television sector is also very crowded. In addition, the lack of appropriate systems to support efficient recovery of subscription revenue destabilises the revenue streams and makes news television very dependent upon advertisers. These factors combine to create intense competition for advertising revenue and, of course, impact profitability and business models.

#### **4.5 BUSINESS MODELS AND BUSINESS PRACTICES**

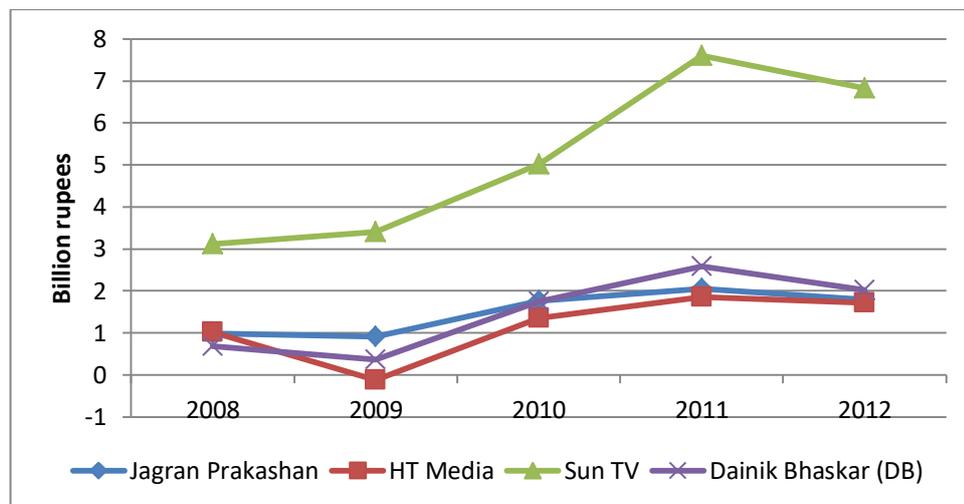
India’s news markets are in a state of flux, caught in a cycle of expensive and risky growth as a strategy for survival. Growth not only demands investment, it has entailed compromises in revenue because of price wars in newspapers and carriage fees in television. The result, as discussed above, is a skewed revenue model that affects business models. These business models, in turn, affect business practices, something that is at the heart of the case study on paid news that will be considered in the next chapter.

In both newspapers and news television, a handful of large players are profitable but the vast majority barely manage to keep their heads above water. Expansion is often fuelled by injections of equity, which brings with it the pressure of shareholders. Some giant media companies, such as the holding company of *The Times of India* group, are privately owned and thus insulated from the pressure of outside investors. However, for publicly listed companies, the pressure of quarterly results cannot be underestimated.

#### 4.5.1 The search for profitability

The profitability of newspaper and news television organisations reveals insights into the pressures they face. Below are provided some graphs charting company results with data extracted from their annual reports. Figure 4.28 shows one set of companies whose financial results display similar trends.

**Figure 4.28: Profitability of media companies 1 – the healthy cresting wave**



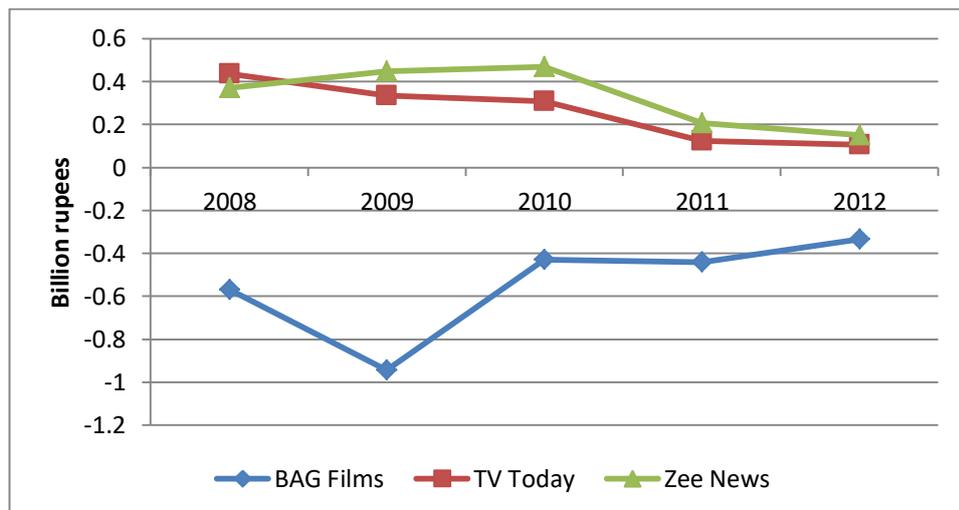
Net profit (consolidated) reported at the end of March each year by Jagran Prakashan, HT Media, Sun TV Network and DB Corp. Source: Annual reports of the companies

The ‘cresting wave’ shape of the profitability curves in Figure 4.28 represents healthy Indian news organisations that have managed to ride out the dip in advertising revenue in 2008–09 (Figure 4.20). The four companies represented in Figure 4.28 are large, with newspapers or television channels that are among the top two players in their respective

markets: HT Media publishes Delhi’s most read newspaper, *Hindustan Times*, and two other leading newspapers (IRS 2012 Q2); DB Corp Limited publishes *Dainik Bhaskar*, a multi-edition Hindi newspaper second only to *Dainik Jagran* in readership; and the Sun TV Network broadcasts 21 television channels in four southern Indian languages. These companies are profitable because they lead the market. Though they – and their business practices – often define the market, their performance is not typical. Not all large media companies exhibit such a curve.

Figure 4.29 shows the profitability of some other news organisations. The TV Today Network broadcasts the leading Hindi news channel, *Aaj Tak*, and Zee News is not far behind in popularity. Their profitability curves, however, show a struggle to survive in their competitive markets. They did not fare very well in 2010–11, a year when the profitable companies shown in Figure 4.28 were cresting the wave and the overall television market grew by more than 10 per cent as shown in Figure 4.1. Of the companies shown in Figure 4.29, BAG Films is yet to achieve operational break-even. It is much smaller and younger than Zee News and TV Today, having launched its news channel in December 2007. These companies show a downward trend in profits, a downward slope that could turn slippery, which their business models attempt to arrest and reverse.

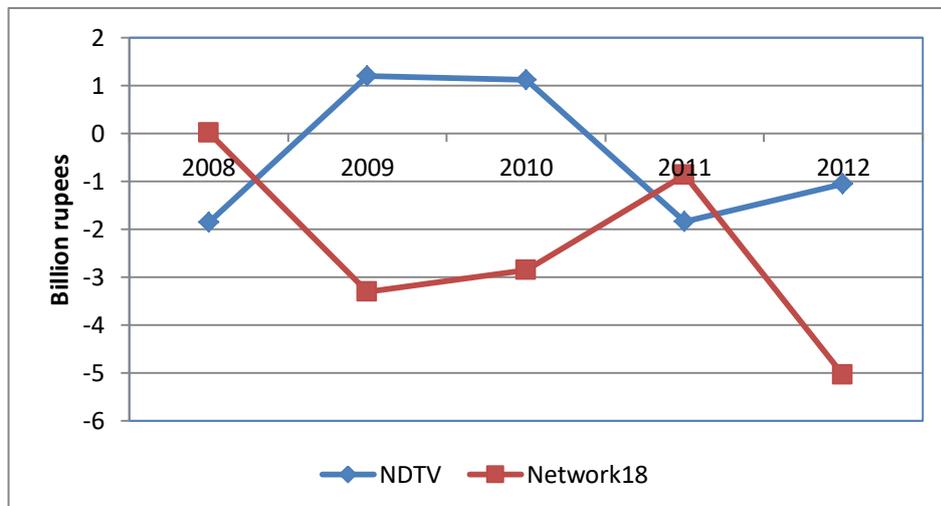
**Figure 4.29: Profitability of media companies 2 – the downward slope**



Net profit (consolidated) reported at the end of March each year by BAG Films and Media, TV Today Network and Zee News. Source: Annual reports of the companies

A third kind of profitability curve – the zig-zag – can be seen. The two companies represented in Figure 4.30 are both large and respected. New Delhi Television broadcasts three news channels, including the well-regarded NDTV 24X7 in English and NDTV India in Hindi. Network18 has a much more diversified offering of entertainment, news and new media over several languages and markets, including a number of channels acquired recently. The profitability graphs of NDTV and Network18 represent the gritty reality of the Indian news business – a market in which the competition represented by sheer numbers leaves no scope for missteps. For both these companies, profits have been zig-zagging in a manner that has caused alarm. T.N. Ninan, one of India’s most respected financial journalists, Chairman and Chief Editor of Business Standard Limited and President of the Editors Guild of India, says the stock market valuation of some television news companies has dropped by ‘up to 80 per cent and even 90 per cent’ (Ninan, 2011).

**Figure 4.30: Profitability of media companies 3 – the zig-zag**



Net profit (consolidated) reported at the end of March each year by New Delhi Television Ltd and Network18 Media and Investments. Source: Annual reports of the companies

The shapes of these three sets of graphs – and the plummeting of stock market valuations – explain why business models are changing and evolving rapidly. Many companies, especially in the hyper-competitive news television space, are experiencing

the market rollercoaster (Figure 4.30), which – if they are both smart and lucky – they might be able to mitigate to the gentler downward slope of Figure 4.29. The goal, of course, is to be in the enviable position of riding the wave (Figure 4.28).

At the same time, it must be pointed out that those organisations that lead the profitability stakes (including the Times Group), also constantly innovate and modify their business models. In fact, an overwhelming proportion of the innovations in business models originate from the Times Group, which is the name used by the publishers of *The Times of India* to refer to their flagship company, Bennett, Coleman and Company Limited, and its portfolio of media outlets.

#### **4.5.2 Disaggregating business models**

It is difficult to precisely define Indian media business models for three reasons. Firstly, organisations are secretive about them, both for reasons of competition and because some of their practices have come in for strong criticism, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. Secondly, in the current phase of explosive growth, business models change rapidly in response to macroeconomic factors, market conditions or strategic innovation. The third reason is that there are no standard templates in literature for describing media business models, and none at all for India, where the media market exhibits unique characteristics because of its size, diversity, number of players and revenue stream imbalances.

Alt and Zimmerman say: ‘The term “business model” often remains undefined and a consensus on the elements of business models is lacking’ (2001: 3). Indeed, in literature related to the media, it is often left at the level of abstract overarching concepts rather than a detailed taxonomy. Picard and Zotto, for instance, define it broadly, but do not list its elements:

A business model involves the conception of how the business operates, its underlying foundations, and the exchange activities and financial flows upon which it can be successful. [...] [Business models] include a description of the potential benefits for the various business actors and the sources of revenues. In terms of modern communications, business models need to account for the vital resources of production and distribution technologies,

content creation or acquisition, as well as recovery of costs for creating, assembling, and presenting the content.

(IFRA, 2006: 5)

The case study at the heart of this research project focuses on paid news, which is linked to changes in the practices of Indian journalism, and these changes are directly influenced by business models, as will be shown in the rest of this chapter and the next chapter.

In the absence of any existing studies of Indian media business models, a preliminary typology of their elements has been developed here to characterise dominant business models and practices. Evidence gathered from various sources, including the data presented earlier in this chapter, is aggregated to present a description of business models that is relevant to the objectives of this study. From among the many typologies that have been proposed to analyse and model business practices, the broad template used here is a modification of the framework presented by Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci. They list nine building blocks grouped under four pillars (2005: 18):

**Table 4.2: Business model building blocks from Osterwalder *et al.* (2005)**

Pillars	Business model building blocks	Description
Product	Value proposition	Gives an overall view of a company's bundle of products and services
Customer interface	Target customer	Describes the segments of customers a company wants to offer value to
	Distribution channel	Describes the various means of the company to get in touch with its customers
	Relationship	Explains the kind of links a company establishes between itself and its different customer segments
Infrastructure management	Value configuration	Describes the arrangement of activities and resources
	Core competency	Outlines the competencies necessary to execute the company's business model
	Partner network	Portrays the network of cooperative

		agreements with other companies necessary to efficiently offer and commercialise value
Financial aspects	Cost structure	Sums up the monetary consequences of the means employed in the business model
	Revenue model	Describes the way a company makes money through a variety of revenue flows

Source: Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci, 2005: 18

This is a general framework, which does not readily lend itself to presenting a complete account of the business reality of Indian news media in a manner that is relevant to this research project. Additional factors suggest themselves as significant, even central, to any attempt to characterise the Indian news business, and some of the elements listed by Osterwalder *et al.* seem to be less germane. For instance, empirical evidence presented in the next chapter suggests that ownership is an important factor in determining the nature of the business models. It would be appropriate to add that. In the same vein, the fourth pillar – infrastructure management – does not add value to the current analysis and can be removed.

Presented below is a modified typology of elements that characterise Indian news media business models. It is geared towards analysing the influence of business models on journalism, so the choice of elements reflects this specific purpose.

**Table 4.3: Typology of elements of Indian news media business models**

Pillars	Business model building blocks	Comments
Structures and influences	Ownership and internal structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ownership and owners' interests</li> <li>• Inter-departmental dynamics</li> </ul>
	External influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Prevalent models and practices</li> <li>• Positioning for the future</li> <li>• Legislation and regulation</li> <li>• Political, economic and social environment, including corruption</li> </ul>
Product	Value proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of the value offered by the news space</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalism for increased value</li> <li>• Political positioning</li> </ul>
Customer interface	Target customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertisers</li> <li>• Audiences</li> </ul>
	Distribution channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Platforms</li> <li>• Geographical diversification</li> </ul>
	Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships with advertisers, government, audiences, society</li> </ul>
Financial aspects	Cost structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost-cutting strategies</li> </ul>
	Revenue model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising dependence</li> <li>• Product-pricing strategy</li> </ul>

Some of the building blocks listed above have already been considered in this chapter in part or in whole, including ‘external influences’, ‘distribution channel’ and ‘revenue model’. In the rest of this chapter, ‘ownership’, ‘value proposition’ and ‘target customer’ will be explored. The elements of ‘internal structures’, ‘cost structure’ and ‘relationships’ figure prominently in Chapter 5. Business models are not composed of discrete elements. They are networks of structures, forces, relationships, perceptions, strategy and actions. Many of the building blocks overlap slightly, or are intricately related to each, and their consideration here is linked with the discussion in the next chapter.

### 4.5.3 Ownership

Current commentary on Indian journalism and news organisations reflects substantial concern over ownership issues, especially because of the perception that the intrusion of owners’ interests into journalism is becoming more pronounced. Many of the changes in professional practices and the behaviour exhibited by news organisations with respect to paid news are attributed to the actions and interests of owners. Owners – through their business models – exert a lot more influence over the content produced by their organisations than they used to, or so anecdotal evidence suggests.

Perhaps the most influential figure in redefining business models has been Samir Jain, the Vice-Chairman of the Times Group. Jain, who took charge of the company in the second half of the 1980s, is now a reclusive figure (Kohli-Khandekar, 2010), but is widely credited with changing the face of Indian journalism. Many initiatives launched by him, and later by his brother, Vineet Jain, who is the Managing Director of the Times Group, figure prominently in the narrative of the rise of paid news in India.

The brothers Jain and top executives of *The Times of India* strenuously deny all allegations of unethical behaviour (Smith, 2011; Pande, 2011; Puri, 2010; Shukla, 2009), but their models and practices continue to be as widely denounced as they are imitated. The Editor-in-Chief of the weekly newsmagazine, *Outlook*, Krishna Prasad, says: 'Every competitor at first agitates over it, gets angry about it, and then quietly apes it', while a former senior staffer of the *Times*, Darryl D'Monte, puts it a bit more caustically: 'The *Times* has corrupted the entire face of Indian journalism, including television. It's like a cancer that has spread. It is the most serious threat to journalism not only in this country but in the entire developing world' (Auletta, 2012).

Rohit Kumar, Deputy Vice-President of the broadcaster, Zee News, and in charge of its marketing functions, reveals that business models are imitated and adopted across media. He says there are two business models in Indian journalism – '*The Times of India* business model' and '*The Indian Express* business model'. He says that Zee prefers *The Times of India* business model:

*The Indian Express* model is completely hard-core journalism, where people matter, but basically ideology comes first. *The Times of India* is completely different – they focus on larger issues and people's voice, but they also change rapidly. Change for survival is really important in the current scenario. They are the right choice for India, the right choice for the mass India, basically, that is why they are the leader. *The Indian Express* and other newspapers are really good in journalism, people say, but I never read it. I never read it.

**Q:** Why don't you read it?

**A:** I don't find it interesting. They have a different approach, and the India of today does not want to go that way. There are certain sets of people reading *The Indian Express*, but I don't find that I am one of them. I am not saying this from the marketing point of view. As per the customer point of

view, I find that *The Times of India* is the newspaper that I should read because the entire world is changing and I would like to be in that race.

(R. Kumar, Interview)

What Kumar does not say is that the most important distinguishing factor between the two business models is that *The Times of India* is very profitable and *The Indian Express* is not. The down-to-earth money-making focus of the Jain brothers – Samir is known to have said in the late 1980s that a newspaper was no different from a bar of soap or a tube of toothpaste; it was just a product to be sold – and the resultant huge profits of the Times Group (estimated to be in the range of \$45 million annually) have made them role models.

There are many different ownership patterns in Indian news organisations. Many of the larger and older news organisations (and, of course, thousands of the smaller ones) are family controlled, including the Times Group; Jagran Prakashan; Kasturi & Sons, the company that publishes *The Hindu*; the Malayala Manorama Group, which has 32 publications in five languages; and The Printers (Mysore) Private Limited, which publishes the *Deccan Herald* and other newspapers. Some of these companies are publicly traded; others have kept ownership tightly controlled or enhanced their capital base through private placements of their stock. In many of the family owned or controlled companies, except for *The Times of India*, members of the owning family serve as editors as well as publishers.

In the television arena, many of the larger companies, including New Delhi Television, Network18 and India TV, are headed by television anchors from production houses of the 1990s that grew into broadcasters. Many television channels are also owned by newspaper companies or by entertainment television companies, profit-making enterprises that are able to subsidise television news. For, television news needs a subsidy in the current market – although it is India's most powerful voice in the public sphere, only the top few players in each crowded segment of the market can aspire to being profitable. The Communications Advisor to India's Prime Minister and former Editor, Special Projects, at NDTV, Pankaj Pachauri, says: 'Other businesses are subsidising news' (Pachauri, Interview).

Increasingly, these ‘other businesses’ that subsidise news are corporate houses, builders, real-estate companies and politicians:

You know, if you are seen as a builder, in society you may not get the status that you want, but if you are seen as a media baron you might have more status. I think the kind of people who are buying television channels today, because in television you need cash, a lot of the transactions that are going on with the cable operators are cash transactions, so you need people with cash, and so I think these are the kind of people now who are coming to own TV channels and possibly newspapers.

(Sardesai, Interview)

They are not in the news business to perform what the former Editor-in-Chief of *The Hindu*, N. Ram, calls the ‘credible informational function’ or the ‘critical-investigative-adversarial function’ of the news media (Ram, 2011b). They subsidise television news so that they can exercise influence. Dilip Cherian, former Editor of *Business India* and now prominent in the public relations industry, says owners leveraging media power are rampant. He likens some media practices to ‘rackets’:

Ownership has become more hands on than it has ever been, so it has really crossed the *Lakshman rekha* [Chinese wall] of the ownership versus the editorial management. Now, we have more owners working – the earlier term used to be masquerading, I use the term working – working as editors. [...]

**Q:** Even in the 1950s and 1960s, you had what is called the cement press, where owners were leveraging media ownership for their other businesses. Is today qualitatively different from that?

**A:** Substantially different from that. You know, the cement press was confined to not more than five people. Here we are talking about the concept of ownership, the media and the concept of media leverage going down to the grass-root level, so in the *tehsil* [sub-district] you have the newspapers, the magazines which are micro rackets which are based on that societal structure and the power structure there.

(Cherian, Interview)

Concern over the patterns of ownership and their underlying motivations has been voiced widely, including by established players:

Zee chairman Subhash Chandra said several builders had started channels to keep the authorities at bay. 'There are 400 news channels operating at present. I believe people running news channels are history sheeters, builders are running channels to keep police away,' he said.

*(The Times of India, 2013)*

The Director-General of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Sunit Tandon, also sees ownership as a central concern:

Increasingly, there is corporatisation of the media, but people are entering it mainly for prestige, with the profit element being almost secondary. The motivations behind ownership also seem to have changed completely. I think we really need to explore the big question of why anybody is in the media at all. Take a look at who are the owners and that will help answer all the questions regarding where they are going and what has happened.

*(Tandon, Interview)*

While the larger and older 'full media playing companies' (Tewari, Interview) are turning to corporate bodies and industrial houses for cash injections, newer players are more dependent on the backing of real estate and political money. India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, now has substantial stakes in the television news business. Through his companies and trusts controlled by them, he now has direct or indirect stakes in a number of general news and business news channels in a variety of Indian languages run by the broadcasters Network18, NDTV and NewsX. The entry of Ambani and his company, Reliance Industries Limited, which is India's largest corporate entity, has aroused concern about the convergence of commercial and media power (Ninan, 2012).

The number of politicians and politically affiliated people who have launched or bought stakes in news organisations has also shown a marked increase. Kohli-Khandekar, one of India's leading media commentators, says:

More than a third of news channels are owned by politicians or politico-affiliated builders. An estimated 60 per cent of cable distribution systems are owned by local politicians. There are dozens of small and big newspapers owned by politicians or their family members. [...] Shouldn't we be discussing the political ownership of the media and its impact on the nature, quality and course of debate in the country?

*(Kohli-Khandekar, 2012)*

In a recent scandal that erupted about corruption in the grant of leases for coal mining, it emerged that at least two media organisations were beneficiaries of corrupt crony capitalistic deals (Jagannathan, 2012). These were DB Corp Limited, which publishes *Dainik Bhaskar* in Hindi, and the Lokmat Group, which publishes the leading Marathi newspaper *Lokmat* and owns half of the Marathi news channel IBN-Lokmat. A third newspaper company, Deccan Chronicle Holdings, allegedly used its media clout to obtain large unsecured and unsustainable loans to finance the purchase of a cricket team and other ventures; it is now on the verge of bankruptcy. Akin to Hallin and Mancini's use of the term 'clientelism' (2004), this kind of corruption has been labelled 'crony journalism' (*Business Standard*, 2012; Jagannathan, 2012).

Much of the unethical behaviour in Indian journalism is attributed to pressures from owners, equally those who have been in the media business for decades and those who have entered the news space recently. The older, more established players have followed the example of the Times Group to diversify their holdings both within the media and in other sectors of the economy, using their clout to promote their business interests. More recent entrants have bought into the Indian news space knowing that they are entering a loss-making enterprise, but secure in the knowledge that in the current environment, they can compensate that financial loss by seeking other political or commercial advantages through their journalism. Senior journalist Vivian Fernandes points out that there is not much to choose between established players and new entrants:

I can understand the loss-making enterprises doing all those things, chasing the advertisers, or doing or taking a short-cut, but you will find that the most profitable newspaper group in the country sets the standard in these aspects, sets very low standards and you know, paid news, for example, all kinds of abominations have emerged from some of the most profitable enterprises in our country.

(Fernandes, Interview)

Among the many influences on the business models of Indian news media, ownership is the strongest. Of course, ownership patterns are also changing rapidly. At one level, the news industry in India is seeing the beginning of a long-anticipated shakeout. There are a number of players who are in financial trouble, and some of them have begun to exit

the market. Newspapers groups such as the Times Group and Jagran Prakashan have been adding editions and acquiring regional newspapers in an effort to increase the size of their footprint, but the President of the Times Group, Bharat Das, does not see consolidation happening in the print industry as yet (KPMG, 2012: 54). Television, which is, in general, in deeper financial trouble, is seeing greater turmoil and the beginnings of trends that could lead towards consolidation (KPMG, 2012: 26).

However, as yet, even though the leading news organisations have large shares of their respective markets, they cannot be said to completely dominate the markets they are in. The global pattern of domination by a few powerful multi-media conglomerates (Herman and McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 1999; Thussu, 2005) may be on its way in India, but it has not yet arrived.

#### **4.5.4 Value proposition**

‘We are not in the newspaper business, we are in the advertising business. If ninety per cent of your revenues come from advertising, you’re in the advertising business,’ says Vineet Jain, Managing Director of the Times Group (Auletta, 2012). This approach to business has been evident from the actions of *The Times of India* for many years, but this is the first time its owners have stated this so publicly and blandly. This articulation of their understanding is also a step ahead of Samir Jain’s thought from the late and mid-1980s that the newspaper is a consumer product no different from a bar of soap.

The vision statement of the Times Group is not easily accessible in the public domain, though students who intern there usually come away with: ‘We are a global company with cosmic consciousness, served from India, aggregating audiences to network media brands transiting through print.’ If one looks very hard, this vision statement can also be found on the website of iTimes, a portal maintained by Times Internet. The mission statement is very clear about the business model of the *Times*: ‘The Times of India Group is the aggregator of content in any form in the infotainment industry. We collect and sell content to right target audience’ (iTimes, no date).

Apart from the dense management jargon, it is striking that the vision and mission statements do not talk of serving audiences, they only talk of selling them content. They also indicate that the Times Group sees itself as a trading organisation (or, at best, a marketing organisation), rather than a journalistic organisation. It collects or aggregates content and sells it.

Samir Jain of *The Times of India* began the trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s of devaluing editors and wresting control of the editorial space from them, and this has since emerged as an integral part of the business model of owner-led journalism. In their international study for IFRA, Picard and Zotto (IFRA, 2006: 19–20) found that publishers ranked Editorial first both when they were asked to pick a strategically important unit and when they were asked to pick their core competency. The results of such a study in India would be drastically different because Indian publishers do not believe credible journalism is the foundation of their business. The CEO of *The Times of India*, Ravi Dhariwal, said in an interview:

Our paper is not for our editors. We don't believe in products that are just editorially driven. Of course, you may have a great editor with tremendous empathy with the common man, but to me, that's not by process, that is by accident.

(Puri, 2010)

News media have two sets of customers. One is the audience, the other is the advertiser; the former buys the product (and pays a price far less than its intrinsic worth), while the latter buys the space in/on the product. The advertiser pays more and is far more important than a faceless audience, and the space in the product is far more valuable than the product itself. *The Times of India* and others who have adopted its business models have no qualms in saying that their job is not about journalism, it is about delivering consumers to advertisers. This colours everything about their business model, from the target customer to the nature of the journalism practised, and political positioning.

Reducing the audience to a consumer also defines it as a passive body and denies it agency. The initiative is with the advertiser, who is the real buyer and who has to be kept happy. Advertisers are willing to pay for reaching audiences, so the name of the

game is to 'aggregate' audiences and give them 'aggregated content'. The target customers (or target consumers) that are desired by advertising agencies are those who have buying power, the top socioeconomic classifications, SEC A and B. This business model dictates that journalistic content has nothing to do with the public interest, its primary purpose is to attract audiences from SEC A and B:

The advertiser is a strong presence in the Media. If the advertiser values somebody, the media page values them, otherwise the media doesn't care about them or society or a public issue. You find a large section of the population is literally being placed in the penumbra, in the dark as far as the media is concerned. You are pushed to the sidelines, so you will find hardly any coverage about rural issues, you will find hardly any story of deprivation, you don't find the process of democracy, the process of development, so that I think is a basic problem.

(S. Kumar, Interview)

This is also connected to a 'feel-good' journalism that is intended to encourage audiences (consumers) to continue to consume. Dhariwal puts it thus: 'We believe in looking at life optimistically: we believe in a glass half-full rather than half-empty' (Puri, 2010). The President of the Times Group, Bharat Das, says: 'We are a derived business. When the advertiser becomes successful, we are successful. The advertiser wants us to facilitate consumption' (Auletta, 2012).

The owner-editor of *Dainik Jagran* was candid about policy decisions not to carry complaints about products or adverse reports about corporate bodies until they were already established by other media:

They are really touchy about 'Bajaj motorcycle *kharab ho gayi hai* and insurance claim *mein paisa chala gaya*' ['My Bajaj motorcycle was defective, and I lost money on the insurance claim'], and they [advertisers] are very touchy about why did you print it and why did you not take their version? What I have done is, as a policy, I have not covered it. It is simple because it doesn't make any difference to me. People still buy motorcycles even if I do write that Bajaj Motorcycles have defect, so it is immaterial. People still go and buy it. Why do I have to waste my page then? I mean, I can't change an opinion, there is no point in giving that space, isn't that so?

As a rule, we don't cover corporate scams, until they really become very big like the 2G scam or something like that where it affects the large part of

society. Just two days back there was an FIR [first information report filed with the police about a cognisable offence] about a crime registered in Noida about some builder and some construction company that they have bungled about Rs.2 crore [\$400,000]. Why should I cover it? It doesn't make any difference to the common man. It may be good news for *The Economic Times* that a world renowned construction company has sued a Noida builder. It is not great news for any common man.

(Gupta, Interview)

News television has to seek and keep audiences more assiduously, for 'advertisers on television do not care about quality, they care about eyeballs' (Fernandes, Interview). The commonly adopted formula is to maintain a shrill, high pitch intended to keep thumbs away from remotes. Television programming feeds on events with an emotional appeal or controversy – including those that the *Dainik Jagran* might shy away from – elements that can be sensationalised and magnified. As discussed, news television is also heavily dependent on advertising revenue because of low subscription revenue and leakage of revenue at the level of the cable operator. This is expected to change as the digitisation programme progresses (Rao, Interview; Das, Interview), but, meanwhile, news television continues to depend heavily on advertisers, for whom the primary indicator of channel reach is TRPs (television rating points). The Chairman of the Press Council of India, Justice Markandey Katju, who is a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India, is particularly concerned about this aspect:

The broadcast media is particularly culpable. They have a system known as TRP ratings, and the higher the TRP ratings, the more advertisements you get. Now the instruction of the owner of the TV channels, through the managing editor or the other senior persons, is that you give us a high TRP rating, we want revenue, we want profits. So, they are treating it only as a business.

(Katju, Interview)

Effectively, in this business model, news organisations have become marketing organisations for whom the news is little more than a vehicle to carry advertisers' messages to audiences. Large players' quest for continued growth and smaller players' struggle for survival have combined with other factors such as ownership to breach normative boundaries normally applied to news media. In this hyper-commercialised

environment, news content is fashioned not with an eye on quality or relevance, but with revenue considerations in mind.

However, news offers another value proposition that goes beyond tailoring it to popular taste to attract advertisers or offering feel-good news to foster consumption. The news space has great value to advertisers and publicity seekers for their messages or marketing communication because it carries greater credibility than the columns or time slots demarcated for advertising. This value proposition has been recognised and widely adopted in the Indian media, first in news related to lifestyle products, travel journalism or entertainment, but later extending to business and corporate news and finally to political news. This value proposition – the monetisation and sale of the news space itself – is reflected in the phenomenon of paid news, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has examined the contours of the media system within which Indian journalism exists. It began by reviewing the historical phases of Indian media and proposed that the current phase is characterised by explosive growth. Next, it mapped the parameters of the growth of media in India and the factors fuelling it. The chapter then considered the effects of that growth on competition, business models and business practices. These elements included the intense focus on enhancing revenues that characterises Indian media in its current phase, and the business models that have emerged in response. The growth and revenue strategies that have been adopted, including issues of ownership and the value proposition presented by the news space, were considered in detail.

The business environment of Indian media has been shown to have a strong influence on its practices. It is one of the dominant forces that govern the behaviour of the media system as a whole. It contributes to its growth, its vibrancy, and also its excesses, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

In concluding this chapter, it is perhaps appropriate to end this chapter with the words of someone from within the industry:

Manipulation of news, analysis, and comment to suit the owners' financial or political interests; the downgrading and devaluing of editorial functions and content in some leading newspaper and news television organizations; systematic dumbing down, led by the nose by certain types of market research; the growing willingness within newspapers and news channels to tailor the editorial product to subserve advertising and marketing goals set by owners and senior management personnel; hyper-commercialization; price wars and aggressive practices in the home bases of other newspapers to overwhelm and kill competition; advertorials where the paid-for aspect of the news-like content is not properly disclosed or disclosed at all; private treaties; rogue practices like paid election campaign news and bribe-taking for favourable coverage. If this is what it takes to have thriving newspapers and other news media, then there is something seriously wrong with this growth path.

(Ram, 2012)

## 5. STUDYING PAID NEWS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter complements Chapter 4. Against that backdrop, it presents findings from the inner case study, the focus on the phenomenon of paid news. Together with the preceding chapter, it comprises the empirical component of this study.

The findings presented in this chapter are largely based on data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 47 respondents in senior positions in Indian media or institutions concerned about paid news, but they also draw upon information from documents such as committee reports, annual reports of organisations and institutions, advisories, press releases, news reports and other records. They build upon the map of the Indian media system presented in Chapter 4 and extend the insights gained from the system level. The interview data presented here is linked to the map conceptually as well as through the process of data collection, where there was active iteration and triangulation between data from different sources.

As described in Chapter 3.4.4, the thematic analysis of data yielded five themes. Two of these – growth of media, and competition and business models – were considered in detail in Chapter 4, albeit largely at the system level because of the nature of the data considered. Here, the focus is extended to the organisations, institutions and individuals within the system, with the intention of uncovering how system-level developments are related to forces and relationships that drive behaviour within the media. The focus on business models is continued here to examine its effect. Considerable attention is also paid to the other three identified themes: the emergence and practices of paid news; regulation and external influences; and pressures on journalism and journalists.

This chapter is structured to explore the phenomenon of paid news in depth, examining its emergence, the conditions and precursor trends that powered it, the forces and relationships that govern it, and regulatory efforts to eradicate the practice. This intense focus on paid news reveals the inner workings of the media system and informs the evaluation of media systems theory to follow in Chapter 6.

## 5.2 THE TWO FACES OF INDIAN JOURNALISM

In October 2012, 91 per cent of the respondents to a poll on the news portal Firstpost agreed with the statement: ‘The media is as compromised as politicians’ (Firstpost, 2012). This poll was held in the immediate wake of allegations that the television channel Zee News had tried to blackmail Jindal Steel and Power Limited into signing a contract to give the channel approximately \$20 million of advertising (*Hindustan Times*, 2012). Tapes released by Jindal appeared to show the Business Head and Editor of Zee News, Sudhir Chaudhary, promising to withhold further exposés of Jindal and assuring them of ‘protection’ against ‘negative’ reports once the ‘arrangement’ was finalised.

The Zee–Jindal contretemps was a high-profile media scandal that sparked off a bout of agonising about the state of the Indian media. It was the fourth media-related scandal to hit the front pages since the end of 2009 – the others being revelations about paid political news; the ‘Radia tapes’ which exposed the uncomfortable proximity of senior journalists and a political lobbyist (*Outlook*, 2010); and an incident in which a reporter of a regional television channel apparently incited a mob to molest a girl for the sake of footage (*The Times of India*, 2012).

Amidst allegations of serious deviations from normative expectations, it is easy to forget that Indian journalism has a history of effectively promoting and defending the public interest, as was discussed in Chapter 4.2. One of India’s most prominent journalists, former Editor-in-Chief of IBN18, Rajdeep Sardesai, who has also been President of the Editors Guild of India, believes that the malpractices are serious, but there is more to Indian journalism:

Let me say that 80 per cent of the time journalists do basic journalism. Reporters are still foot soldiers who go out and do the story, cover the press conference, you know, they just go out there and tell stories. So, I am not willing to believe that the paid news has hijacked journalism or taken over journalism.

(Sardesai, Interview)

The former CEO of Zee News, Barun Das, who resigned from the job a few days before the Zee–Jindal affair erupted in the headlines, puts forward an assessment of news channels shared by many inside the media:

Where else do you think that people in power are being asked the direct question, where else do you see the combined feedback of people at large being played back to the world? Where else? Newspapers come in the morning and you read it and it is over. According to me, news channels have brought in so much of accountability in the entire system. I would give 100/100 marks to news channels despite their on and off straying from what they are supposed to do.

(Das, Interview)

News television is often the engine for campaigns to enforce the accountability of those in positions of power. Channels are intensely competitive and an issue picked up by one channel quickly spreads to all screens, leading to a strong focus on the issue, even if only for a day or part of a day. Even though news channels are commonly accused of sensationalism and editorialising, they are frequently successful in setting an investigative or public service agenda. The impact of the media on social issues, corruption and governance speaks for itself, says Sonia Singh, Editorial Director of the broadcaster NDTV:

I think the Assam [sectarian riots] may be one good example. I think, [during the] Gujarat [sectarian killings], if we didn't have television cameras, the impact would have been different. You may say the television journalists' interviewing of the riot victims was insensitive, but take away the journalists and the cameras and how speedy would justice have been? [...] I agree that in some cases there are privacy issues, allegations are unfounded, allegations which can ruin people's life on serious issues, but I think the reporting on the spot gave a sense of urgency otherwise the system would have been comatose.

(Singh, Interview)

The media in India have undertaken several campaigns that have highlighted protest movements, pursued justice or thrown the spotlight on cases of corruption. Examples in recent years include the anti-corruption movement of the social activist Anna Hazare; the Jessica Lal murder case where media attention ensured that a politician's son was brought to book for the murder; and energetically uncovering corruption in the 2010 Commonwealth Games, allocation of 2G telecommunications spectrum and the allotment of mining licences.

The media also undertake campaigns on a number of social and environmental issues. *The Times of India* began the trend as an attempt to build its brand value, and others have followed. Among others, the *Times* runs a high-profile ‘Teach India’ campaign. Zee News ran ‘Your Vote, Your Strength’, a campaign to encourage responsible voting, in collaboration with the Election Commission of India and ‘My Earth, My Duty’ on climate change issues. These are often in the nature of large events to showcase their brand and social responsibility. Sonia Singh of NDTV says that good practices can also be infectious:

We do Save the Tiger, and we do the Greenathon. A good one is about schools, about toilets in girls’ schools. One of the major things we found is that girls weren’t going to school because of the [lack of] access to toilets. I think nowadays it is much harder for a campaign to actually change government policy [...] like getting a cop to change, getting a justice criminal system to change is harder than getting the politician to go. I find there is a bit of a drumming up, the drum beats go from one channel to another.

(Singh, Interview)

Thus, there is substantial evidence of tenacious and robust journalism – but this coexists with irresponsible newsgathering, paid news and allegations of blackmail and extortion. Despite the large volume of high-quality daily journalism and positive results of special campaigns, the narrative of media malpractice is a prominent one in India, and paid news is high among the concerns voiced. Quality journalism is the normative expectation, but, in keeping with this study’s design choice of focusing on the deviant case represented by paid news, the rest of this chapter focuses on it and its facets.

### **5.3 DEFINING PAID NEWS**

The term paid news is not well defined. It is commonly used in India and can refer to a number of different practices. The first report on paid news, from the regulatory body, Press Council of India, even includes media junkets in the term:

Paid news is a complex phenomenon and has acquired different forms over the last six decades. It ranges from accepting gifts on various occasions, foreign and domestic junkets, various monetary and non-monetary benefits,

besides direct payment of money. Another form of paid news that has been brought to the notice of the Press Council of India by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is in the form of “private treaties” between media companies and corporate entities. Private treaty is a formal agreement between the media company and another non-media company in which the latter transfers certain shares of the company to the former in lieu of advertisement space and favourably coverage.

(Press Council of India, 2010b)

In the manner it is commonly used, the term paid news variously refers to any or all of:

- 1) ‘Retail corruption’;
- 2) Advertorials;
- 3) Paid political news;
- 4) ‘Private treaties’; and
- 5) Extortion based upon threats of adverse news reports.

For the purposes of this thesis, the first category, retail corruption, is not included under the term paid news. Retail corruption is an informal term used to describe small acts of corruption or unethical practices by journalists, such as those alluded to by statements like ‘journalists can be bought for a bottle of whisky’, which can be heard in India. It is not included here because it is seen as an unethical practice at the individual level, not one that is institutionalised at the level of media organisations. It reveals the existence of unethical practices, but it is not thought to reveal important information about the Indian media system in the manner that other practices do. It also does not arouse the level of concern that institutionalised paid news does.

Advertorials, the second category, are not included either – as long as they are genuine advertorials where the sponsored nature of the content is appropriately disclosed to audiences. In India, advertorials are broadly understood to be marketing communication that is designed to appear similar to neighbouring editorial content in form and presentation, but appropriately labelled as paid or sponsored content. A number of quality newspapers carry such content, also referred to as branded content or, in the digital space, native advertising, and have been known to exist since 1917 (Bell, 2014). *The New York Times* went public with its policy for native advertising in 2013 (Somaiya, 2013) and *The Guardian* has also announced its policy (*The Guardian*,

2016). Advertorial content that is sufficiently distinguished from news content is not considered paid news in this thesis. However, if sponsored content appears in the news space and masquerades as news, it would be an example of paid news.

The third practice, paid news in the form of cash for coverage at election time, is an example of an unethical advertorial, but in a specific domain. It refers to political news, which is not usually associated with the term advertorial, but the core of the practice amounts to falsely presenting political advertising as news. As described in Chapter 1.1, paid political news has received substantial public attention since it was first noticed in 2009. The practice is nothing more than the organisation undertaking the same actions as the retail corruption of a political reporter, but in an institutionalised manner. The difference between the opportunism of an individual and the strategised enterprise of a news organisation, however, is a critical one. It has changed the way politicians reach their constituents. Prakash Javadekar, who was the spokesperson of a major political party, recalls the difference between earlier elections and the 2009 elections:

They [the media] used to come and tell we want to go with Pramod Mahajan, we want to go with Advaniji for a day's coverage, they used to plead with us, but now they bargain with us – we will cover him but this is the rate. Even the normal coverage, normal coverage of meetings is paid for, and the news press conferences also. Nothing was free.

(Javadekar, interview)

The fourth category listed above – private treaties – refers to similar practices in the arena of financial and commercial news, but implemented through a particular kind of equity-for-publicity arrangement. Private treaties are financial arrangements between media organisations and businesses or companies where the former strikes a deal to promote the latter in exchange for a share of the company. Though they ostensibly extend only to the advertising space, in reality they have been shown to include surreptitious promotion in the news. *The Economist* (2012) says private treaty deals 'may not be transparent'. Private treaties also represent institutionalised behaviour that is both system-wide and widely recognised as a prominent ethical and normative breach.

Private treaties were launched by the owners of *The Times of India*, Bennett, Coleman & Company Limited, also called the Times Group. In 2005, the group launched a company called Times Private Treaties, later rebranded as Brand Capital, to strike promotional deals with about 400 small and medium businesses or companies desirous of entering ‘the bigger game’ (Brand Capital, 2012). Brand Capital offers brand-building services to ambitious companies seeking to gain profile and attract private equity investment or strategic partners. In return, it takes a share of the client company, which can be encashed when share prices rise or the company is bought by an investor. No information is available on the exact deals struck, but at one place the Brand Capital website says that advertising amounts to ‘60–70% of overall investment in business set-up’, which indicates that it might demand a substantial share of the client’s equity.

Brand Capital proudly proclaims its status as part of the Times Group and offers ‘access to the unmatched national 360 degree media platforms of the Times Group’ (Brand Capital, 2012), listing its daily and financial newspapers in several languages, television channels, radio stations and news websites. The website also sets out a code of conduct on its website, which includes the following clause:

Brand Capital is the investment arm of Bennett, Coleman & Co. Limited and does not share information relating to its investments (including proposed investments) with any of the editorial teams of the Times Group. There exists a Chinese Wall between Brand Capital and the editorial department. Members shall in no manner attempt to influence editorial teams in respect of reporting relating to investee companies of Brand Capital.

(Brand Capital, 2012)

However, several instances of *The Times of India* and its sister publication, *The Economic Times*, promoting the interests of private treaty clients through the news columns have been documented, including references to an internal email from an editor of *The Economic Times* saying senior editorial persons would ‘interface with Treaty clients’ so that ‘we will be able to incorporate PT [private treaties] into the editorial mainstream’ (Shukla, 2008; Swain, 2009). Several other organisations have also emulated the Times Group and entered similar arrangements (Bansal, 2008).

The fifth type of unethical practice amounts to allegations of blackmail and extortion. This form is also thought to be indulged in by some news organisations when there is an opportunity to do so, but, by dint of being carried out covertly, is difficult to investigate. One example is the allegation that *The Times of India's* intense focus on corruption during the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi was occasioned by the newspaper not being granted the advertising and publicity contract for the games worth about \$2.5 million. This was strenuously denied by the CEO of the Times Group, Ravi Dhariwal, in a magazine interview:

Events have an exclusive media sponsor, don't they? We were seeking that status. They said they weren't going to have any exclusives. We said, fine. It is an insult to our journalists to say that influenced our (critical) coverage of the Commonwealth Games. We were very angry when this link was made. We are not blackmailers.

(Puri, 2010)

Another example is the earlier mentioned allegation made by the steel magnate and Member of Parliament Naveen Jindal against Zee news channels in October 2012. He filed a police complaint alleging that the editors of the television channel Zee News and its sister channel Zee Business tried to blackmail him into committing advertising worth Rs.1 billion (approximately \$20 million) in return for the channel spiking an investigation into his involvement in a coal mining scam (*Hindustan Times*, 2012). Zee News and Zee Business belong to the Zee group, which launched India's first satellite television channel in 1992 and is now its biggest broadcast organisation. Jindal accused the group and its senior officials of 'criminal conspiracy, extortion, criminal intimidation and defamation'. Jindal claimed that the two Zee editors told him the idea of demanding advertising in exchange for dropping the expose was 'company strategy devised in consultation with top management' (Shukla, 2012). Jindal gave the police video recordings of the meetings with senior Zee News editorial staff in which the extortion attempt took place. The sequence of events alleged by Jindal describes an extortion attempt that sought to make dishonest use of the news space for financial gain.

It has not been possible here to rigorously explore incidents of alleged blackmail and extortion because of the clandestine nature of the activity. This thesis instead focuses largely on advertorial or promotional content presented as news. This includes a number

of news domains, including celebrity, various sectors of entertainment, and lifestyle. Most important are paid political news and paid financial news through arrangements such as private treaties. They are all examples of media organisations leveraging their control over the news space to boost revenue in violation of the norms and ethics to which they claim to subscribe.

The origins and the mechanism by which paid news was rapidly adopted across the Indian media are unknown, but on the surface both its rise and its spread are attributed to incorporating existing patterns of corruption into revenue models. For instance, it is believed that paid news at the institutional level emerged as an effort by media owners to get a share of the gains that were accruing to unethical journalists who were striking individual retail corruption deals (see, for instance, Puri, 2010). This institutionalisation, of course, is what has made it difficult to ignore or dismiss it as an occasional aberration.

K.N. Shanth Kumar, Director of The Printers (Mysore) Limited, Publisher of the *Deccan Herald* and Editor of its sister publications in a regional language, says that the spread of paid news goes hand in hand with it becoming normalised. He says he is often told ‘Others are doing it, so why don’t you accept our money to put out paid political news as well?’ or words to that effect:

One is what I would call institutionalised paid news, where the media organisation itself is indulging in this malpractice; this is an extremely dangerous practice. Fooling the reader you know, influencing public thought and thinking and opinion making. The other part is corruption practised by journalists themselves, which may not necessarily be accepted by the institution that they work for. So they are two distinct parts and, of course, I completely agree with you, the institutionalised part is the more dangerous one. There the organisation itself is legitimising this kind of collecting money and putting out so-called news that is not really news and making the reader believe that it is news. Certainly, there have been instances which have come to my knowledge, especially during election time but not necessarily only during the elections. But there is no doubt that the incidence of paid news is more during election time, I know that for a fact, both from the information I get and, secondly, we have been approached for accepting such paid news. When we refused, we have been told that you know everybody does it, why aren’t you doing it? So this is the kind of reaction we

get from political parties, from politicians at the Central level or at the Karnataka level or localised politicians who are contesting elections in various constituencies.

**Q:** What kind of sums are they talking about?

**A:** Well, I can't say that because we didn't even bother to discuss it. When they come to us, we don't have a plan, we don't have a scheme, we don't have anything so there is no discussion. There is no commercial discussion, it doesn't start.

**Q:** How do the rates of paid news compare to advertising rates?

**A:** Logically, it would be much greater than the advertising space. If I am able to take an advertisement, why would I take news which is valued much more than advertisement, why would I charge him less? It doesn't make any commercial sense. News is obviously valued much more than advertising from the politician's point of view. It will not be less than advertising space. My logical commercial thinking makes me think like that.

(Shanth Kumar, Interview)

S.Y. Quraishi, who focused heavily on paid political news while serving a two-year term as India's Chief Election Commissioner from 2010 to 2012, points out that it continues unchecked because transactions are usually in unaccounted cash. Early instances noticed during the 2009 general elections were relatively easy to detect because the content made it obvious that it was not news. However, more sophisticated insertions of advertising, especially when there is no accounting trail, may be more difficult to detect and prosecute:

Anything in black, black money [unaccounted cash], is not easy to handle and since all the transaction is in black, how much vigil can we keep? For instance, at the end of the day there is a news item favouring you, and there are several news items favouring you as winning, how can anyone prove that this has been done out of sheer objective assessment by the reporter or is it paid for? It becomes very difficult to prove and that is the difficulty. We were able to seize the paid news pages initially because the same news item appeared in rival papers or several papers word for word and it was so obvious. Now what they will do is their copy writers will customise the write-up for each paper. So, let anybody detect any commonality! There will be separate write-ups in each paper and they will not make the mistake of issuing a common press release and changing the headlines. In many cases they did not even change the headings and that is the reason they got caught.

So, that is why the issue is not solved, although we were able to put some kind of a check on them.

(Quraishi, Interview)

In view of differing manifestations and understanding of paid news, a definition of the phenomenon is proposed below. It characterises it as an activity undertaken by news organisations seeking to leverage their control over the news space to generate revenue. It also defines paid news as an institutional activity rather than ethical transgressions by individual journalists:

*Paid news is the institutionalised profit-seeking and transactional journalism that seeks to monetise the news space to gain financial returns on the space it occupies in the public sphere.*

*It negotiates financial transactions to falsely present advertising, public relations content or motivated information as journalism. Alternatively, it seeks rewards for withholding information.*

Paid news is usually easily recognised as outright corruption. It is also often extortionate. However, its significance lies in the manner in which it has been integrated into the business models of news organisations as a source of revenue. Its institutionalisation and clandestine nature are factors that have apparently come together to thwart multiple attempts by regulatory bodies to eliminate it.

#### **5.4 REGULATORY ATTEMPTS AND MEDIA RESISTANCE**

Serious attempts to address paid news were first made after the revelations of paid political news during the 2009 general elections as the result of stories (Sainath, 2009a; Beckett, 2009) in major national and international newspapers. Simultaneously, state-level journalists' associations such as the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) and Delhi Union of Journalists, as well as a political organisation, National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, expressed concern about the trend and gathered evidence. The APUWJ identified 255 items of paid political news in two newspapers in just one district of Andhra Pradesh in less than four weeks in March–April 2009 (Press Council of India, 2011: 49). It estimated the size of the paid news 'market' in Andhra Pradesh during the 2009 elections to be Rs.300–1,000 crore (\$60–200 million), and that

was in just one state out of India's 29 states and seven union territories. Journalists were concerned both because of the ethical transgressions their news organisations were committing and because editorial control had been usurped – some journalists in the state of Gujarat later told the Press Council that they had been asked not to file political reports because news copy would come from elsewhere (Press Council of India, 2011: 37). Veteran editor and journalist Kuldip Nayar recalls first hearing about it:

I was interviewing on radio, I was interviewing two MPs – how much money have you spent, this is too much money, the limit is so much. He said, *Nayar sahib, mein kya karun, aap paise bahut maangte ho* [Mr Nayar, what can I do, you ask for a lot of money] and it was live. I said what do you mean by *paise* [money], and he said, Sir, to get elected I have spent a lot of money, I have spent Rs.2 crore [\$400,000] on newspapers, on journalists.

(Nayar, Interview)

Nayar took his concerns to the Election Commission of India, and this was confirmed by the then Chief Election Commissioner of India:

The silver lining is that 95 per cent of the media is against this practice and particularly the working journalists because they have not been co-opted and it is only the owners of some papers who were indulging in these activities. The fact that they are raising their voice.... As I remember, the first time when we got a complaint [it was] from late Surya Prakash Joshi and Mr. Kuldip Nayar. They both came to see me and gave us the details and expressed their concern.

(Quraishi, Interview)

The Election Commission of India emerged as central to the efforts to regulate paid news because of the perceived seriousness of paid political news and because the activity centres round politicians at election time. Others, including the Press Council of India, the News Broadcasting Standards Authority and other bodies, have also made attempts. These efforts have met with limited success at best, but they are considered in some detail because they provide insight into the phenomenon as well as into the effectiveness of the systems tasked with combating it.

### 5.4.1 The Press Council of India

The Press Council of India is the statutory regulator for the print medium. It was originally set up in 1966 under the Press Council Act, 1965. This was its first avatar and it functioned till December 1975, when it was dissolved during the state of Emergency declared in India (Press Council of India, 2013). It was restored in 1979 under the Press Council Act, 1978, which sets out its twin objectives: ‘The objects of the Council shall be to preserve the freedom of the Press and to maintain and improve the standards of newspapers and news agencies in India’ (Press Council of India, no date).

The Press Council calls itself ‘a mechanism for the Press to regulate itself’ (Press Council of India, 2013). It consists of a chairman appointed by a parliamentary committee and 28 other members, 13 of whom are working journalists or editors, six represent publishers, one represents the management of a news agency, five are members of Parliament and the remaining three are nominated by the University Grants Commission, the Bar Council of India and India’s national academy of letters, Sahitya Akademi (Press Council of India, no date).

The Press Council describes itself as a self-regulatory body, but it would be more appropriately classified as co-regulatory. The model followed in Indian media – and, indeed, the social responsibility role it has traditionally adopted – are attributed to inspiration derived from the Father of the Indian Nation, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi:

In the very first month of *Indian Opinion*, I realized that the sole aim of journalism should be service. The newspaper press is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countrysides and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within.

(Gandhi, 1927: 211)

The Press Council broadly fulfils two roles – that of regulating media behaviour and protecting the media’s independence from external threats and interference. The Council is invested with judicial powers and its hearings are deemed to be judicial proceedings. It can summon individuals, including government officials, enforce their

attendance, receive evidence and requisition public records in a manner identical to a civil court (Press Council of India, no date). Its inquiry committee meets regularly, usually three to four times a year, and issues adjudications in two broad areas – complaints by the press and complaints against the press. The former usually relate to threats, intimidation and interference in the freedom of the press, while the latter overwhelmingly relate to issues of standards and ethics. However, the Press Council has little punitive capability and is limited to making observations, censuring newspapers and demanding the printing of corrections or apologies. It is commonly termed a toothless tiger and its website says: ‘It will thus be seen that the Council wields a lot of moral authority although it has no legally enforceable punitive powers’ (Press Council of India, 2013). The Editor and Publisher of *Civil Society*, senior journalist Umesh Anand, describes the Council as ‘moribund’ (Interview).

The Press Council took cognisance of paid news as concern expressed by journalists’ associations in various parts of India began to resonate in Delhi around the time the general elections came to an end. On 13 May 2009, which was the last of five days of regionally staggered polling and three days before the declaration of results, the then Chairman of the Press Council of India, a former judge of India’s Supreme Court, Justice G.N. Ray, expressed concern about paid news in a speech (Press Council of India, 2011). The Council formally expressed concern in June, and in July, it set up a two-member subcommittee and asked it ‘to examine the phenomenon of paid news observed during the last Lok Sabha [the directly elected lower house of the bicameral Indian Parliament] elections based on inputs received from the members and others’ (Press Council of India, 2010b: 3).

The subcommittee did not have the judicial powers invested in the Council’s Inquiry Committee. It met and collected evidence from a large number of journalists and owners or publishers, but some did not appear before it because it lacked the ability to compel them. It submitted a 71-page report in April 2010. The Council discussed the report, but did not accept it. It chose instead to appoint a drafting committee to prepare a ‘final report’, which was formally adopted by the Council in July 2010, relegating the subcommittee’s report to a ‘reference document’ between April and July 2010 (Press Council of India, 2010b). It later explained: ‘The Report of the Sub-Committee was not

accepted by the Council and was only relied upon, inter-alia, for information for drawing up the Final Report' (Press Council of India, 2011: 1). The final report was substantially shorter than the subcommittee report; it also omitted all names of individuals and organisations whose complicity had been established by the subcommittee, removed references to journalists' working conditions and job security, and reduced its consideration of private treaties to two sentences.

The former Editor-in-Chief of *The Hindu*, N. Ram, describes the Press Council as 'full of conflict of interest' (Ram, Interview). Sainath revealed that publishers and their representatives on the Press Council had been instrumental in the decision to water down the report:

Presented with a chance to make history, the Press Council of India has made a mess instead. The PCI has simply buckled at the knees before the challenge of 'Paid News.' Its decision of July 30 to sideline its own subcommittee's report – which named and shamed the perpetrators of 'paid news' – will go down as one of the sorriest chapters in its history. A chapter that will not be forgotten and the impact of which causes immeasurable damage to the fight against major corruption within the Indian media. A chapter that saw the PCI back down in the struggle against the suborning of the media by money power; though its 'final report' pretends to fight it in a flood of platitudes. [...]

Tragically, the Chairperson of the Press Council who firmly supported the exposure of the paid news offenders was outgunned by a very powerful publishers' lobby. The latter had its way by a slim majority. Justice G.N. Ray was all along for the sub-committee report (which named and shamed the guilty) being annexed to the 'final' one. He now finds himself saddled with an 'official' position that was not his but which he must defend as his own.

(Sainath, 2010c)

The Council only placed the subcommittee's report in the public domain in October 2011 after it was forced to do so by the Central Information Commission under the Right to Information Act, 2005.

The Council's final report included a set of observations, key among which were that the independence of editors should be safeguarded; the Election Commission of India should set up a special cell to deal with complaints of paid news; the Information and

Broadcasting Ministry should conduct awareness campaigns and discussions to arrive at workable solutions to paid news; and Parliament should set up a committee to review election-related law (Press Council of India, 2010a).

It also made four recommendations, including: amending election law to make paid news a cognisable offence; empowering the Press Council to adjudicate complaints of paid news; amending the Press Council Act to make its recommendations binding; and bringing electronic media under its purview (Press Council of India, 2010a). At the same time, it reiterated its guidelines for election coverage issued in 1996, which included the clause: ‘The Press shall not accept any kind of inducement, financial or otherwise, to project a candidate/party’ (Press Council of India, 2010b: 8). In sum, the observations and recommendations of the Council in its final report ask other institutions to act against paid news and ask for greater power, but carry no message of admonition to its own constituency.

Thus, though the Press Council of India moved rapidly to examine paid news, it focused attention on the phenomenon but was not successful in tackling the phenomenon of paid news in a meaningful and effective manner. The Council received 17 complaints of paid news in 2009–10, of which it closed 14 for ‘non-pursuance’ by the complainant. In three cases involving seven newspapers, it ‘censured the respondent newspaper by giving warning’ (Standing Committee of Information Technology, 2013: 110–111). In 2010–11, it dismissed both the complaints it received, one because it was not pursued by the complainant and the other for being outside its charter and, in 2011–12, it censured and warned nine newspapers, some of which were repeat offenders (Standing Committee of Information Technology, 2013: 112–114).

#### **5.4.2 The News Broadcasting Standards Authority**

News television is not regulated in the same manner as the print medium. There is no statutory regulator and two self-regulatory bodies, both set up by broadcasters’ associations, cater separately to news and non-news channels. The Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC), set up by the Indian Broadcasting Foundation in 2011, has general entertainment, sports, film, music and other non-news channels as its

remit. The Foundation describes the Council as ‘a milestone in the history of Indian television, the initiative signifies the maturity of broadcasters to uphold freedom of speech and expression enshrined as a Fundamental Right in the Indian Constitution’ (Indian Broadcasting Foundation, no date). The self-regulatory body for news television is the News Broadcasting Standards Association (NBSA), which was set up by the News Broadcasters Association in 2008.

Neither NBSA nor BCCC are backed by statute and their writ extends only to member associations, but that too depends on voluntary compliance rather than any means of enforcement. Both of them, however, draw heavily upon the draft self-regulatory guidelines circulated for comments by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Government of India, 2008) and are headed by former judges of the Supreme Court.

The very first complaint heard by the NBSA was about misrepresentation of facts by a news channel, India TV. The NBSA’s ‘directions’ in the case included a ‘strong disapproval’ of the news content of India TV, a fine of Rs.100,000 (\$2,000) and instructions to run an on-screen apology (News Broadcasters Association, 2009). India TV, however, refused to accept the order and instead withdrew from membership of the Association (Bahri, 2009). The head of India TV was later persuaded to return after ‘much cajoling’ (Siddiqui, 2013), perhaps because it was critical for the Association to demonstrate that its self-regulatory efforts were working.

The News Broadcasters Association has depended upon the collective power of private broadcasters to successfully resist multiple efforts by politicians, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the government to introduce statutory regulation for news television. For instance, it responded to earlier outrage expressed about unethical ‘sting operations’ with the following statement:

[T]he present instance is only the latest in a series of government interventions in media content in the recent past, including several cases of suspension of licensed TV channels. In each instance the key question left unanswered was how and by what process it was determined that there was an offence; and on what basis the penalty was determined. A free and independent media is the cornerstone of India's powerful democracy, and it behoves an elected government to support and strengthen that freedom. The NBA knows that with freedom comes responsibility, and respects the role of

government in ensuring such responsibility. However, it also believes that to do so requires a transparent and codified process. Government intervention in news content without a transparent, codified process and basis is nothing short of censorship, and a threat to the freedom of the press – and in turn to the health of the democracy.

(News Broadcasters Association, 2007)

The Press Council of India's final report on paid news had recommended that electronic media be brought under the Council's purview and that its punitive powers be enhanced. In 2011, Justice Markandey Katju reiterated the call soon after he took over as the Council's chair:

'I have written to the PM that the electronic media should be brought under Press Council and it should be called Media Council and we should be given more teeth. Those teeth would be used in extreme situations,' Katju told Karan Thapar on CNN-IBN's *Devil's Advocate* programme.

(*The Times of India*, 2011)

Others endorse the underlying principle. During research interviews, the Chief Electoral Officer of Tamil Nadu, Praveen Kumar (Interview), said private broadcasters are not controlled by any law, and the Director-General of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Sunit Tandon (Interview), likened the self-regulatory body to a 'cartel for bargaining with the government'. However, the News Broadcasters Association once again resisted the pressure, writing a strongly worded letter to the Prime Minister:

We earnestly request you to intervene and request the Chairman, Press Council of India to engage himself constructively with print media matters, which is the mandate he has under the Press Council Act and not to exceed his remit and to exercise restraint on commenting upon areas which are outside his jurisdiction.

(News Broadcasters Association, 2011a)

The NBSA has issued its own guidelines on paid news. These include general guidance ('No news broadcasting organization shall broadcast or be associated in any manner with the broadcast of Paid News'), the direction that paid content should be accompanied by a continuous on-screen disclosure to that effect, and an assertion that it was prepared to fine offenders an amount of up to 10 times the value of remuneration received for paid news (News Broadcasters Association, 2011b).

In subsequent years, the NBSA took cognisance of issues of paid news, usually in response to specific complaints forwarded to it in batches through letters from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Election Commission of India or the Press Council of India. Their annual reports provide information on how they were handled:

- In May and June 2012, after courts took notice of paid programmes promoting a self-proclaimed spiritual guru or godman running on 36 television channels, including news channels, both the Indian Broadcasting Federation and NBSA issued advisories to their members to ensure that the programmes carried the on-screen label of ‘advertisement’ (News Broadcasters Association, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). It was later reported that 17 channels dropped his programmes, but 19 continued to carry them (India TV, 2012).
- The case of Zee and Jindal Steel described in Chapter 5.3 above was referred to NBSA by the Press Council of India in October 2012, but it declined to consider it because cases had been filed in the courts and the matter was sub judice (News Broadcasters Association, 2013).
- In December 2012, NBSA fined the business news channel CNBC TV18 Rs.100,000 for product promotion in a panel discussion on diabetes. The channel paid the fine (News Broadcasters Association, 2013).
- In February 2013, it informed the Election Commission of India that it could not act on the complaints it had forwarded about paid political news because the channels involved were not its members (News Broadcasters Association, 2013).
- In April 2013, it informed the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that it could not act on its complaints about paid political news because three channels involved were not members and the fourth channel had not provided a recording of the relevant programme (News Broadcasters Association, 2014).
- In June 2013, it informed the Election Commission of India that it could not act against two sets of complaints about paid political news because the accused channels were not members (News Broadcasters Association, 2014).
- In March 2014, it issued guidelines for election broadcasts and informed its members they were required to distinguish between news and paid content by

labelling the latter ‘Paid Advertisement’ or ‘Paid Content’ (News Broadcasters Association, 2014).

- In March 2014, it informed the Election Commission of India that it could not act on its complaints of paid political news because it had no jurisdiction over non-members (News Broadcasters Association, 2014).
- In August 2014, it informed the Election Commission that it was not able to find ‘any direct evidence’ against a news channel accused of five instances of paid political news (News Broadcasters Association, 2015).
- In November 2014, it informed the Election Commission of India that it could not proceed on a forwarded complaint about paid political news because the original complainant had not provided further evidence as requested (News Broadcasters Association, 2015).
- In December 2014, it informed the Election Commission of India that it could not act against a news channel accused of repeatedly carrying paid political news because it was not able to find direct evidence against the channel, and because the channel had denied the allegations (News Broadcasters Association, 2015).

Thus, it is apparent that the News Broadcasters Association has successfully resisted pressure for statutory regulation of news television, but, like the Press Council of India, has little to show for its efforts to contain paid news. The NBSA has fined one business news channel Rs.100,000 (\$2,000), but dozens of complaints forwarded to it by the Election Commission of India and the Press Council of India have not resulted in any action either because it did not have jurisdiction over non-members or it did not find evidence of wrongdoing.

### **5.4.3 Other bodies**

Unlike the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority, which has taken action against *The Telegraph* and BuzzFeed for inadequate disclosure of marketing content (Sweney, 2016), the self-regulatory body for advertising in India, the Advertising Standards Council of India, does not consider the news space as part of its remit. It defines advertisements as communications ‘which in the normal course would be recognised as

an advertisement by the general public' and thus excludes paid news where advertising is mislabelled or unlabelled (Advertising Standards Council of India, 2014). It concerns itself with violations such as misleading, offensive or plagiarised advertisements, or those that indulge in unfair competition or promote harmful products. It has thus not concerned itself with paid news, unlike advertising regulatory bodies elsewhere.

However, a number of other organisations and institutions within and outside the media have attempted to address the problem of paid news. Journalists' organisations have been instrumental in turning the spotlight on paid news, beginning, of course, with the associations that initially voiced concern during the 2009 general elections (Press Council of India, 2011). The Editors Guild of India subsequently took a stand on private treaties as well as paid political news (*Outlook*, 2009). However, the President of the Guild at that time, senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai, says about half the editors refused to sign the resolution, saying they did not have full control over the news space:

We drafted a resolution, which we asked all editors and members of the Editors Guild to sign. I must confess that a number of editors frankly didn't sign and a few of them were honest enough to say that even if they signed, they didn't see what it really would do. The fact is the decision about paid news is often not taken by editors, but by proprietors. We also had the practice of proprietor-editors who were members of the Editors Guild. I would say 50 per cent of the editors did not sign that resolution, but let us be honest, the Editors Guild at the end of the day can do only so much.

(Sardesai, Interview)

The Broadcast Editors' Association acted more swiftly and decisively when one of its members was accused of illegal activity related to paid news, perhaps because it is an association of individuals rather than organisations and is not hampered by extensive rules and regulations. Immediately after the Zee-Jindal case hit the headlines in October 2012, the Association expelled the accused Business Head and Editor of Zee News after a week-long inquiry:

After having satisfied itself that all possible and credible sources of information had been heard and investigated and all available material on the issue perused, the three-member fact-finding committee arrived at the following unanimously held conclusion 'that Mr. Sudhir Chaudhary is found

to have acted in a manner that is unbecoming of an editor and in a fashion that is prejudicial to the interest and objects of the BEA’.

On the basis of the rules provided in the constitution of the BEA it was decided to arrive at a conclusion by putting the issue to a secret ballot. Subsequent to the vote by members of the Executive Committee, the BEA resolved to remove Mr. Sudhir Chaudhary as member of the BEA.

(Broadcast Editors’ Association, 2012)

The Association was criticised for staying silent on the conflict of interest represented in Chaudhary’s combination of editorial and business responsibilities. It was accused of missing the opportunity to highlight Zee’s controversial approach as a critical element of an enabling environment for paid news, but its ‘exemplary action’ was also appreciated (The Hoot, 2012b).

The financial markets regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), took up the issue of private treaties with the Press Council of India in 2010, expressing concern about the conflict of interest.

SEBI had taken up with Press Council of India its concerns on practice of many media groups entering into agreements, such as ‘Private Treaties’, with companies. [...]

Needless to say, biased and motivated dissemination of information, guided by commercial considerations can potentially mislead investors in the securities market. Such journalism would not be in the interest of securities market.

(Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2011: 26)

In response to the Board’s concerns, the Press Council directed media companies to disclose their financial interest while reporting on companies in which they hold a stake, in a move described as ‘mandatory disclosures’ (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2010). However, media organisations refused to comply. The CEO of the parent company of *The Times of India*, Ravi Dhariwal, was unequivocal in rejecting the directive in an interview:

We don’t have to state it in every story. We have written to SEBI, pointing out that the moment you tell a journalist that you have equity in this or that company, you are biasing him, either positively or negatively. We don’t

want to bias our journalists. But if a reader is interested, we direct the reader to the relevant websites where we have disclosed this information.

**Q:** That's a cumbersome process.

**A:** If it's an IPO, if it is price-sensitive information that SEBI should be bothered about, we always disclose a private treaty. But disclosing it in every article is unrealistic. A paper is put to bed at 11 pm at night, and we have 500 private treaty clients. Is a journalist going to keep on checking in the short time available whether we have a private treaty with this or that company?

(Puri, 2010)

Separately, Parliament and the government also made attempts to tackle paid news. Early in 2011, a Group of Ministers (GoM) – essentially a ministerial committee – headed by the then Finance Minister (later President of India), Pranab Mukherjee, was constituted to suggest 'policy and institutional mechanisms' to address paid news (*Deccan Chronicle*, 2011). Its mantle passed to Parliament's Standing Committee on Information Technology, which did not mince its words, using 'corrupt' or 'corruption' 16 times, 'extortion' or its variants seven times, and characterising paid news as 'blackmail' eight times in its 137-page report. It was also scathing about the way in which the government had handled the situation:

Realising the dangers of 'Paid News' to democracy as well as the right to freedom of expression enshrined in Article 19 of the Constitution of India, Press Council of India (PCI) appointed a Committee to examine the menace of paid news observed during the General Elections, 2009 and after deliberating on the issue it released the final Report on Paid News on 30th July, 2010 and submitted to the Ministry. However, to the dismay of the Committee the Ministry is still considering the Report. When asked to spell out the status of the Report, the Committee have been informed that a GoM was constituted by the Government to examine the Report, to give views on a comprehensive policy and institutional mechanism to address the phenomenon of paid news. The Committee express their strong displeasure that though the issues were deliberated upon by the GoM, yet the recommendations of the GoM could not be finalized. Not only this, it was also decided that the GoM on Paid News would not be re-constituted and the issue as and when considered necessary may be placed before appropriate Cabinet Committee/Cabinet. The Committee are also given to understand that since the issue is sensitive and requires Inter-Ministerial consultations, the Ministry has requested the Cabinet Secretariat to re-constitute the GoM

on Paid News. In the considered opinion of the Committee, the Government is dithering on this important policy initiative on one pretext or the other as the same is revealed by the failure of the Government in taking a decision on the recommendations of the PCI appointed Committee made in July, 2010 on the shortcomings noticed in 2009 General Elections. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend the Ministry to take expeditious action on the Report of PCI and apprise the Committee of the Government' [*sic*] stand.

(Standing Committee on Information Technology, 2013: 91–92, emphasis in original)

The Standing Committee's report highlights the combined failure of the government and regulators to arrive at a viable solution over several years. It takes note of the long trail of fruitless requests for cooperation exchanged between various institutions and calls for coordinated inter-ministerial action.

It is evident that no coherent strategy has emerged and that both print and television media have been successful in stonewalling credible allegations of malfeasance. Y.C. Halan, representing the Editors Guild of India, told the Press Council that the media in India has become a 'strong force' and 'it is impossible to dictate to it by passing legislation' (Press Council of India, 2011), and senior journalist N. Ram says the government 'was afraid to go after the media' (Ram, Interview). Prakash Javadekar, Member of Parliament and a member of the Press Council of India, says 'everybody is afraid, because they can destroy your image by giving two news against you [*sic*]'. He attributes governmental inaction to pusillanimity and historical factors:

Unfortunately, we thought that the government will accept it because we thought that it is Press Council's report but government had developed cold feet and decided not to say anything about media. Whatever they [the media] are doing, let them do it because once they suffered in Emergency and they don't want to be seen as somebody who is bringing in restrictions, so they have backed out and it is pending.

**Q:** Are you hopeful that something will be done about this?

**A:** Today, the government has decided not do anything on it. This is my knowledge, this is my personal knowledge that they have already decided not to do anything on this.

(Javadekar, Interview)

#### 5.4.4 The Election Commission of India

With the media seemingly invulnerable and in an environment marked by the ineffectiveness of regulatory efforts, the Election Commission of India approached the issue from the opposite direction and focused attention on politicians. By the end of 2010, when it had become clear that the Press Council's efforts had run into obstacles, the Election Commission began to get results:

The Election Commission at that time I think was taken by surprise. Subsequently, the Election Commission did a very good job in Bihar. [...] They went after it, appointing monitors, observers, observing the media and appealing to them.

(Ram, Interview)

The Election Commission began to strictly monitor the election expenditure of candidates and, more specifically, their advertising and publicity activities. Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi set up media certification and monitoring committees in every district. They were charged with scrutinising political advertising for content proscribed by law as well as keeping account of each candidate's expenditure on advertising:

These committees were initially constituted to vet any political advertisements which were to be broadcast because they were to be vetted by the election machinery. We entrusted these committees with the power to also check the black money which was used for media purposes, say paid news. [...] We appointed senior media persons to preside over them and asked them to look out for paid news. We first tried it in Bihar in the 2010 assembly elections. We had separate guidelines for paid news and they detected 121 suspected pages of paid news. Candidates were issued notices and most of them admitted that it was paid news and they agreed to account for in their expenditure expenses.

(Quraishi, Interview)

The Chief Electoral Officer of Tamil Nadu, Praveen Kumar, revealed that the media certification and monitoring committees monitored television channels and recorded them to maintain a record. Simultaneously, the Election Commission maintained 'shadow expenditure registers' for each candidate, where they entered their estimate of election expenditure:

Basically, they [candidates] submit returns, they are supposed to give their expenditure one month after the completion of the election and that is scrutinised by the Election Expenditure Observer. We also maintain a shadow expenditure register throughout the election, video recording, CDs are kept and based on that we make an assessment of what shall be the extent of this expenditure.

(P. Kumar, Interview)

Thus, the lever found by the Election Commission to tackle paid news was to treat it as advertising and thus as election expenditure that had to be accounted for within the legally prescribed limits for each candidate. In 2009–10, the expenditure limit for a parliamentary constituency was Rs.4,000,0000 (\$80,000), while the limit for elections to state legislatures was Rs.1,600,000 (\$32,000). Candidates found to exceed this limit – and this would become very likely if substantial advertising spend were to be detected – were liable to be barred from standing for elections for three years:

We came across a couple of cases where the Press Council investigated and were able to prove and came to the conclusion that there was indeed a paid news and in one such case, one sitting MLA was unseated, Umlesh Yadav. She was from Uttar Pradesh and she was disqualified for the next three years. So, that of course sent the shivers down the spine of the persons who are thinking along the same lines. We have one or two more cases, which are under inquiry but they are sub judice. We were looking at some of these cases and the parties went to the court and challenged our competence.

(Quraishi, Interview)

The sub judice cases Quraishi refers to are those of two Chief Ministers of states – Ashok Chavan of Maharashtra and Madhu Koda of Jharkhand.

Despite the legal challenges, it is apparent that the Election Commission's strategy is the only one that has yielded some punitive action on paid news. It approaches the issue through the lens of financial transparency in elections. It thus addresses only the political manifestation of paid news and focuses on politicians. Significantly, even where charges of having paid for coverage have been proven against politicians, media organisations that received the payment have remained untouched. The Election Commission's strategy thus sidesteps the issue of media ethics and accountability and

ignores the reasons behind its spread or its other manifestations, both of which are deep-rooted.

## **5.5 THE EFFECT OF BUSINESS MODELS**

### **5.5.1 Commercialisation and impunity**

Observers and insiders see a definite and direct link between the rise of paid news and the manner in which business models and practices have evolved in the Indian media. At the most basic level, the developments are seen as the result of commercialisation of media companies and expectations that they deliver financial returns as ‘profit centres’.

The outspoken Chairman of the Press Council of India, Justice Markandey Katju, is a retired Supreme Court judge who has been campaigning for the formation of a Media Council with regulatory jurisdiction over both print and television. Since he took over as head of the Press Council in the second half of 2011, he has been making strong statements about the lack of ethics in the media, some of which have come in for criticism in the media.

It is over-commercialisation. If all you care for is money, money, money and the rest of the society may go to hell, then this is what you will get. Unfortunately, a large section of the media has degenerated into seeking money. What is paid news? Earlier, the journalist would go to politicians and say you must give me Rs.20,000 [\$400], I will publish the news in your favour that you are winning the election by a huge majority of votes. Later on, the owners of the media, they thought why should the journalists who are our employees get that money, why should we not get that money? So they came up with packages, for instance, in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, [packages of] one crore [Rs.10 million; \$200,000], half crore [\$100,000], we will publish news in your favour. [...] To earn money, you are prepared to do anything. Who does not like money? Do you think I don't like money, but, then, it has to be combined with some ethical values. [One] can't do wrong things just to earn money.

(Katju, Interview)

The Director-General of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in New Delhi, Sunit Tandon, is one of those who believes that having a self-sustaining news organisation is a laudable aim, but not at the expense of the ‘public good’:

Increasingly, most newspapers have begun to look at themselves as business enterprises and not particularly as the fourth estate, and this leads to all the other compromises down the line. The bottom line has become more important than their standing or stature, or perceived authoritativeness of the paper, or independence. Those became almost secondary. [...] The thing is that our papers tend now to follow a very sort of a market-oriented [model] by and large. One or two still hang to their older ideals a little bit more than the others. Some are blatantly into their bottom line.

(Tandon, Interview)

The most commonly encountered explanation for paid news is the market imperative – the need to maximise revenue and profit so as to show good quarterly returns to investors or potential investors. The business environment of journalism is one of hyper-commercialisation. Many observers and senior people in the industry have no hesitation in using the word ‘greed’ to explain the drive to maximise profits at any cost, among them senior journalist Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, who co-authored the Press Council of India’s report on paid news:

The greed of certain media organisations is the only explanation that one has for why big brother, instead of showing little brothers or little siblings the way, actually led the way in terms of pioneering these unethical practices. Bennett, Coleman and Company [publisher of *The Times of India*] started the trend and others followed when it comes to political paid news. The *Dainik Jagran*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Lokmat*, *Eenadu*, these publications are market leaders, these are among the top [...] so the only explanation that you can have for this phenomenon of paid news is greed.

(Guha Thakurta, Interview)

Sardesai makes much the same point. ‘It comes through sheer greed,’ he says. ‘It also comes through lack of values. Once you start seeing a newspaper or a television channel purely as a product with no interest in journalistic value then you believe that none of these things matter’ (Sardesai, Interview). The Member of Parliament and national spokesman for the Bharatiya Janata Party, Prakash Javadekar, uses similar words:

You see, paid news is a very anti-democratic phenomenon as a term and as a narrative. It is the greed of the owners of the newspapers. It is the product of the greed of the owners and the management of the newspapers and the media.

(Javadekar, Interview)

Ashis Nandy, a political psychologist and social theorist who has appeared in *Foreign Policy's* list of Top 100 Public Intellectuals, ascribes the paid news phenomenon to a wider culture of corruption and greed:

Evidently, there is in the Indian media, among large parts of the Indian journalists, a culture of corruption, greed and impunity. Corruption, your ability to undertake corrupt practices; greed to share in the black money of politicians; and there is an impunity with which they go around extorting cash payments.

**Q:** Where does this culture of corruption, greed and impunity come from?

**A:** It comes from partly secrecy, partly hypocrisy and partly a culture of impunity itself, this could be a little crude, off the cuff.

**Q:** Is it the culture within journalism, or is it drawing on a wider social trend?

**A:** It is, of course. From what I am saying, it should be obvious that it partly draws on the culture of the English-speaking social class, partly from secrecy and you have institutionalised it. I wouldn't say greed so much as a kind of an exercise of power by sectors otherwise not that powerful.

(Nandy, Interview)

The situation is not unique to Indian media. A blog post by Barry Turner in the wake of the publication of topless pictures of the Duchess of Cambridge sunbathing in France contends that it is financial gain, not ethics or the law, that determines the actions of the media (Turner, 2012). He said that the decision to publish the photographs would have been commercial, not moral, weighing the profit from publishing them against the penalty this would invite. Shanth Kumar of the *Deccan Herald*, one of the newspapers that claims to be clean with regard to paid news, says an important factor is that 'some of the newspapers have indulged in it and have found that actually it has not impacted them negatively or adversely'. This is what is 'encouraging them', he says (Shanth Kumar, Interview). This only deepens the 'culture of impunity' in the media that Nandy (Interview) talks about.

## 5.5.2 Advertiser dependence and the 2008 slowdown

Sardesai, who has worked in leading magazines, newspapers and news channels in the last two decades and more, sees a combination of ownership-related issues and prevalent business models at work:

It is not just the newspapers and the television channels, I think, it is the business model. It has two things – one is the kind of people who have got into media, the kind of proprietors who have got into the media [and] for whom the values and ethics don't really matter. Number two, and more seriously, is the business model. Your revenue model is so advertiser dependent. Your newspapers are priced so low, television channels don't get subscription revenue from cable operators, as a result you are entirely dependent on advertising revenue and once you have created that kind of a model, that model will go through this kind of pressure.... Well, elections are seen as a major source of revenue.

(Sardesai, Interview)

Shanth Kumar makes the point that the economics of the newspaper business has changed over the last 30 years, and that the level of dependence on advertising has increased sharply. 'Probably 20–25–30 years ago, the circulation and advertising revenues streams were more or less equal, so we were not over-dependent on any one of them,' he says. 'If you had drop in the advertising revenue, it didn't really concern you too much because you had a fairly decent circulation revenue and vice versa' (Shanth Kumar, Interview).

This trail of advertising dependence leads back to *The Times of India*, as do many other trails on matters related to the business of journalism in India. Strangely for a media recluse who seldom interacts with journalists, the Vice-Chairman of the Times Group, Samir Jain, is probably the man who has done more than any other to change the face of contemporary Indian media. The business model that has privileged advertising revenue over circulation or subscription revenue is a result of the price wars he waged to challenge *Hindustan Times* in New Delhi in the 1990s (Whitaker, 1994). Since then, a number of regional markets have seen aggressive price wars to break the hold of existing newspapers, and *The Times of India* has been a player in most of them (exchange4media, 2001). In the view of the Chairman of the Media Development

Foundation in Chennai, Sashi Kumar, this business model devalues both the subscriber and journalism:

The leading newspaper – which is *The Times of India*, whose advertising revenues are probably slightly more than no.2 and no.3 put together, so that is the kind of lead position it has got – when that newspaper cuts the subscription price below the cost of production of the paper, you know, Re.1 per paper, you almost had a situation where if we sold the paper to *raddi* [scrap] you got more money than you bought it for. They are economical at that level because of the greater reliance on advertising. Eighty-five per cent of the revenue of the English language paper comes from advertising. So, how important is the subscriber in that kind of a scenario? The subscriber is only there to show a particular size of circulation for the advertising, otherwise the subscribers become an anonymous mark. The advertiser is growing in importance because 85 per cent of the revenues come from the advertising. You can have all kinds of discussion and analysis, but finally you fall into the same chain because the main newspaper leads the market. The others follow because they have no choice.... They come [and try to] take over other markets so there is a war of undercutting prices, so advertisers [are] even more comfortably positioned in terms of running the newspapers.

(S. Kumar, Interview)

The strategy of low cover prices not only increases dependence on the advertiser and leads to increased susceptibility to advertisers' agendas, it also acts as an effective entry barrier for new players in the market. Low cover prices are viable only for those who already have an established circulation and are thus able to attract advertising. Of course, they also increase susceptibility to market factors and downturns in the economy that adversely affect advertising volume. One of the causal factors for the emergence of paid political news is held to be the economic downturn in 2008. Guha Thakurta says:

One reason [for paid political news] which is relatively immediate is that in 2008 and 2009 there was a worldwide economic crisis and that crisis did impact the advertising expenditure across the globe and also in India. So, to some extent the inflows of revenues of media organisations got constricted.

(Guha Thakurta, Interview)

Shanth Kumar, too, believes that though paid political news may have existed earlier, one of the factors in its institutionalisation was the economic downturn. He said the

revenues of the *Deccan Herald* and its sister publications fell substantially in 2008–09, giving the drop variously as ‘15–20 per cent’ and ‘20–25 per cent’:

I would say over all would be about 15–20 per cent. Yes, I would think more, may be 20–25 per cent and I can’t get the figure right now but I would think it was a serious setback. [...] I wouldn’t tell you the exact figure because we are a private limited company, but my sense is about 20–25 per cent. It seriously impacted us in such a way that we had to shelve our plans for a year or a year and a half – plans of expansion, plans of modernising, plans of developing the news product itself, etcetera, etcetera, so it was a major impact.

(Shanth Kumar, Interview)

The former Editor-in-Chief of *The Hindu* in Chennai, N. Ram, says though circulation did not suffer during that period, advertising did:

Generally the estimate was 25–30 per cent in the ad recession, very serious. We didn’t go into a loss but the profits were all wiped out during that period because advertising collapsed. Twenty-five to 30 per cent is brutal and so this undesirable thing [paid political news] came in by way of an innovative solution, but once it came in, they wouldn’t let it go. I don’t know what the losses of the big players are. Some of them suffered losses, but the recovery was very quick. There are some Hindi papers who claimed they never had a loss, [*Dainik*] *Bhaskar* and [*Dainik*] *Jagran*.

(Ram, Interview)

The economic downturn of 2008, though offered as an explanation for the institutionalisation of paid political news, is evidently not a complete explanation.

For one, there is a paucity of figures to substantiate this explanation. Most companies, partly because many are privately held and partly because of the competitive environment, guard their financial data zealously. Estimates for the drop in advertising revenue given by the newspaper sector range between 15 and 30 per cent, but there is room to question these figures. As shown in Figure 4.20, Roy and Bahirat’s data (2011) shows a dip of less than 10 per cent in the overall advertising spend in the Indian economy between 2008 and 2009, but data from FICCI-KPMG (2015) shows a slight increase instead. It is also notable that advertising spend recovered sharply, with Roy and Bahirat (2011) showing a 26 per cent rebound from 2009 to 2010, while FICCI-

KPMG (2015) analysis shows a 16 per cent growth over that period. Incidentally, 2009 was an election year in which a nation-wide general election was held, and election years are commonly thought to be boom years for expenditure on advertising and publicity.

Secondly, the institutionalisation of paid political news is a trend that so radically departs from normative considerations that it is difficult to visualise its emergence and widespread adoption across geographies and sectors in the short period of one year as the result of a single impetus such as a global financial crisis. There is reason to believe that if there was an advertising downturn in 2008–09, it was a precipitative factor rather than a fundamentally causative factor for paid news.

Indeed, even apart from practices such as private treaties, there are a number of other developments going back more than two decades that industry insiders believe led to the institutionalised sale of the political news space. Two of them will be considered here – the devaluing of the editor and the creeping incursion of advertising into the editorial space. Both of these developments are a direct result of the adoption of specific business models and practices.

### **5.5.3 Role and authority of the editor**

It is not a coincidence that the Editor of Zee News, Sudhir Chaudhary, who was accused of trying to blackmail an industrial house into committing \$20 million of advertising, is formally designated ‘Business Head and Editor’ of Zee News. It is also interesting to note that the term ‘Business Head’ precedes the term ‘Editor’ in his designation.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Indian news media began to become more commercialised and be seen as primarily a business proposition, the role of the editor in India has changed. Editors have been expected to yield their tight control over the editorial space and have, in exchange, been asked to shoulder some responsibility for the commercial success of newspapers and news television. The trend began in *The Times of India*, where the Vice-Chairman, Samir Jain, was determined to unseat from their perches ‘elitist’ and ‘pontificating’ editors who would brook no interference from

the management or the commercial departments. It has been documented that Jain achieved this by recruiting managers from consumer products companies, inviting them to editorial meetings, ensuring that editors took note of feedback collected from readers' focus groups by the marketing department, and even appointing managers as editors when the editor went on leave (Auletta, 2012; Puri, 2010; Shukla, 2009, among others). In the 1990s, *The Times of India* began designating the resident editors of its editions as editors of the concerned market – for instance, 'Editor, Delhi Market' – thus underlining the commercial imperative.

Sashi Kumar of the Media Development Foundation, which runs one of India's top journalism schools, the Asian College of Journalism, feels that the focus on commercial functions has eroded editorial independence:

The larger problem in the context of India is the editor. As you have understood, in a newspaper, the editor is an endangered species. With some exceptions, the rule is becoming that you don't have an editor, you have somebody as an editor who is also your marketing director. The same person who is editing the paper is also asked to look after the bottom line, the financial bottom line. So the owner of the paper says you want to have an editor, fine, but he also brings in advertising. I don't care what you write but I want my balance-sheet to look good at the end of the day. So, you can imagine the pressure operating on somebody who is wearing both these hats. If I am both the editor and the person who is supposed to bring in the advertising revenue, obviously my editorial right, my editorial sanctity, is being eroded.

(S. Kumar, Interview)

The editor of *The Times of India* who came into direct conflict with Samir Jain during the second half of the 1980s when he was implementing his ideas and putting the new regime in place was Girilal Jain. Girilal Jain, who was known to claim that he had the second most important job in India (the most important being the Prime Minister), brooked no interference from the owners or from commercial departments in the editorial space. It is likely that he made the mistake of dismissing Samir Jain as the owner's son and underestimating his determination to leave his mark on the newspaper. Sardesai, who joined *The Times of India* in Girilal Jain's last year as editor, is witness to the change over the decades:

I remember, the first meeting of *The Times of India* in 1988, when I joined as a part of the editorial team, Girilal Jain getting a phone call from his secretary saying that someone from the advertising [department] wants to meet you. He said, please tell them that I don't want to meet them. I don't think any editor today would have the courage to say that and I think it was clear that the marketing [department] lived in its own world, editorial lived in its own world. I am not saying that was ideal, but I think there is always a need for a Chinese wall. Over time, the Chinese wall has been breached.

**Q:** Who breached it?

**A:** I think *The Times of India* started it because I was there at that time in 1988. In the first couple of years, if you went to the advertising floor, it was just another floor and in those two years, they had marble floors, the whole place changed and it looked five-star and the editorial remained where it was. That was in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the change was effected. There were good points to it; it made *The Times of India* a much more profitable entity, stronger financially, but I think over time it undermined the self-confidence and the self-respect of the editorial [department] wherein the editorial [department] was constantly told that the marketing guys would decide the shape and direction of the newspaper. Even today, *The Times of India* editorially remains a fine product, but the balance of power has shifted. It was almost that if you wanted to become the editor of *The Times of India*, you would have to be subservient to whoever was the CEO. You could not be Girilal Jain of 1988 who says I don't want to talk to him.

(Sardesai, Interview)

Sardesai is of the opinion that though Girilal Jain may have 'angered' Samir Jain and accelerated the process, commercialisation and the concomitant shift of power from editorial to marketing was probably inevitable. Nandy thinks some amount of editor-envy may have played a role in the process:

They [the editors] are hobnobbing with the rulers of the country, so that gives [them] a larger than life status. First of all, the owners have come to the conclusion if that is what journalism is, in what way am I less? My father didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge and didn't get a degree of business management from Harvard School of Business, so they could bow down to the chief editors like Girilal Jain or Shyam Lal or Dev Dutt Gandhi, but why should I have to do it? I hold a degree from the Harvard Business School, I know what the world is. In America the owners run the newspapers as if it is their personal property, so why not me? So, suddenly, the journalist's stature

and his power are diminished. His public eminence has declined. [Today] nobody knows the editor of *The Times of India* or *Navbharat Times*.

(Nandy, Interview)

Sadanand Menon is an arts writer and editor who has worked with several large national publications, including India's largest circulated pink paper, *The Economic Times* from the Times Group. His experience was that refusal to accept the dominance of market considerations is not an option for editorial staff:

Those who have tried to make the argument within have been shown the doors very fast and there are no two ways about it. You can't argue against it and stay on because they will make your life very difficult. From outside, of course, you can't see [any of this] because they are, at the moment, what you call the market leader. They are market leaders because of these factors. But they are market leaders, and that is the argument. So, their own argument, which I have heard from very close, is that if you want to run something which is different, do it on your own.

(Menon, Interview)

V.V.P. Sharma, Senior Editor at the English news channel Headlines Today from the TV Today Network, echoes this when he says that, as a journalist, he has rights, 'but not within the organisation to choose the kind of journalism I want to practise'.

Leading English newspapers, including *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, and now *The Hindu*, have professional editors. Sanjay Gupta of the *Dainik Jagran* is one of the many owner-editors in the regional newspapers in English, Hindi and the various regional languages. He finds no conflict in the two roles:

Being an owner-editor, once I wear my editorial hat, I will not allow interference [from myself] as a CEO, and as a CEO, I can overrule the editor as and when I think, so it is right. So, it is one person deciding both the things. I have never come across a point where I have been pressurised because I am myself. So, how will I pressurise myself?

We have an editorial team; the core committee over there will run the newspaper on a daily basis and it is their responsibility. I am not a hands-on editor sitting in the newsroom over there interfering in their day-to-day work. I set up policies and leave it to them.

(Gupta, Interview)

Shanth Kumar, who is part of the family that owns the *Deccan Herald*, is quite frank that the editor's cap is more prestigious in certain circumstances:

If I go to a newsprint manufacturer and say I am Editor of so and so newspaper, I don't think he is going to give me much importance, but if I say I am the Director and am going to buy some paper, definitely then he will give me a little more importance. I do things like buying newsprint, buying printing machines, I do finance, I go to the banks and those are all my directorial responsibilities. But in many situations, I call myself as Editor of *Praja Vani* and a little more importance and a little more recognition is given to what I say. Both are important roles that I play and [they are] equally important.

(Shanth Kumar, Interview)

#### 5.5.4 The Medianet phenomenon

The incursion of advertising content into the news space in an institutionalised manner began with Medianet, an initiative launched by *The Times of India* in 2003 to encourage companies and individuals to pay to have news written about them. The logic was very simple – celebrities and brands were getting free publicity in the pages of the newspaper when reporters covered their events and Samir Jain and his younger brother, Vineet Jain, thought they should be asked to pay for it instead. *The Times of India* reacted to initial criticism by defending itself in its news pages:

As advertisers seek to make themselves heard over the cacophony of a million voices, all competing for the consumer's attention, they are no longer willing to settle for standard advertising measures. Especially since they are all too aware that simply carrying a big ad or even repeating it often may not be enough to register the message with the reader. [...]

Those who are apoplectic about the perceived invasion of 'message' into the domain of 'content' may want to consider that the two have long since ceased to be strangers, and are sharing an increasingly symbiotic relationship. Marshall McLuhan famously declared that the medium was the message. In all humility, we'd like to say that Medianet is the messenger – heralding a brave new world of innovation.

(*The Times of India*, 2003)

Under the label of Medianet, the Times Group officially accepted money to send reporters to cover PR events and activities such as film releases, product launches, celebrity brand-building and even society parties. There was an official rate card, revealed by Ashar (2004), and PR companies could buy news space and photographic coverage for their clients, including those aspiring to celebrity status. City-specific supplements of *The Times of India* such as *Delhi Times*, *Mumbai Times* and *Hyderabad Times* blazon from their colourful pages the activities and parties of minor celebrities now commonly known by the collective noun of ‘page three people’ or ‘P3P’ (no reference to page three girls in *The Sun*). Raja (2004) said Medianet ‘makes Rupert Murdoch's Fox News a glowing paragon of journalistic virtue in comparison’, but a Murdoch newspaper later attacked the business practice:

A *Sunday Times* reporter telephoned Medianet last week posing as the public relations agent of a company wanting coverage for a party at Emporio, an exclusive shopping mall in Delhi.

Chandru Sambasivan, the head of Medianet’s Delhi office, said space could be bought in the *Delhi Times* supplement, the *Times*’ society pages, for £27 a centimetre on the front page, of £16 inside.

He said it could ‘definitely’ be dressed up as a genuine news story, as long as it met a ‘celebrity quotient’. Celebrities were available to attend the event at an extra cost, he said.

‘Once you are able to share it (the launch product) with us, we could always build a story around it and make an interesting article for the readers,’ he said.

(Smith, 2011)

Most other newspapers and even television channels followed suit and adopted this strategy of, in effect, hiring out their reporters to cover publicity events. Interviews, on the page or on screen, also became sources of revenue. The paid item is given the treatment a news story would, in terms of how it is used, the font and its ‘feel’. However, the story’s placement and its length in terms of airtime or column centimetres are determined by how much the advertiser has paid. *The Times of India* – sometimes – carries a small ‘Medianet’ credit for such stories, and other newspapers have taken to using other code words such as ‘impact feature’. Gupta of Jagran Prakashan admits that

boundaries are being blurred, but refuses to be worried by the fact that the newspaper is not only carrying advertising content in the news space, it is even creating this content:

Boundaries are being blurred because some advertisers or some corporate houses or some personalities want something to be printed about them in the newspaper and over there you may have told them some advertorial or some impact features. Somebody has to write those impact features, so that is a different department. They have writers, and they are clearly marked and that is the end of the story.

(Gupta, Interview)

Competitors followed the pattern set by *The Times of India*, but that newspaper has since moved on to more refined strategies. City-specific and subject-specific supplements of *The Times of India* have now been entirely turned over to paid content. On the basis of this, the management claims that a separate space has been designated for paid content, and that there is a line between the main newspaper and the supplements. These supplements include *Delhi Times*, *Times Property*, *Education Times* and *Speaking Tree* (a supplement on spirituality, which is big business in India, with several television channels dedicated to paid slots for gurus and godmen). They carry display and classified advertising and, separately, stories that appear to be factual content, but are, in fact, PR material. Readers treat 'stories' in these supplements as genuine newspaper content on, say, college education or buying a house, but the management of the newspaper is clear that it is all advertising. Education and real estate are particularly lucrative areas for paid content. Tandon of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication says:

They pass off paid-for elements as if they are doing it, they try and distinguish it as what they call an impact feature or something else, but they do not clearly spell out that it is paid for. The difference between the paid-for content and the content which is supposedly originated by the publication itself is becoming more difficult to discern and unless you are a very observant media watcher, it might escape you. Every media, even general interest magazines and news magazines, bring out surveys of all these colleges and so on. Many of them carry the interviews of the people behind the colleges. You can fairly well discern this is paid for and it is not the magazine's own assessment after a careful study of where their relative standings are. Some of the surveys are fine, but even those, I am sure, there

would be doubt as to how much has been influenced by the advertisement input.

(Tandon, Interview)

*The Times of India* has now begun to declare its advertising supplements as ‘advertorial promotional features’ with a notice – in small type – incorporated as part of the masthead. *Delhi Times* carries ‘Advertorial, entertainment promotional feature’ on the masthead, *Times Property* says ‘Advertorial, property promotional feature’ and *Speaking Tree* declares itself to be a ‘Spiritual promotional feature’. However, so cleverly is the notice hidden in plain sight in the least-read part of the newspaper, its masthead, that readers – and even journalists from other newspapers – are not aware that all the content is potentially paid content.

Television channels follow a similar strategy – they put a credit on screen for a short while indicating (often obliquely) that there is a commercial interest, and then carry on as if the programming was a journalistic product. Sardesai talks about an advertising-driven series on his news channel CNN-IBN:

I think when we initially started there was a ‘Shave India’ campaign that we did with Gillette, which Paranjay [Guha Thakurta] in his report [Press Council of India, 2011] points out, but my argument to that was it was Gillette’s Shave India campaign and at no stage was it suggested that Gillette was not the sponsor. But even from that instance, learning from the past we have decided that there will be a ‘sponsored feature’ tag running through the show. I think the way forward is disclosure.

(Sardesai, Interview)

Various practitioners of this subterfuge proclaim the openness of their approach and the honesty of their intentions frequently and loudly. *The Times of India* says that its ‘advertorial’ declarations on the supplements show that the main newspaper is advertorial-free. This argument also assumes that displaying advertising as news is legitimate with the level of disclosure provided on their mastheads.

*The Times of India* no longer flogs its rate card for advertorials in-house, it does it through a subsidiary set up for the purpose, Optimal Media Solutions (OMS). In 2010,

OMS was mentioned on the Medianet website, though in later years, these references were no longer to be found:

Optimal Media Solutions Limited (A Times Group Company) is a leading image building organization. We are looking towards moving beyond the current format of advertising, which is currently used extensively by organizations to improve brand awareness. We at OMS work towards projecting our clients in an informative manner using the (multiple) medium of *The Times of India*. We provide comprehensive solutions and back this up with an excellent editorial team, which provides solid content. Optimal Media Solutions operates in the metro supplements (for e.g. *Delhi Times*, *Bombay Times* etc.) of *The Times of India*.

(Times Medianet, 2010)

The Times Medianet website, like many other Times Group websites, varies widely in accessibility and in the information it provides from year to year. A 199-slide PowerPoint presentation by one of the managers in OMS makes it clear that ‘OMS is not a channel to buy your way into Times Publications’ (Joseph, no date). However, in other places, it clearly indicates links with editorial content when it says: ‘It is an editorial solution offering brand positioning through communication of credible concepts’ and ‘A premium service from the TOI Group assuring editorial in a quasi-controlled media (date, page, position, content)’. There are many other indications that what is being offered is brand-building by mimicking the credibility of editorial content.

Unlabelled or deviously labelled advertorials – now widely institutionalised and integrated into business models in Indian news media – began in seemingly innocuous areas such as travel journalism, film journalism and reporting ‘page three people’. They extended to sport, then to economic and corporate news through activities such as private treaties. Then came other areas in which audiences sought information from newspapers and where players had a commercial interest in being projected, including education and real estate. With almost all areas covered, the next logical step was political news – if a newspaper can run advertising disguised as news on behalf of a film star, a private university, a doctor, a construction company and a spiritual leader, then why not for a politician?

India is not alone in this – *The Guardian* has reported allegations that American TV host Larry King was paid \$225,000 to interview Ukraine’s prime minister in 2011 (Harding, 2016). *The Atlantic* and *Washington Post* have been accused of hosting panel discussions at political conventions that are, in effect, paid promotions for causes or individuals (Fang, 2016; Emmons, 2016). In the UK, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* have accused each other of being too cosy with advertisers (*The Guardian*, 2015; *The Telegraph*, 2015a, 2015b). The subservience to advertiser interest described in the allegations is not very different from paid news in India. However, there is a difference, and that is of scale, impunity, and the widespread integration of the practices of paid news into business models. Prevalent business practices are also associated with the weakening of editorial authority as well as the ability and confidence of journalists to oppose unethical practices or act against them.

## **5.6 JOURNALISTS AND JOURNALISM**

### **5.6.1 Corruption among journalists**

One of the reasons given for the institutionalisation of advertorials disguised as news stories in the form of Medianet is that the management of *The Times of India* suspected that reporters were striking deals with public relations agencies to feature their clients in the newspaper. It is accepted by many senior journalists that lax editorial control after the devaluing of the editor and promotion of commercial considerations in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a spurt in corruption among journalists. The pink papers reporting financial affairs are said to have produced many millionaire reporters who took advantage of hectic corporate activity following economic liberalisation in the early 1990s. The owners and management of *The Times of India* decided this was unacceptable – not the corruption, but the fact that reporters were making money by using the news space. They decided to institutionalise advertorials so that the newspaper could benefit instead of the individual. This may sound like an apocryphal story, but the CEO of the Times Group, Ravi Dhariwal, confirmed in an interview that reporters’ corruption was indeed ‘a large part of the reason for Medianet’ (Puri, 2010).

The former Editor-in-Chief of *The Hindu*, N. Ram, says the earlier scenario of corruption at the individual level was ‘manageable’:

There is a great deal of corruption in the Indian media and the journalists have tasted the good life. I think apart from petitioning government to give this or that [they] consciously trade their skill and space, particularly in the business papers. I am sure there are stakes in the general press as well for favours, whether in shares or send me to Tirupati [a popular pilgrimage] or pick me up. It may look small, but it is not. It goes back. I have heard of business journalists earlier and I don’t think we are exempt from the asking for favours and so on, but it was manageable and small time. Corruption is serious and it is not [at] just the working journalists’ level, I think, it involves the proprietors, it involves senior executives, it involves various players.

(Ram, Interview)

Vinay Tewari, Managing Editor of the English news channel CNN-IBN, talks of his culture shock and disillusionment at the time he entered the profession:

I remember in early 1990s going to a press conference when the first wave of liberalisation started. I wasn’t a financial journalist; though I had done a business journalism course, I did not cover business that much, but I remember once in a while when I had to go, I was astounded to see that at the end of the press conference, they would hand out envelopes which had Rs.500 notes inside, there were currency notes inside. The fact that they had the courage to do that astounded me, but I got even more shocked to see some people actually accepting it. I couldn’t believe how you can have such low self-respect that you would actually accept an envelope like this. I think when liberalisation happened, there were enough business hand-outs and the coverage of the corporate world was much worse actually. I think the proprietors suddenly realised that there is some hanky-panky going on in any case, so why not institutionalise it?

(Tewari, Interview)

### **5.6.2 Journalists’ salaries**

In the early 1990s, journalists were relatively poorly paid, but before that decade ended, journalists had started earning handsome salaries. One reason was *The Times of India*’s practice of hiring journalists on higher salaries on a short-term contract, rather than on

the lower salaries that went with lifelong employment in the earlier tradition. This gave journalists more money in their pockets, but also made them more susceptible to management pressure. The subcommittee report that was not adopted by the Press Council of India (Press Council of India, 2011) also pointed out that contractual employment deprived journalists of the job security that came with being employed under the provisions of the Working Journalists Act, 1955, and called for the Act to be strengthened. Another reason for salary rises was the advent of private news television and the increasing demand for journalists.

Today, some journalists, mainly in television but also in newspapers, earn salaries that are fabulous by any standards. The Editor and owner of the *Dainik Jagran*, Sanjay Gupta, says that the editor of a leading newspaper (not the *Jagran*) gets an annual salary in the range of Rs.60 million (about £730,000 at the exchange rate in October 2012, but many multiples of that if you consider its purchasing power in India). B.G. Verghese, a senior and respected journalist who has been the editor of both *Hindustan Times* and *The Indian Express*, says that high salaries can lock journalists into jobs and co-opt them into management agendas:

The salary the people get and the young reporter gets in a month, I didn't get in five years in any newspaper. Many times, if you are accustomed to high living, you are not able to chuck a job and all these factors come into play.

(Verghese, Interview)

Sharma, Senior Editor of *Headlines Today*, substantiates the point:

Unlike in the past, when people still thought of it [journalism] as a passion and associated with nation building and all that, today, the journalist is also an individual. You know, there is a dichotomy in his personality, for him the job security is more important. For example, for me, the job security is paramount, more important than probably my professional instinct.

(Sharma, Interview)

Guha Thakurta, who co-authored the Press Council's report on paid news, says this insecurity about jobs prevents many journalists from openly expressing disapproval of unethical practices:

When you have seen there is a slowdown in the economy, when the advertising revenues have shrunk or [are] shrinking, when jobs are at stake and when you look around and find that many of your colleagues are without their jobs, then your values and your ethical norms or principles can, on occasion, take a backseat and that is what has happened in certain cases.

(Guha Thakurta, Interview)

However, Pankaj Pachauri, former Editor, Special Projects, at the news broadcaster NDTV, and a Communications Advisor to the Prime Minister of India, believes that it is not just fear of losing the job that is at work. High salaries and the commercialised, corporate culture of media organisations have seduced many journalists into adopting the same thought processes as the management:

Look at high salaries. My marketing guy, I think, gets paid more than the editorial side. So, the editorial people said we are part of the same product, so why shouldn't we get paid so much, and that had been the complaint of the editorial people. But the media has become a business and you need good marketing people and good marketing people don't come cheap. So, you are caught in this system where the salaries of the editorial people have to go up to keep some sort of a balance with the marketing team. [...] All the boats have to rise together and once the boats start rising together, they have [the] same interest and that is what is happening. The interest of the marketing side has become the interest of the editorial side because both the boats have risen together. In this tidal wave, the media profession finds itself in a crisis.

(Pachauri, Interview)

Journalists in India are thus in a position where they have high salaries but low job security, which makes them vulnerable to pressures from management. Veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar puts it succinctly: 'The piper has called the tune' (Nayar, Interview).

### **5.6.3 Economic pressures on newsgathering**

The business models of newspapers privilege advertising revenue over subscription revenue and this, in turn, makes the newspaper industry sensitive to market pressures. Coupled with increasing corporatisation and the demands imposed by having to declare

quarterly results, it makes newspapers extremely cost-conscious in turbulent times. The first casualty of financial pressures is often the newsroom.

In English newspapers, this translates to the abandonment of rural and agricultural beats and an increasing focus on the urban middle classes that are desirable to advertisers. In the Hindi and regional systems, it translates to a focus on the ‘creamy layer’ of the population and neglect of the interests of poorer sections. Thus, apart from other effects such as paid news, business models are also leading to a contraction of the Indian public sphere. There have been discernible changes in the breadth and depth of the journalism practised, in the concerns of journalism and its role in society. It has also changed the culture of journalism into an easy acquiescence with news that is modified for a commercial purpose.

Regional newspapers, which have expanded their number of editions very fast to offer an unprecedented level of localisation, depend heavily on a network of stringers in small towns and at the village level. Stringers are paid by the story, usually a pittance (sometimes as low as Rs.300 or less than £4 a story):

The fact is that in most small towns and district headquarters in this country, the person who is a stringer often doubles up as an advertising agent. There are very clear conflict[s] of interest. The concerned correspondent/ advertising agent does not wish to write the unpleasant truth about the person who could be a potential advertiser or is an existing advertiser, so since the so-called stringer-cum-ad-agent[s] depend on the commission they earn from the advertising (which is an important component of their total earnings for their livelihood), this also acts as a factor for compromising the free and independent dissemination of information.

(Guha Thakurta, Interview)

This aspect of regional newspapers is responsible for substantive and continual, albeit low-level, paid news, often as a means of survival. It is not difficult for stringers to find people willing to pay to be featured in the newspaper, or to have their version of the news published. The newspaper industry has been aware of this problem for many years. However, rather than improving working conditions and stringers’ rates, evidence suggests that newspaper proprietors have emulated their survival tactics and integrated the cash-for-coverage model into their revenue models.

In the television world, competition, large ‘carriage fees’ to cable operators and high initial and fixed costs have a similar effect. Das, CEO of Zee News till September 2012, says this affects the pursuit of journalism:

You have to turn around [show a profit] quicker than what the market was actually offering. So, there is no long-term content planning and there is no investment in content. Rather, there is an expense in carriage. So, once you have drained out your money in the carriage, you are left with very little money to invest in your content. So, content suffers. The easy way to produce content for prime time Indian television is to include entertainment content cut from entertainment channels. So that is what journalism has gone through in the Hindi genre, whereas in the English [news genre], I would still like to think that the quality has not gone down to that extent. The regional has.

(Das, Interview)

Pachauri says that imperatives of low-cost journalism have changed the content of television news. News television programming typically includes several hours of prime-time studio-based argue-fests between politicians, activists and experts – for a reason. Talking heads are the cheapest form of television. Similarly, there have been other changes that have altered the framework of news values:

If you look at the free part, then you have the cinema. Most cinema footage is free, it is given by the publicity department [of the film company], so the component of cinema in Indian television channels according to one study is about 17 per cent. Similarly, the components of sports – when you talk about sports in India, it is mainly cricket – that is also free footage when you are just taking a clip of someone hitting at slip, someone hitting a century, someone taking a very good catch, it is free. That is why the component of sports is also almost 17 per cent. So, we are looking at more than one third of television news running on free footage, and that also transcends into political activity. It is free and cheap footage. If there is a political event, it is very cheap to cover it. There is no difference between a cricket match, cinema, gossip and a political rally because they are all free or very cheap in terms of your content.

(Pachauri, Interview)

#### 5.6.4 Missing editorial filters

On the one hand, news values are changing under the pressure of business models, financial constraints and technology. On the other, newsroom cultures and the processes of journalism have also changed. Flatter newsroom hierarchies, shorter response times and a far larger number of editions have led to the erosion of editorial filters in the newsroom. Sadanand Menon is of the opinion that digital flows are also responsible for a lack of journalistic accountability in the newsroom:

Twenty years ago every newspaper had wonderful filters. I could be a cub reporter doing this or a senior reporter doing that, but my copy would go through at least three filters down the line. Even if the filtering was neglected at two stages, in the third step certainly my copy would be cross-checked by the News Editor. But in online journalism today this kind of filtering is reduced dramatically and more and more inaccuracies are coming out. Despite the electronic system enhancing your reach and sourcing system, the media practice itself has abandoned certain filtering stages. Twenty years ago or 15 years ago, a copy had a physical trail and, if I was editing a reporter's copy, I would use blue pencil and the next day the blue pencil copy would be available to that reporter to refer to, I know that. Or even the printed edition of [the] paper, the editor or chief editor himself would be redlining or blue lining. Errors, inconsistencies, or departing from the paper's policy were discussed in the next day's editorial meeting. Today those practices have vanished completely.

(Menon, Interview)

In television news rooms, the pressures of time are even greater:

We are living in times of – how do you put it – a live information business. So, whatever it is, it is available to you live. If a film star tweets about the birth of a grandchild, they are on air immediately. If someone, a politician, tweets about getting arrested, it is there almost immediately and there is no second source for that story. So, it has a lot of problems for the future – that not sourcing the stories properly has become a general practice now. Second sourcing is gone. And that is because you want to be the first with the news. However insignificant it is, you have to be there and the most important thing is speed.

(Pachauri, Interview)

Guha Thakurta sees it as a problem of the seniors being co-opted into the agenda of commercialisation:

If there is collusion right from the top, then where is the question of a filter? And if everybody is part of this nexus, the corrupt nexus, then there are no watchdogs, there are no gatekeepers, there are no filters; everybody is part of this whole racket.

(Guha Thakurta, Interview)

### **5.6.5 Marketing departments and news processes**

Some editorial filters have also gone missing because of the diminishing of the editorial department's control over editorial decisions. In many organisations, the marketing department plays a day-to-day role in journalistic output. This, of course, is not true for all organisations – in many newspaper and television companies, journalists never come across marketing or management personnel. But it must be said that the number of companies in the latter category has fallen drastically over the years. Pachauri describes the interaction in NDTV:

The marketing people come to you because they have a very good programme and so and they want to, say, run a 13-part series before the Budget, so naturally you have to sit down with them and discuss how to take it forward. Similarly, if I have a good idea on the editorial side and I think it needs some extra money and there is not enough in the editorial kitty, I can go to the marketing people and say that I have a very good idea, can you get some money to sponsor this kind of programme? So, that is I think a very healthy thing to do. But what is happening lately is that because of the pressure on revenue, the marketing departments are pushing on two counts: number one is eyeballs, which is the TV rating, and number two is direct cash inflow [from programmes capable of attracting sponsorship].

(Pachauri, Interview)

Zee News works differently. The head of marketing, Deputy Vice-President Rohit Kumar, and his team sit in an unusual position – in the middle of the editorial department. They interact with the editorial staff daily and have no compunctions in giving editorial instructions:

Every day we interact with the editorial at the editorial meeting. We interact at a broader level and what content we are planning and we are free to give our input and ideas because we are marketing guys, so it will help because we understand and we talk from the viewer's point of view. It can benefit the viewer and it helps in getting the ratings. Apart from that, there is a weekly rating meeting about the performance of the channel and we give the input information. We are happy that our input information is bringing lots of changes and we also keep a track [of] certain changes – is it beneficial to the channel or not?

**Q:** Don't the editorial people say to you they know the audience better?

**A:** Yes, this is a war in the media industry. It is high time that everybody understands that marketing has to play a vital role. Marketing doesn't mean one individual, marketing means the viewer, what the viewer wants, so we have to understand the viewer, we have to respect the viewer and we should deliver the product.

**Q:** So, when editorial says to you, listen, we know better and we interact with the people, what do you say to them?

**A:** It is fine that they interact with the people. It is also important how many people they interact with and also the research, the numbers, the ideas. I think that really matters most because everything is linked to TRP [television rating points] and if you get good TRP, you get good revenue, and if you get good TRP, you get good subscription.

(R. Kumar, Interview)

Thus, there are a number of factors related to journalists and journalism that bear a connection to the phenomenon of paid news. Journalists in India feel disempowered for a number of reasons, including vast disparities in salaries between the elite metropolitan journalist and stringers in distant districts; lack of job security; economic pressures on newsgathering; and the usurpation of editorial decision-making by marketing departments. All of these factors have played a role in reducing journalists to the status of bystanders or collaborators in the unrestrained spread of paid news.

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has considered various aspects of paid news in a manner designed to explore the features of the Indian media system. It focused largely on three themes – the

emergence and practices of paid news; regulation and external influences; and journalism and journalists.

The chapter first considered the two faces of Indian journalism and the peculiar concurrence of quality journalism and paid news, with both of them being prominent in their own right. It was emphasised that paid news does not represent the totality of Indian media; it merely represents a system-wide ethical fault-line that coexists with quality journalism. The chapter went on to define paid news and specify that retail corruption and appropriately labelled advertorials were excluded from the definition, but private treaties, paid political news and incidents of blackmail and extortion were included. This also resulted in the proposing of a formal definition of paid news.

The chapter then discussed the large range of regulatory attempts that have been made to curb paid news, for they reveal the inner working of the Indian media system as well as the media's practices of power vis-à-vis the government and regulatory bodies. Next, the deep linkages between business models and the emergence of paid news were examined, with attention focused on how business models and financial considerations are connected with the trends that have taken root. Finally, the chapter studied how journalists' working conditions, professional boundaries, newsroom practices and economic pressures have combined to create an environment in which they perceive themselves to have little control over their output or the activities of their organisations.

Rajdeep Sardesai, one of India's best-known journalists and former Editor-in-Chief of the IBN18 Network, which runs three television news channels in three languages, has had a long career at the head of news organisations. He summarises recent developments as a crisis of confidence in journalism:

I am not willing to concede entirely that the core of journalism has been completely corroded today. I do believe it, I think, the quality has declined but, you know, let us not blame paid news, marketing men, commercial men for the decline in the quality of journalism, we have to blame ourselves. At the end of the day, we have failed journalism, we don't do enough homework, we don't do enough fact-checking, we don't invest enough in news gathering; these are problems that lie within. We titillate audiences, we trivialise news, we sensationalise news. The marketing guy is not asking you to trivialise, titillate or sensationalise. You are doing it because your self-

confidence has been undermined, because you no longer have any confidence in journalism and the journalistic product. You believe that the audience out there wants titillation, wants sensationalism. You cater to the lowest [common] denominator. Up to a point, we can blame paid news, but let us not blame paid news for the decline in standards. Standards have declined because of us.

(Sardesai, Interview)

Sardesai paused for nearly 10 seconds when asked to enumerate how Indian journalism today is better than it used to be in the past – and then came up with ‘energy, passion and aggression’ (Sardesai, Interview). It is likely that the question stumped Sardesai because the recent discourse on the undefined ‘quality’ of Indian journalism has been overwhelmingly critical, both within the profession and from without. The focus has been on ethical lapses illustrated by incidents and trends such as entrapment, irresponsibility during security operations, sectarianism, influence-peddling, profit-seeking, and the encroachment of advertising into the news space. This is also related to a strong element of nostalgia for the more overt public-spiritedness of a ‘more ethical and responsible’ past. Even if one accepts that the virtues of past practices are unproven and that the recollections of old-timers have no evidentiary value, the attractiveness of Siebert *et al.*’s normative ideal goes hand in hand with widespread disenchantment with the current state of affairs.

Journalists in India still persist in their self-image of serving an important function in democracy. They have also guarded their freedom historically, resisting and often successfully rebuffing attacks on their own freedom, or that of cartoonists or social media, by politicians, proposed legislation, the judiciary and self-regulatory bodies. An argument could be made that journalistic independence has yielded in some measure to media power exercised by organisations. The fierce resistance to efforts at regulation and, indeed, the venal exercise of power of politicians at election time both testify to the power of the media, even if not the empowerment of journalists:

The constitution framers gave freedom to write to the scribe, the journalists. The freedom of the press is for the persons who are employed there and conveying [information], the journalists, that was the idea of freedom of the press. If today, that freedom of the press is going to be enjoyed or is going to

be hijacked by the proprietors, the Constitution framers are the country will have to see it and weep.

(Nayar, Interview)

In sum, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Indian journalism has not been able to protect itself from attacks by managers and owners. Market considerations and owner interests have fuelled rapid growth and brought about fundamental changes in news media in the two decades since the landmark economic reforms of the early 1990s. News organisations have not been mere observers and commentators of the changing economic climate, they have been active participants. Participation in a fast growing and ineffectively regulated market – the Wild West once again suggests itself as a metaphor – has changed the structures, practices, strategies and outputs of news organisations. As the focus has shifted from the social responsibility of the news media to its economic productivity, owners and the market played a larger role in influencing journalism.

The analysis undertaken in this chapter reveals the unsoundness of the assumption that the quality or performance of journalism is independent of the business of journalism. This assumption is often made in the Western world, either explicitly as a theoretical modelling assumption (Nielsen, 2012: 9) or implicitly in the context of binary all-or-nothing scenarios about the ability of newspapers to survive as institutions (for example, Downie and Schudson, 2009). As has been seen in this chapter, this is not the situation in India, where the idea of journalism has proved to be significantly more mutable under the pressure of markets and owners.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

At its core, this research project asks a) whether information emerging from the study of the phenomenon of paid news can provide insights into the behaviour of the Indian media system, and b) whether these insights can be translated into a set of candidate variables and approaches that could contribute to greater depth and accuracy in the comparative study of media systems.

The phenomenon at the heart of this thesis, paid news, was selected as the core case study because it is a fresh and concerning phenomenon. Significant, system-wide and deeply entrenched as it is, it was thought to possess the potential to illuminate some of the forces that drive the Indian media system. As research progressed, ample evidence emerged that paid news is intricately – even organically – linked to the structures, processes and practices of Indian media, validating the view that it reveals important aspects of the media system as a whole. The focus on paid news also led to an exercise of mapping the Indian media system, which is significantly under-represented in media studies. India is overlooked to an even greater extent in media systems theory, finding no mention in most comparative studies, perhaps because its complexity presents a barrier to easy classification within extant typologies.

The match between media systems theory and the case study was strong. It brought together a theoretical framework that seeks to characterise the behaviour of media systems with a phenomenon that highlights the forces and relationships that drive the behaviour of a specific media system.

This research thus acts at two levels – it fills an empirical gap in academic literature relating to Indian media, and also seeks to use the knowledge thus generated to deepen understanding of theoretical frameworks that in their current form are apparently unable to adequately represent the Indian media system.

This thesis began by establishing the broad contours, framework and motivation for this study in its Introduction. Next, Chapter 2 reviewed media systems theory and its

foundational assumptions and frameworks. There was a clear focus on evaluating its effectiveness in describing and explaining the empirical reality of media systems, including non-Western ones. Structured around landmark studies, the chapter discussed the development of models of media systems over six decades. Debates were analysed and insights drawn, resulting in a comprehensive view of theoretical issues. On this basis, a set of theoretical propositions about media systems theory were put forward for testing against the case study. The chapter also defined the two overarching research questions that guided this research.

Chapter 3 clarified the study's design, provided justification of methods and specified the ultimate objective of data analysis – to study the system-wide ethical fault-line of paid news in a manner that could contribute to media systems theory. Research was designed around a nested case study, with the study of paid news nesting inside a broader exercise of mapping the Indian media system. The exploratory intent of data collection and the qualitative lens applied to analysis were specified. The chapter provided details about the collection of data from documents, statistics and in-depth interviews, as well as about how the data was analysed to extract relevant themes. Attention was also focused upon the manner in which varied data sources and the substantial cross-fertilisation between the inner and outer case studies contributed to analytical depth and triangulation.

Chapter 4 produced a map of the Indian media system, filling a gap in knowledge and characterising it as currently being in a phase of explosive growth. It explored various dimensions of the growth in the media system to reveal how they drive the actions of media organisations. The chapter revealed that a hyper-competitive business environment has created system-wide distortions in revenue models across media and across languages. The factors behind distortions in revenue models are media-specific, but they create remarkably similar conditions. This, in turn, exerts an influence on the commercial behaviour of individual media companies that is so strong and homogenising that it cannot but be considered a characteristic of the media system. It is remarkable that even as differentiation and regionalisation develop, there is a convergence in business practices.

Chapter 5 analysed data generated for the inner case study. It examined the emergence and institutionalisation of paid news from a number of different perspectives within and around the media. It established the relationship between the specific phenomenon and the broad characteristics of the media system mapped in the previous chapter; it revealed how paid news arises from within a confluence of forces that ultimately link back to the state of the system and its context. It documented the remarkable similarity between the newspaper and television sectors, whether in newsroom pressures and processes, or in their firm resistance to all formal attempts to hold them accountable. Collectives of news channels and newspapers exercised media power under different institutional arrangements and used different arguments and tactics, but they were driven by similar forces and achieved similar results. Together, Chapters 4 and 5 present the rich, in-depth empirical data yielded by this study.

In this concluding chapter, the data and perspectives generated in the preceding chapters are synthesised and examined in their theoretical context. First, the empirical contributions of this study are summarised, evaluated and contextualised. The next section discusses methodological aspects, including the productivity of the adopted approach. The theoretical conclusions are then presented in two sections as the answers to the two research questions. These sections combine the learnings from the literature review in Chapter 2 with the empirical findings from Chapters 4 and 5 to synthesise the implications for media systems theory. The answers to RQ 2 are presented in Chapter 6.4. They include the suggested variables (Chapter 6.4.1) and approaches (Chapter 6.4.2) deemed to have the potential of wider application to the comparative study of media systems. This is followed by seven theoretical propositions about media systems theory (Chapter 6.5), which is the core of the answers to RQ 1. The additional variables and approaches identified, taken together with the seven theoretical propositions, have the potential to add to the granularity and fidelity of media systems theory, especially as it relates to non-Western media systems. They represent the theoretical contribution of this study. Finally, this chapter discusses the limitations of this study and makes recommendations for further research.

## 6.2 THE EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTION

This research project studied the Indian media system at two different levels in accordance with its objectives and design. At one level, it constructed a map of the media system, anchored in statistics and data about macro indicators of the system. This map was informed by perspectives from in-depth qualitative data collected for the more specific inquiry into paid news. Both levels of analysis came together to yield insights into the powerful forces and snowballing trends that can drive the behaviour of a media system. This detailed and triangulated representation of the Indian media system is a specific achievement of this research project.

Chapter 4 establishes the state of explosive growth that has existed in the Indian media system since the mid-1990s and recognises it as a defining characteristic that influences numerous other aspects. While the media market awaits a 'shakeout' of weak players long anticipated as the necessary precursor to 'market consolidation', media organisations are driven by an imperative to expand or perish in the face of competition. India's demographics, low levels of media penetration and technological advances mean that there is no shortage of fresh geographic, linguistic and genre vistas on which to stake a claim. The findings highlight how the race to conquer new territory has skewed revenue models across the media system and how this, in turn, influences business models and ownership patterns. The exercise resulted in a comprehensive map of the web of contextual, strategic and financial imperatives that are prominently visible in Indian media.

The map in Chapter 4 is not a complete wide-angle picture of the Indian media system, and neither was it intended to be. It is the map of processes, forces and relationships within the media system that were established as relevant to paid news, but these elements are so numerous that they nevertheless create a more detailed map than otherwise available. The lack of comprehensive data on the Indian media system and its linguistic subsystems informed the decision to adopt a grounded and exploratory approach to constructing the map, instead of formally applying the structural and normative factors usually considered by media systems theory. The map presented in Chapter 4 focuses its lens on the case study and the media system around it, rather than on the media system and its surrounding context. It does not ignore macro-level

contextual structures and influences, but they are not the primary objects of scrutiny and are largely considered when suggested by the case study. The media system's relationship with the state and the political system, for instance, has been explored where it directly relates to the case study, but no attempt has been made to otherwise define it in terms of the variables of media systems theory. The mapping of the media system has been conducted to a depth and breadth that is currently not available in academic literature and thus represents a clear contribution to knowledge.

Equally, considerable research effort was devoted to the inner case study to gain an understanding of paid news, including its background, emergence, contours, and impact on journalism, which were presented in Chapter 5. The large number of qualitative interviews with individuals in senior positions combined with depth of perspective with analytical depth, and yielded rich data that was both internally consistent and triangulated with information from other sources. Chapter 5 showed how the explosive growth of the media and distortions in business models have resulted in fundamental changes to journalistic traditions and perspectives. The chapter highlighted the shift in values from public service and quality content to the maximisation of profit, manifest as the advertiser being privileged over a devalued audience and the favouring of commercial imperatives over editorial standards. It also revealed how a wider social and political environment marked by impunity and high levels of corruption ferments a potent brew, from which systemic and institutionalised normative violations such as paid news arise.

The analysis of empirical data demonstrated how paid news has been integrated into the business models of media organisations and established its contours, leading to the following definition:

*Paid news is the institutionalised profit-seeking and transactional journalism that seeks to monetise the news space to gain financial returns on the space it occupies in the public sphere.*

*It negotiates financial transactions to falsely present advertising, public relations content or motivated information as journalism. Alternatively, it seeks rewards for withholding information.*

Taken together, the inner and outer cases provide important insights into the workings of the Indian media system as they follow the thread of a seemingly inevitable logic that weaves together macro-level factors with flawed business models and editorial compromises made in pressured newsrooms. They reveal the roles played by different parts of the media, changes in attitudes, and the cynicism and helplessness that permeate the journalistic fraternity in India.

Overall, the case study reveals that paid news is not an isolated event but a deep-rooted process that has been in the making since the media system entered what this thesis describes as its current *phase of explosive growth*. In that sense, the study of paid news reveals forces that are at the heart of a historical phase of the media system, not just one phenomenon.

This thesis contributes to the study of Indian media by uncovering complex layers of conditions, influences, actions and consequences. The findings presented and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 are the result of a multi-layered and multidimensional analysis of forces inside the media system. At both levels – that of the map of the Indian media and the detailed study of paid news – they represent an important addition to academic literature on Indian media.

### **6.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Two significant methodological aspects related to this study will be discussed here. The first is that the grounded approach was productive and yielded an analysis of the forces and relationships that characterise the behaviour of the Indian media system. The second is the question of whether these characteristics of the Indian media system can have wider applicability in the comparative study of media systems.

The first claim, of a productive approach, is substantiated by the rich findings of this study. The grounded approach to the Indian media system and the system-wide phenomenon of paid news led to an extremely productive analysis of relevant factors. The thematic analysis of the empirical data gathered for this study moved through three stages. Initial coding resulted in a total of 1,152 open codes, which were categorised into 37 categories. These were in turn refined into five broad themes – growth of the

media; competition and business models; the emergence and practices of paid news; regulation and external influences; and pressures on journalism and journalists. These five themes provided a strong framework for the presentation of the findings of the empirical analysis. The first chapter of findings, Chapter 4, covered the first two of these themes while laying out the context for the inner case study of paid news. The other three themes were considered in Chapter 5 and structured the detailed discussion of the forces and relationships instrumental in the emergence of paid news. The division of the two chapters was not watertight. This was only to be expected in view of the fact that case study was conducted as a nested case study as described in Chapter 3, with extensive cross-referencing and triangulation between the different sources of empirical data. The five themes further find reflection in the three variables proposed by this study.

The productivity of the case study also validates the approach of identifying and studying a particular system-wide behaviour as a means of gaining insight into a media system. The reference here is to the choice of paid news, which represents a deviation from normative expectations, as the inner case study. The examination of this ethical and normative fault-line revealed forces and relationships which are significant in describing and analysing the media system as a whole. This methodological choice of a fault-line as a site of inquiry was an important element that contributed to the success of this study. This element is considered in greater detail later in this chapter. The sixth and seventh theoretical propositions about media systems theory that have been set out in subsequent sections shed further light on the productivity of this approach.

The second broad methodological aspect that needs consideration is that of the wider applicability of the conclusions of this study in the comparative study of media systems. This study has produced three variables and three approaches for the description and analysis of media systems. The variables arise from the five themes identified in the empirical research and the approaches arise from the observed productivity of the methodology deployed. They are described in detail in Chapters 6.4.1 and 6.4.2, respectively. This study has not specifically tested them on other media systems, but it is clear that they will have some wider applicability if only because of the universal nature of the many of the elements they encompass. As will become apparent in the next

section, the additional variables have not been proposed as a fresh model to replace existing models. The analysis here is confined to the aspect of finding gaps in extant theory that hinder analytical depth with regard to the Indian media system. The variables and approaches that emerge here fill these gaps with regard to the Indian system. They provide a level of additional, critical, detail and are perhaps best viewed as supplementing, not supplanting, the macro-level focus of existing models and typologies.

The question of whether the methodological approach taken in this study, focusing as it does upon one particular media system, has the potential to contribute to the wider comparative study of media systems also deserves consideration. It has been pointed out earlier in this thesis that this study is not an explicit variable-by-variable comparison of the Indian media system with other media systems. The paucity of comparable data sets made such an approach of applying media systems theory to India unfeasible. However, this study does make a claim of being implicitly comparative. Media systems theory is essentially comparative in nature, and the inductive, grounded and exploratory approach adopted here results in conclusions that enhance its granularity and fidelity with respect to the Indian media system. No other media systems are considered in this study, but it is obvious that the proposals made here will have relevance to them to a substantial degree. There are ample indications in literature that case studies can contribute to implicit comparisons by forming the basis for valid generalisations (see, for instance, Lijphart, 1971, 691), and have a valuable role to play in ‘propositional depth’ (Gerring, 2004: 352) and generating hypotheses and theory (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 209; Bryman, 2012: 71).

Thus, this study lays claim to reaching conclusions that have the potential for wider applicability in the comparative study of media systems even though the method adopted here is not explicitly comparative.

The theoretical conclusions and contribution of this study are presented below.

#### **6.4 ANSWERING RQ 2: VARIABLES AND APPROACHES**

The two research questions that guided the design and implementation of this study are:

- RQ 1: How can the granularity and fidelity of media systems theory be enhanced with respect to the Indian media system and other non-Western media systems?
- RQ 2(a): What salient features and behaviour of the Indian media system are revealed by the system-wide phenomenon of paid news?
- RQ 2(b): Do these features suggest additional approaches or variables for incorporation into media systems theory to enhance its applicability to India and other non-Western media systems?

As has been discussed, the first research question represents the overarching theoretical thrust of this study, while the second question stipulates the specific empirical focus.

Here, the answers to the research questions will be presented in reverse order for the sake of progressing from the particular to the general and from the empirical findings to their theoretical implications. This section presents the answers to RQ 2. The answers to RQ 2(a) emerge from Chapters 4 and 5, and here they inform the answers to RQ 2(b), which are presented in Chapter 6.4.1 (Variables suggested by the case study) and Chapter 6.4.2 (Fresh approaches suggested by the case study). These variables and approaches are also examined for their suitability for wider use. The answer to RQ 1 – theoretical implications for media systems theory – is presented in Chapter 6.5 in the form of seven theoretical propositions that aim to add descriptive and analytical depth.

#### **6.4.1 Variables suggested by the case study**

Both parts of the case study – mapping the media system and examining the phenomenon of paid news – yielded a large number of possibilities for additional variables and approaches that help to characterise the Indian media system in greater detail. The analytical effort was focused upon supplementing dominant models and approaches, not on replacing them. Thus, any claim made here is limited to providing additional, albeit critical, detail. There is no attempt to lay the foundation for a fresh typology.

The empirical findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 revealed a number of possibilities for factors relevant to defining the behaviour of Indian media. These were not in the form of variables suitable for wider adoption, so they were reviewed and reconfigured.

Five characteristics emerged from mapping the media system in Chapter 4. They are: 1) explosive growth; 2) a hyper-competitive environment; 3) issues related to ownership; 4) skewed revenue models; and 5) an intense focus on profitability. The first of these, explosive growth, covers the rapid expansion of the media industries in size and circulation; geographical spread; and the growth in the number of newspaper editions and news channels. The second, the state of hyper-competition, is the result of a large number of entrants into a growing market as well as the aggressive expansion strategies of existing players. The third, skewed revenue models, refers to the mix of factors that has caused advertising revenue to overshadow circulation/subscription revenue for both newspapers and news television. The fourth, issues related to ownership, points to reasons for aspiring to media ownership as well as the influence owners exert on strategy and approaches. The last one, the intense focus on profitability, refers to the struggle for survival that has led to the widespread adoption of what has been described as ‘the *Times of India* business model’. These characteristics can be classified according to the level at which their influence is operative:

**Table 6.1: Characteristics derived from mapping Indian media**

Operative level	Characteristics
Media system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explosive growth</li> <li>• Hyper-competition</li> </ul>
Media organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skewed revenue models</li> <li>• Issues related to ownership</li> <li>• Intense focus on profitability</li> </ul>

Similarly, the findings from Chapter 5 provided a set of features and characteristics emerging from the focused study of paid news that provide further detail about the workings of the Indian media system. The characteristics emerging from Chapter 5 are set out in Table 6.2 below.

**Table 6.2: Characteristics emerging from the analysis of paid news**

<b>Operative level</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Media system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ineffective regulation</li><li>• Hyper-commercialisation</li></ul>
Media organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advertiser dependence</li><li>• Economic pressures on newsgathering</li><li>• Diminishing role and authority of the editor</li><li>• Influence of marketing departments on newsrooms</li><li>• Missing editorial filters</li></ul>
Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Journalist salaries</li><li>• Training</li><li>• Corruption among journalists</li></ul>
Contextual conditions and influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Political corruption</li><li>• Impunity</li></ul>

There are obvious overlaps between the lists of characteristics extracted from the two levels of the case study. This is an expected consequence of the nested research design and the extensive iteration between the two levels. It is important to note that they are of the nature of mid-level data. They represent a distillation of empirical data that characterises specific behaviours of the Indian media system and are not a list of variables suitable for incorporation into media systems theory.

The two list of characteristics revealed in Chapters 4 and 5 can be combined to produce a shorter list comprised of: 1) Growth trends; 2) Competition and stability; 3) Business models and revenue streams; 4) Pressures on editorial processes; 5) Ownership influences; 6) Journalist vulnerability; 7) Regulatory environment; and 8) Cultural and social influences.

This list is still unwieldy from the perspective of media systems theory, but it now exhibits the possibility of wider applicability. ‘Growth trends’, for instance, can provide an account of the pressures of rising or falling fortunes at the system level, while ‘competition and stability’ is applicable to a number of media-related situations at the

organisational level, including the difference between single-newspaper and multi-newspaper environments. Similarly, ‘ownership influences’ provides a lens to examine the nature of state ownership as well as the motives of private ownership. ‘Journalist vulnerability’ embraces varied factors such as job security, undue influence, threats and physical vulnerability, all of which can exert significant influence on the journalism produced within a media system. In the same way, ‘cultural and social influences’ permits consideration of influences as diverse as corruption, values, culture, ideology, and national concerns or obsessions, all of which have been shown to drive media behaviour in different countries. The observed characteristics of Indian media thus have the potential of examining a wide range of influences. This also indicates that they may have wider applicability.

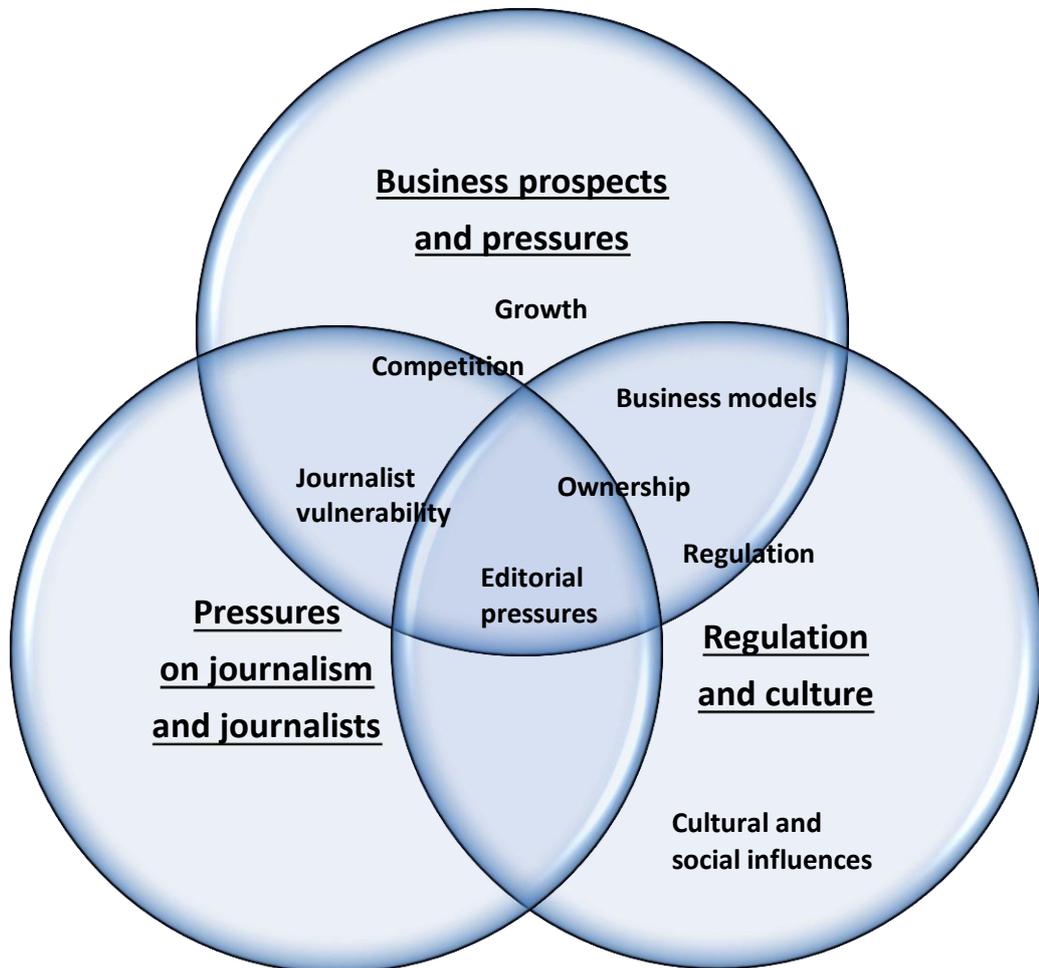
In the final step of synthesis, these aspects were further refined into the following list of candidate variables:

#### **Variables suggested by the case study**

1. Business prospects and pressures;
2. Pressures on journalism and journalists; and
3. Regulation and culture.

These candidate variables are composites, each representing the confluence of several characteristics. They collectively encompass the complete range that emerged from this study and are not mutually exclusive, as the depiction in Figure 6.1 shows:

**Figure 6.1: Additional media systems variables suggested by the case study**



In one sense, these additional variables are all focused on pressures on the norms and processes of the media. They are thus different in nature to the variables considered by extant typologies and models, though they exhibit some overlap with them. This difference is significant – they emphasise factors that drive deviations from a broad, often undifferentiated, norm and thus provide additional traction and focus.

For instance, one of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) four dimensions is 'development of media markets', but the first variable proposed here, 'business prospects and pressures', possesses greater exploratory and diagnostic power because it can account for varied influences ranging from fears for the future to competition and the pressures of

quarterly corporate results that drive the real-world behaviour of media organisations. The second variable proposed here, ‘pressures on journalism and journalists’, similarly overlaps with Hallin and Mancini’s dimension of ‘professionalism’, but also supplements it. The third variable, ‘regulation and culture’, incorporates aspects that are less frequently incorporated into analyses. Regulation is often considered, as in Hallin and Mancini’s dimension of ‘state intervention’ or Blumler and Gurevitch’s (1995) ‘state control’, but in a slightly different manner. In those schema, state control and intervention are conceived of as negatives that are to be shed as systems develop. However, their absence is not necessarily a mark of progress, as paid news demonstrates. Here, ‘regulation’ indicates a wider sweep of issues. ‘Culture’ similarly encompasses social influences and values that are usually neglected, probably because they suggest deep philosophical explorations in the vein of Siebert *et al.*

Approaching the issue from the viewpoint of deviance rather than normative adherence provides additional insights – seeing the glass as half empty prompts the question why it is half empty, whereas viewing it as half full prompts a different question about how it can be filled completely. The formulation proposed here provides additional insights into the political, financial and safety pressures on journalists as well as economic, commercial or ownership pressures on journalism as a whole. They could, for instance, explain differences between the British and US media systems, which are both classified under the same model, but diverge from each other in many important respects.

It must be emphasised that the three additional variables proposed here do not replace variables already used in dominant typologies. No analysis of a media system can be complete without assessing how it relates to and is shaped by political and economic structures. The additional variables encourage a sharper focus on manifest forces and relationships such as those that drive media system behaviour in India. It is suggested that similar influential forces may play a critical role in other media systems and focusing on additional variables could help identify them and assess their significance.

## 6.4.2 Fresh approaches suggested by the case study

In addition to variables, the rich outcomes of the case study and the research design also indicate the potential of a number of fresh approaches. These approaches have two different origins. One emerges from the configuration of the variables discussed in Chapter 6.4.1 above. Two others were adopted earlier at the stage of research design, and this research project has confirmed their utility. The three emergent approaches relevant to the comparative study of media systems are:

### Suggested additional approaches for the study of media systems

1. Focus on three levels – system, organisation and individual;
2. Conduct grounded analyses; and
3. Normative fault-lines as lenses for identifying critical forces and relationships.

The first of these is derived from the operational levels of the additional variables suggested by the case study, and whether they apply to the system as a whole, to media organisations or at the level of individuals and groups within the media system.

**Figure 6.2: Operational level of additional media systems variables**



Figure 6.2 illustrates the levels at which the three variables operate. ‘Business prospects and pressures’ operates at the system level as well as on organisations within the system, and ‘pressures on journalism and journalists’ has been split between the organisation and individual levels.

## 6.5 ANSWERING RQ 1: THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The answers to RQ 2 in the form of emergent variables and approaches are intimately linked to the answers to the first research question, which asks how media systems theory can achieve greater granularity and fidelity in describing non-Western media systems. The implications of this study for media systems theory flow directly from the discussion and conclusions in Chapter 6.4. Here, they are combined with the insights gained from the review of literature in Chapter 2 and encapsulated as seven theoretical propositions.

### Seven theoretical propositions

1. The wider applicability of media systems theory is hampered by the adoption of Western media as a pivotal reference point.
2. Normative beliefs and macro-level structures or relationships are inadequate descriptors of media systems.
3. Dimensions other than politics and economics can be critical to defining media systems.
4. Variables that account for forces and relationships within the media are important in defining or characterising media systems.
5. Media systems are not passively shaped by political, economic and other structures; they have agency and can act independently.
6. Grounded case studies can yield variables and approaches that help characterise media systems.
7. System-wide ethical or normative fault-lines such as paid news can reveal critical characteristics of a media system.

These theoretical propositions are related to the approaches that emerged in Chapter 6.4.2. The first approach outlined there, that of focusing on various levels of the media system rather than merely on the macro level, is related to propositions 2, 3, 4 and 5 above. Similarly, the second approach – conducting grounded analyses – relates to propositions 4 and 6. The third approach – the value of normative fault-lines in determining the operative characteristics of media systems – relates directly to proposition 7 stated above.

This thesis thus proposes that the answer to the first research question lies in grounded studies of non-Western media systems. A grounded study of the Indian media system, focusing on the ethical fault-line represented by paid news revealed a series of variables and approaches that can account for the behaviour of the Indian media system, behaviour that is not otherwise accounted for by media systems theory. In that, this study demonstrates a methodological approach to describe the behaviour of a media system in great detail. Similar in-depth case studies that conduct country-specific analyses of factors and variables that determine the manifest behaviour of other media systems could yield other factors and variables, suggesting a way forward for media systems theory.

A more detailed discussion of the seven theoretical propositions follows.

### **6.5.1 Western orientation as a barrier to wider applicability**

The first proposition focuses on questions about media systems theory when it is applied to non-Western cases:

The wider applicability of media systems theory is hampered by the adoption of Western media as a pivotal reference point.

The review of literature in Chapter 2 revealed a recurrent critique that media systems theory implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, treats the media of developed Western democracies as a pivotal reference point. All too frequently, non-Western media systems are examined for the absence – or presence – of characteristics found in Western media. At a basic level, this is prone to being interpreted as an assumption that the Western media represent a ‘developed’ form, which the media in other parts of the world should aspire to or should be measured against. At a deeper level, it represents a limiting framework, one that restricts the approach and thus the field of vision of inquiries into the reality of media systems. This is because it sets the conceptual perimeter of its inquiry at the known world of structures, influences and underlying ideologies observed in Western media. Factors that may play a defining role in other cultures or media systems but are outside the experience of academic scholars of

Western media are excluded, and typologies fail to recognise that dissimilar media systems may be shaped by elements and factors beyond those that parallel (or diverge from) those in Western media systems. The question determines the answer, and it is appropriate to examine the framing of the question when the answer is inadequately descriptive, explanatory or predictive. The inability of theory to meaningfully account for a world beyond makes it vulnerable to the charge of being ineffective in the internationalisation of media studies.

As was noted in Chapter 2, the liberal model of the media is readily identifiable as the core reference point of extant theory. This model lies at the heart of dominant typologies, either as an ideal (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956) or as a projected point of convergence (Hallin and Mancini, 2012b). However, in global terms, Western media systems are special cases marked by a relatively rare combination of political, economic, social and cultural factors. Many theorists have added categories or models to represent a wider variety of cases (Hachten, 1981; Picard, 1985; Altschull, 1995; McQuail, 1983, 1994), but a closer look at their schema shows that the amendments and additions are relatively minor; their basic framework reference point remains that of dominant typologies.

The Indian media system exhibits characteristics that are wholly outside the experience of Western media. This research has demonstrated how Indian media are multiplying rapidly not only in terms of 1) their overall size and 2) the number of news outlets, but also with regard to 3) audiences and 4) geographical reach. All four of these trends are alien to Western media. They do not exist in contemporary Western media, and neither have they existed in their recent history. Add to this 5) India's continental scale of linguistic diversity and 6) the marked differences of practice between national and local news outlets, and it is easy to see why media theory based on Western cases does not possess the conceptual vocabulary to account for Indian media. The experience of Western countries does not extend to the factors that are most noticeable about the Indian media system and are central to defining it. Beyond all this lies 7) the normative breach that is no longer an aberration but a way of doing business. These are foundational aspects of Indian media, but they have no parallels in Western media, so it

is not surprising that a Western reference point is an inadequate lens with which to view this reality.

### **6.5.2 The limited descriptive power of normative and structural approaches**

The second proposition is:

Normative beliefs and macro-level structures or relationships are inadequate descriptors of media systems.

Normative and structural approaches dominate media systems theory to the detriment of its applicability. In effect, dominant approaches examine relationships between the media and other structures at the macro level. They seek, for instance, to characterise media systems on the basis of the political system or economic structures prevailing within national boundaries. The assumption is that these macro-level systems are in some sense adequate descriptors of the behaviour of media. However, ideal types constructed on this basis have been found lacking. They evidently overlook significant differences between systems placed within the same category, and they are also not readily applicable to fresh examples. Numerous scholars have felt the need to expand, refine or transcend dominant models in their search for greater descriptive and explanatory power. The somewhat embarrassing abundance of variables put forward for inclusion in media systems theory indicates that normative and structural macro-level approaches do not always satisfactorily describe reality.

Theorists such as Nordenstreng (1997) and Christians *et al.* (2009) have justified normative approaches on the basis that they serve a critical function in the formation of professional roles and identity. They have proposed normative typologies based on different philosophical traditions, models of democracy and roles of media. However, the case of Indian media exemplifies a different problem – that of accounting for deep-rooted and systemic aberrations such as paid news. Indian media does not challenge its normative role with regard to democracy. This role is frequently and regularly fulfilled by good journalism – but it is equally frequently ignored, egregiously and without restraint. Normative conceptions can embrace different kinds of norms, but they have

limited scope to consider the systemic flouting of norms when it is an important element of manifest behaviour.

Many theorists, including Curran and Park (2000) and Hallin and Mancini (2004) have consciously adopted empirical approaches to study relationships between the media and external macro-level structures, usually political or economic. However, these efforts have also exhibited low descriptive and predictive power, as is apparent in the difficulties faced in explaining significant differences between media systems that are classified in the same category.

At one level, the diversity of cultural, historical and political traditions in India renders most categorisation futile. For instance, India – along with most of the non-Western world – would be classified as polarised pluralist under Hallin and Mancini's schema. However, this is not convincing because the label reflects at most an inaccurate and partial view of reality. The political parallelism and clientelism that are central to the conception of polarised pluralism is not a fundamental characteristic of Indian media in the period being studied. Some sub-systems – such as news television in Tamil and large sections of news television as well as newspapers in Telugu – do display a high degree of political parallelism. However, paid news, which amounts to extorting a tithe from the political class during elections, shows that the primary loyalty of large sections of the privately owned media is to their own financial interests, not to any political masters. The markedly diverse characteristics between linguistic sub-systems and among different vertical scales of operation make it difficult to classify the Indian media system under models based on macro-level variables even though they share a common legal, regulatory and macroeconomic framework, a situation that sparks unexpected sympathy for the efforts of media systems theorists.

The empirical heart of this study validates the second theoretical proposition in another manner. The case study showed that the forces driving paid news have strong roots in a number of factors other than macro-level structures external to the media. Chapters 4 and 5 showed that many mid- and micro-level factors were both central and significant in relation to paid news, ranging from the wildly fluctuating balance-sheets at the organisation level to the adoption of specific business practices by one trend-setting

individual. Macro-level or structural factors do have a bearing on paid news, but they do not provide a satisfactory level of descriptive or analytical granularity.

### **6.5.3 Considering dimensions beyond politics and economics**

The third proposition, which has been a central thread running through this thesis, is:

Dimensions other than politics and economics can be critical to defining media systems.

Overwhelmingly, the principles that underlie the political system are the first port of call for media systems theory. The second touchstone is economic policy. Culture is a very distant third, though a strong argument can be made that cultural identities, values and trends have a much more symbiotic relationship with the media. It is apparent that other dimensions are significant, but they are prioritised even lower by media systems theory.

Since Siebert *et al.* (1956), the primary definer of a media system has been the nature of the political arrangements within which it exists. However, the in-depth analysis of paid news provided scant evidence of the active influence of the political system on the media system. Extant theory would consider the fact that Indian media operates within a functioning democracy as a central factor in classifying it. However, it is clear on examining paid news that it has little to do with the broad nature of the political system – the fact that India is a democracy is a background factor, but it is not the most important factor driving its behaviour. Paid news is linked to democratic elections, but only because it uses the latter as a staging ground. The practice is profoundly anti-democratic, but this is a kind of interaction that media systems theory is not equipped to deal with. If at all, the critical elements of media-politics interaction in this case are the media's exercise of power vis-à-vis the political system and the role of political corruption as a justificatory and enabling factor. These, however, do not fall within media systems theory's conception of the media-politics relationship and must be accounted for separately.

The relationship between paid news and the media systems theory conception of economic influence is similarly fraught. An argument can be made that paid news is an extreme manifestation of neo-liberal economics, and that the role played by economics is stronger than that of politics. However, the relationship between the media system and economics is also complex rather than a one-way infusion of ideology. The fact remains that the practice of paid news is normatively aberrant and also illegal. It represents the media operating outside the established norms and reach of the economic and legal system. Once again, media systems theory has few answers about accounting for this empirical reality.

Numerous scholars have felt the need to suggest variables other than politics and economics to define media systems. Some are structural factors such as country size, levels of regionalism and ethnic structures (McQuail, 2005b; Remington, 2006; Humphreys, 2011). Others have suggested country-specific variables, including security considerations and a commitment to nation building for Israel (Peri, 2012), cultural protection and national resistance for the Baltic states (Balčytienė, 2012) and whether the media system is central or peripheral with respect to other media systems, as in the case of Brazil (de Albuquerque, 2012).

The frequency of suggested refinements to media systems theory discussed in Chapter 2 indicates the importance of transcending a focus on politics and economics. One important area is culture, which has a strong symbiotic relationship with media, but seldom features among the primary variables used for constructing models. It is interesting to note that other than the discourse around Asian values, and a few other notable exceptions (Hepp and Couldry, 2009; Couldry and Hepp, 2012) few attempts have been made to correlate observed media behaviour to culture. Interestingly, many of the noteworthy characteristics of media systems that remain unaddressed by theory fall under the amorphous label of culture. In the case of paid news, one obvious example is what could be termed the culture of corruption and impunity, but there are many other cultural influences that are at play.

In this study, a number of other variables were revealed as important. The findings from the case study thus confirm academic opinion that media systems are not decisively defined by their relationships to political and economic principles or structures.

#### 6.5.4 The importance of media systems variables

The fourth theoretical proposition states:

Variables that account for forces and relationships within the media are important in defining or characterising media systems.

The distinction here is between forces and relationships within the media and those that operate on it from the outside. At a conceptual level, media systems theory pays scant attention to the state of affairs within the media system. It is somewhat inexplicable that the study of media systems does not begin with the behaviour of the media system itself, preferring to focus on external influences.

Several analyses of media systems take variables related to media systems into account, though they are almost always secondary to political and economic factors. It is noteworthy that though all four dimensions that form the basis of Hallin and Mancini's models (2004) are ostensibly related to media systems, most of them concern themselves with the relationship between the media and the political system. Only one, levels of professionalism among journalists, looks primarily at the media. Of the others, development of media markets examines whether newspapers served an elite or mass audience; political parallelism assesses levels of political advocacy or neutrality; and the last looks at the level of state intervention in the media. The preponderance of politics-related variables, of course, reflects the declared focus of their framework.

However, this study suggests that a critical component of understanding a media system is a keen examination of what is happening inside the media – and with greater emphasis than extant theory places. Doing so would provide the necessary detail of the processes, forces and influences at work at the heart of the media system where decisions are made and directions are set. It is contended that attempts to define a media system without factoring in this information can only result in incomplete descriptions because a media system has its own dynamics and is not determined by external systems alone.

As a corollary, it must be stressed that restricting analysis to the boundaries of the media system would also not result in valid results, and that is not being proposed here.

Extant media systems theory amply demonstrates the importance of the relationships between media systems and other macro-level systems. Media systems variables are proposed here as additional variables to be given significant weight in any analysis, but not to be adopted to the exclusion of all others. They are necessary but not sufficient. For instance, this study demonstrates that the dynamics of the media system such as its growth or decline; the business environment within the media system; the prospects of media organisation and the pressures on them; and the pressures on journalism and journalists all had a role to play in driving a systemic violation of normative expectations. A different set of factors may be significant in other media systems, but the assertion here is about the importance of media systems variables, not the exact formulation of those variables.

### **6.5.5 The agency of media systems**

The fifth proposition is:

Media systems are not passively shaped by political, economic and other structures; they have agency and can act independently.

Media systems theory seems to be hampered by an implicit assumption that media systems do not possess agency and that their behaviour is overwhelmingly determined by external influences. This is closely related to the previous theoretical proposition that contests the implicit assumption that the internal dynamics of a media system do not matter. In not recognising the agency of media systems, existing models assume that media do not have the capacity to act independently of other structures.

This study provides robust evidence that the relationship between democracy and the Indian media system is far more complex than a one-way influence. Phenomena such as paid news indicate that media systems can and does act independently of political structures and systems. It is evidently more than a passive recipient of influences; it is an actor that influences other systems and even strenuously imposes itself on them. The Indian media have also exhibited a significant level of disdain for the tools deployed by the political system and civil society, including regulatory efforts and public

admonition, and the combined might of the state has been unable to force compliance. This proposition, in the form it is validated by the case study, suggests the need for a shift of emphasis away from the implicit assumption that media systems are primarily shaped by their structural environments and exhibit little agency.

### **6.5.6 The value of grounded case studies**

The sixth proposition, which was tested extensively by the chosen research design, states:

Grounded case studies can yield variables and approaches that help characterise media systems.

This proposition is related to the second proposition, which stated that normative and structural approaches have limited descriptive power. This proposition offers an alternate approach that can be used to supplement macro-level approaches.

It is asserted here that the findings of the case study have convincingly demonstrated the value of grounded approaches. The approach adopted in this research project provides a level of granularity and analytical insight that macro-level approaches cannot deliver. The study of paid news has exhibited a high level of explanatory power and revealed that factors internal to the media are heavily implicated in the creation of its systemic behaviour. The wealth of factors revealed as significant include business imperatives; business practices; journalists' perceptions of job security and their ability to effect change; cultural influences; and the effect of newsroom processes and power equations. These factors are unlikely have been uncovered by existing approaches in media systems theory.

Had paid news been approached from a normative or structural viewpoint, it would have revealed several important aspects, including the lack of effective regulation, the influence of political corruption and problems with observed levels of professionalism. All of these are important, but they do not have the level of explanatory power of an analysis that builds itself up from lower structural levels. However, comparing macro-level and grounded approaches to paid news is infructuous – the fact is that traditional

media systems theory would not have picked paid news as a phenomenon worth investigating in the first place. It is the grounded approach that permits a focus on manifest aspects of behaviour rather than macro-level structures. It also enables a disaggregation of the media system so that it can be studied at various levels ranging from that of the individual journalist to media organisations rather than merely at the level of the system.

### **6.5.7 Systemic fault-lines as opportunities to study media systems**

The last theoretical proposition states that there is a specific advantage to the study of systemic fault-lines:

System-wide ethical or normative fault-lines such as paid news can reveal critical characteristics of a media system.

This proposition has clear methodological implications for the study of media systems. A large number of comparative studies have been carried out, as was discussed in Chapter 2, and many of them have critiqued, extended or sometimes transcended dominant schema while striving for greater analytical power. However, they overwhelmingly choose extant theoretical frameworks as their starting point. This parallels the problem of the Western orientation in media systems theory – it limits the scope of the inquiry by making it more difficult to conceive of or consider factors that do not exist at the point of reference.

It is a fact that this research project adopted paid news as a focus because it was a matter of concern rather than because it was a considered choice appropriate for analysing a complete media system. Once adopted, however, the results proved the value of the decision. Paid news was a deviant case, one that flouted ethical standards that are widely acknowledged as well as proclaimed. It focused attention not on the norms but on reality, not on structures but on actors, forces and influences. Equally importantly, it was a multifaceted phenomenon, not a variable or a relationship. It thus highlighted a complex mix of variables and forces, opening this study up to possibilities that would not have arisen had an existing set of variables been adopted as a framework. Paid news

represents the convergence of multiple aspects of Indian media. Unravelling them amounted to following evidence where it led, asking questions suggested by the evidence, not seeking answers to pre-determined questions.

The outcomes of this inquiry confirm the value of studying ethical or normative fault-lines that are system-wide and persistent because they have the potential to reveal the inner workings of media systems and portray them as they really are. Analogies suggest themselves readily. One such would be to study phone hacking to identify the forces that drive the real-world behaviour of British media, something that cannot be explained by merely assigning it to the classification of the liberal model. In fact, the Leveson inquiry has already provided validation of this argument by revealing important forces and relationships other than those expected from normative and structural considerations. In other domains, this proposition could be likened to acknowledging that the Chilcot report provides important insights into the working of the British government, or that studying the 2008 financial crisis would reveal significant aspects of the global financial system.

The seven theoretical propositions outlined above encapsulate the learning from this study. They draw upon the empirical findings and contribute to the advancement of theory. These propositions are the theoretical spine of this inquiry.

## **6.6 ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.6.1 Underlying assumptions and relevant limitations**

This section considers the assumptions that underlie this research project, its limitations, and recommendations for further research.

A foundational assumption of this study has been to treat paid news as a phenomenon that represents the behaviour of contemporary Indian media. This study has taken care to stress that paid news does not represent the totality of Indian media. However, there is a definite claim that it represents significant and critical aspects of the media system as a whole. This thesis believes that this assumption is justified on the basis that it

represents a deviation from normative expectations that is shown by empirical evidence to be system-wide, institutionalised, persistent and significant.

Another assumption has been that studying an ethical fault-line such as paid news can reveal the forces and relationships that drive critical aspects of the media system. This is a thread that runs through the fabric of this thesis. This has been justified here on the basis of the results yielded by this approach.

Several limitations of this study are also recognised. The first is that paid news is a clandestine activity which has received widespread adverse attention. It is also illegal – transactions are conducted in unaccounted cash, the paymasters transgress legally mandated limits on election spending, and recipient media organisations violate tax laws. This situation raised the possibility of interview respondents not being fully transparent about their own roles, and those of their organisations – if any – while discussing it. There was no occasion for this researcher to feel this was indeed the case, but the possibility exists.

A related problem was the difficulty in obtaining interviews. However, it is felt that the interview sample is sufficiently large and varied. It is also to be noted that the research design adopted purposive and snowball sampling, and this potentially has a bearing on the results.

A third limitation was that this researcher approached the topic with strong personal feelings about paid news and a specific ethical position. However, the attitude of the researcher in this regard is a normative position that is both widely held and frequently articulated, so it is not considered problematic. Conscious attempts were made to adopt a neutral and non-judgemental stance during research, but the possibility of personal bias colouring the results cannot be discounted.

The descriptive and analytical reach of this thesis has been somewhat circumscribed by the focus of the research, as well as by the word length prescribed for the thesis and the availability of time. The map of the Indian media system presented in Chapter 4, for instance, is not a complete map covering all the aspects and variables that find mention in media systems theory. It does not claim to be more than a mapping of macro-level

factors that emerged in relation to paid news, but behind it lies a conscious decision to adopt a specific research strategy that eschewed mapping the Indian media system in terms of existing typologies.

The fifth limitation of this study is that it examines Indian media at a specific point in time, and that it concentrates on newspapers and news television to the exclusion of other elements such as social media. Both these decisions, which are also related to the time period studied, have been explained in the thesis.

### **6.6.2 Recommendations for further research**

This research project suggests a number of avenues for further research. Many of them are related to studying Indian media in greater depth to fill obvious gaps in academic knowledge of Indian journalism. The working practices of Indian journalists as well as the pressures on them present extensive opportunities for further research. These include the effect of rapid expansion on the quality of journalism, the inability of journalists to assert professional standards, their job insecurities, and the discourse on ethics in Indian journalism.

There are also a number of opportunities for further research into the Indian media system, including regulatory structures and effectiveness, the adoption of business models, and the regionalisation of media. The practice of power by the Indian media vis-à-vis the political system is a particularly interesting avenue for further examination.

In terms of media systems theory, it has already been suggested that grounded studies such as this one could be conducted in other countries, whether Western or non-Western, to enhance understanding of the factors that drive the behaviour of media systems and contribute to the advancement of theoretical frameworks. This, it is suggested, is a strategy that will be highly productive in the advancement of the comparative study of media systems.

## 6.7 CONCLUSION

This research project began with alarm over the institutionalisation of paid news in India and progressed to, at the broadest theoretical level, a study of the efficacy of media systems theory in fulfilling its proclaimed objective of understanding and describing the behaviour of media systems. In this thesis, the various intervening steps have been considered in detail, including an examination of how and why paid news emerged, how it came to infect the whole system, what this reveals about the real-world behaviour of the Indian media system and, finally, how these findings can inform media systems theory, especially in relation to non-Western media systems. No attempt has been made to propose an alternate typology of media systems – in any case, it would be both reckless and futile to construct one on the analysis of a single media system and a specific fault-line that rives its normative chassis.

Thus, this inquiry performs several empirical and theoretical functions. It:

- Asks what media systems theory aims to do and why;
- Pinpoints some shortcomings of dominant approaches;
- Suggests alternate approaches to supplement established approaches in the comparative study of media systems; and
- Yields variables that define salient characteristics of the Indian media system that are not otherwise accounted for, and which have the potential of being adopted for wider use.

This thesis unpacks the scope and ambitions of media systems theory to show that they are not always clearly defined. At times there is a mismatch between what media systems theory formally states as its ambition and what seems to be its unstated ambition. The pioneers, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), betray no such mismatch – they set their sights high and implement their analysis accordingly. Their basic question ‘Why is the press as it is?’ combines a seductive simplicity with the promise of profundity. In seven words, it signals a sweeping intention to understand ‘the nature of man, the nature of society and the state, the relation of man to the state, and the nature of knowledge and truth’ (1956: 2).

Siebert *et al.*'s mission is, in one sense, the media systems avatar of the theory of everything, seeking to uncover deep truths and be universally applicable. Their schema has been reviled, and their approach and claims questioned, but their ambition has endured. It continues to exert an influence over the work of their successors, a presence sensed rather than seen even when no direct reference is made to it. Models and typologies proposed subsequently may not make an explicit claim of universal applicability, but, as discussed in Chapter 2, they certainly aspire to it. This ambiguity in the intention of theorists – and certainly in its interpretation by those who apply media systems theory – is underlined with uncomfortable frequency when typologies are sought to be applied to dissimilar media systems. The seeming inconsistency could perhaps be eliminated if the user manuals of media systems theory laid greater emphasis on the boundaries of its analysis and scope – this would enhance, not reduce, its applicability for it would specifically invite modification instead of leading to the confusion that arises from straightforward deployment.

It is the conclusion of this study that relationships and forces that are central to defining media systems are often to be found outside the frameworks of abstract categories that lie at the heart of most models. Normative and structural factors perform a sterling role in defining important elements of media systems, but provide a low level of granularity. It is as if they produce an identikit picture which looks vaguely familiar, but is not good enough to translate into instant recognition by those who know them well.

In response to this situation, a specific empirical study was undertaken with the intention of understanding the dynamics and forces within the Indian media system that facilitated the spread and institutionalisation of paid news. The in-depth, grounded and exploratory study provided insights not only into the Indian media system, but also into methods and frameworks for studying media systems more generally. On this basis, this thesis makes a claim of an empirical contribution as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of media systems. It is hoped that these will go some way towards the fulfilment of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's ambition of explanatory power.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW LOG

The table below lists all the interviews that were conducted for this thesis. It provides the names of all respondents, their designations at the time of the interview and cities in which they are based, the date of the interview and its length. It provides additional detail in the case of interviews that were not conducted in person, if the location of the interview varied from the norm, and of the few cases where a complete audio recording was not possible.

No.	Respondent, designation and location	Date/status*	Length (min)**	Remarks
<i>Television journalists and newsroom heads:</i>				
1	Rajdeep Sardesai, Editor-in-Chief, IBN18; President, Editors Guild of India; New Delhi	28 Jul 2012	27	
2	Sonia Singh, Editorial Director, NDTV; New Delhi	27 Jul 2012	49	
3	Karan Thapar, Executive Producer, ITV; one of India's best-known television interviewers; New Delhi	23 Nov 2011	60	
4	Vinay Tewari, Managing Editor, CNN-IBN, Network18; Noida	26 Jul 2012	51	
5	Punya Prasun Bajpai, Anchor and Senior Editor, Zee News; Noida	25 Jul 2012	39	Interview conducted in Hindi
6	Vivian Fernandes, Senior television journalist, Network18; Noida	07 Dec 2012	57	Additional inputs over email
7	Madhusudan Srinivas, Senior News Editor, NDTV; New Delhi	24 Jul 2012	54	Interview conducted at home of respondent
8	V.V.P. Sharma, Senior Editor, Headlines Today, TV Today Network; New Delhi	15 Jul 2012	46	Interview conducted at Noida home of the researcher
9	Rajeet Sinha, former Producer, Zee News; Noida	24 Jul 2012	50	Interview conducted over Skype
<i>Newspaper editors and journalists:</i>				
10	Kuldip Nayar, senior journalist,	31 Jul	45	Interview conducted at

	former Editor, <i>The Indian Express</i> ; former Indian High Commissioner in London; New Delhi	2012		home of respondent
11	B.G. Verghese, former Editor, <i>Hindustan Times</i> ; former Editor, <i>The Indian Express</i> ; former Communications Advisor to the Prime Minister of India; New Delhi	6 Oct 2011	13 (recording failure)	Interview conducted at home of respondent
12	N. Ram, former Editor-in-Chief, <i>The Hindu</i> ; Chennai	3 Aug 2011	72	
13	Parsa Venkateshwar Rao, Jr., Editorial Consultant, <i>DNA (Daily News and Analysis)</i> ; New Delhi	16 Jul 2012	74	Interview conducted at neutral location in New Delhi
14	Respondent A, Newspaper editor; former editor of several newspapers; New Delhi	30 Jul 2012	39	Anonymity requested; Interview conducted over telephone
15	Cho Ramaswamy, Editor, <i>Thuglak</i> ; Chennai	5 Aug 2011	14 (recording failure)	
16	Sadanand Menon, former Arts Editor, <i>The Economic Times</i> ; Chennai	4 Aug 2011	52	
17	Tarun Basu, Editor-in-Chief, Indo- Asian News Service; New Delhi	20 Jul 2012	27	
18	Ishwar Daitotta, senior journalist, former Editor of four major Kannada language newspapers; Bengaluru	6 Aug 2011	53	
19	Nirupama Subramanian, Assistant Editor, <i>The Hindu</i> ; Chennai	4 Aug 2011	21	
20	R. Poornima, Assistant Editor, <i>Mayura</i> ; Bengaluru	6 Aug 2011	25	
21	Anusha Subramanian, Special Correspondent, <i>Business Today</i> ; Mumbai	5 Jun 2012	36	Interview conducted in London home of researcher

22	Bharat Bhushan Nagpal, senior journalist; expert on Indian media; New Delhi;	11 Nov 2011	83	Interview conducted at neutral location in New Delhi
23	'Respondent B', senior journalist, major newspaper; Chennai;	4 Aug 2011	39	Anonymity requested
<b>Owner-editors of major newspapers:</b>				
24	K.N. Shanth Kumar, Director, The Printers (Mysore) Limited, publishers of <i>Deccan Herald</i> ; Editor, <i>Praja Vani</i> ; Bengaluru	6 Aug 2011	45	
25	Sanjay Gupta, CEO, Jagran Prakashan, and Editor, <i>Dainik Jagran</i> ; Noida	20 Sep 2011	25	
<b>Journalists who have moved to PR or have become publishers:</b>				
26	Dilip Cherian, Founding Partner, Perfect Relations; former journalist; New Delhi	25 Jul 2012	29	
27	Umesh Anand, Editor and Publisher, <i>Civil Society</i> ; New Delhi	12 Jul 2012	69	Interview conducted over Skype
<b>Senior managers of news organisations:</b>				
28	K.V.L. Narayan Rao, Executive Vice-Chairman, New Delhi Television; President, News Broadcasters' Association; New Delhi	22 Nov 2011	47	
29	Barun Das, CEO, Zee News Limited; Noida	20 Sep 2011	39	
30	Rohit Kumar, Deputy Vice-President, Zee News Limited; Head of Marketing; Noida	26 Jul 2012	33	
31	Abhay Ojha, Vice-President, Ad Sales, TV9; Noida	30 Jul 2012	28	Interview conducted at neutral location in Noida
<b>Officials and policy makers:</b>				
32	Pankaj Pachauri, Communications	22 Nov	67	

	Advisor to the Prime Minister of India; former Editor, Special Projects, NDTV; New Delhi	2011		
33	Usha Bhasin, Deputy Director-General, Doordarshan, Prasar Bharati; New Delhi	4 Oct 2011	33	
34	Khurshid Ahmed Ganai, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India; New Delhi	5 Oct 2011	37	
<b><i>Press Council of India officials and members:</i></b>				
35	Markandey Katju, Chairman, Press Council of India; former judge, Supreme Court of India; New Delhi	26 Jul 2012	42	Interview conducted at home of respondent
36	Prakash Javadekar, Member of Parliament; National Spokesman, Bharatiya Janata Party; Member, Press Council of India; subsequently Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India; New Delhi	20 Jul 2012	22	
37	Kalyan Barooah, Special Correspondent, <i>Assam Tribune</i> ; Member, Press Council of India; New Delhi	1 Aug 2012	20	Interview conducted at Press Club of India
38	Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, senior journalist; former member, Press Council of India; co-author of the Press Council of India's report on paid news; New Delhi	22 Aug 2011	56	
<b><i>Election Commission of India officials:</i></b>				
39	S.Y. Quraishi, Chief Election Commissioner of India, 2010–12; New Delhi	13 Jul 2012	32	Interview conducted at home of respondent
40	P.K. Dash, Director-General,	17 Jul	24	

	Election Commission of India; New Delhi	2012		
41	Praveen Kumar, Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu; Chennai	3 Aug 2011	36	
42	T.N. Seshan, Chief Election Commissioner of India, 1990–96; Chennai	4 Aug 2011	50	
<b><i>Heads of major journalism schools:</i></b>				
43	Sunit Tandon, Director-General, Indian Institute of Mass Communication; New Delhi	7 Oct 2011	36	
44	Sashi Kumar, Chairman, Media Development Trust; Head, Asian College of Journalism; Chennai	4 Aug 2011	49	
45	Sunil Saxena, Director, Amity School of Communication; Jaipur	17 Jul 2012	67	Interview conducted over Skype
<b><i>Public intellectuals:</i></b>				
46	Ashis Nandy, political psychologist; public intellectual; New Delhi	3 Aug 2012	38	
47	Dipankar Gupta, sociologist; Member, News Broadcasting Standards Authority; New Delhi	2 Aug 2012	55	

\* Unless otherwise specified, all interviews were conducted in person, in the offices of the respondent and in English.

\*\* Audio recordings were made of all interviews.



<p>fifty per cent of the Editors replied and did sign that resolution, but let us be honest the Editors Guild at the end of the day can do only so much. But beyond the resolution, we worked with the Election Commission and that was more successful, that we worked with Dr. Quraishi and at a mutual instance we had a discussion between him and me and then put a team in place which worked with him and I think, in terms of elections we were a little bit more successful in the elections that followed, in at least raising awareness that paid news is an unacceptable practice. The resolution that we passed in the Editors Guild, frankly, was confined to those editors, but I think, what we did with Dr. Quraishi since the Election Commission actually was keen to implement it, they then set up monitoring units and many of the district election officers were told to look at specific instances and see it as corrupt practice and he tells me that they were reasonably successful in the elections that followed. But, as a result, in the Guild, frankly, all we could do was raise awareness and we had one seminar on it, we had a resolution on it but that is where it was limited.</p>	<p>working with ECI more successful</p>	<p>paid news – PCI ECI</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> So the Editors Guild was only partially effective.</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> I would say that it was partially effective because, I think, the basic issue was as many editors told me that the decision on paid news is not taken by editor but by proprietor.</p>	<p>decision on paid news taken by proprietors, not editors</p>	<p>paid news – details of sales</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> Okay, can you point me in the direction of some editors who feel this way?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> I point you in the direction of some editors, I am not sure, who those editors are actually, to be</p>		

<p>honest, you know, if you meet any senior editor, who works in a regional newspaper, they will tell you this, whether it was Alok Mehta who was the former President of the Editors Guild, Shravan Garg of <i>Dainik Bhaskar</i> at the time, these are off the cuff names that are coming to my mind and there is a guy from Gujarati <i>Janmabhoomi</i>, Kundan Vyas of the <i>Janmabhoomi</i> Group, all of them came up with the same and, I mean, to be fair to them they signed on because they were senior members but they also revealed the limitations that would be there as it is just a resolution.</p>	<p>editors who pointed out problems named</p>	<p>ethics discourse</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> What is the way going forward? Is paid news clearly an unacceptable practice in journalism?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> It is an unacceptable practice. My solution has been very clear. In fact, I raised it in a recent debate that I had with the Law Minister, as well as the member of the opposition, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad and Mr. Salman Khurshid, was that we must have norms of disclosure and I don't think you can say that there will be nothing like a sponsored feature but disclose it. I think the permissiveness and the corrupt practice comes when you do it almost in secrecy, when you don't reveal it, that is the corrupt practice. If I were to say that every paid news item will have a particular form of disclosure, this is a sponsored feature brought to you by so and so. If it is on television, put it up there. We have done that now any sponsored feature that we have there will be a bug this is a sponsored feature. Now you could argue that what is the size, is it small, is it large, these debates will continue but I mean, I would like it as large as possible but the marketing guys</p>	<p>norms of disclosure as a solution</p>	<p>ethics discourse</p>

<p>will like it as small as possible and we are very clear and I am very clear in my mind that disclosure is the way forward. As long as you are willing to, I found it... I will tell you what happened. In the Maharashtra elections of 2010 many local politicians came and told us we will pay you so and so you run a half an hour feature on us. We said, we will run your speech but we will say this is brought to you by so and so. We suddenly found that those who were willing to come to IBN Lokmat dried up and in contrast those who were willing to go to competitors increased or they were willing to pay us a lesser rate. This is what the marketing guys tell me that they could possibly do the disclosure norm, but then be prepared for lower revenue. I told, it is okay but we are very clear. There is and I think when we initially started there was a ‘Shave India’ campaign that we did with Gillette, which Paranjoy in his report points out, but my argument to that was it was Gillette’s Shave India campaign and at no stage was it suggested that Gillette was not the sponsor, now only a, you know, but, even from that instance, from now on, learning from the past, we have decided that there will be sponsored feature tag running through the show and I think the way forward is disclosure.</p>	<p>2010 Maharashtra politicians came to IBN Lokmat</p> <p>marketing guys oppose disclosure</p> <p>Gillette Shave India</p>	<p>paid news – details of sales</p> <p>marketing vs editorial</p> <p>journalism PR influence</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> At the moment, how widespread is paid political news in newspapers and television?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> I think paid political news isn’t as widespread as it is ... let me correct that ... I think paid political news exists in both television and newspapers. Why say one is worse, it comes mainly during election time when the stakes are higher. It takes various forms. It takes the form,</p>	<p>Paid news exists in both newspapers and TV</p> <p>happens at election</p>	<p>paid news</p>

<p>as Dr. Quraishi once pointed out to me that some newspaper had on the front page two items one saying so and so the candidate is winning and the other saying so and so, the other candidate, is winning. Both were on the same page and both obviously had been paid for. In television, it is more through the speech, which could be done, or not reporting enough about your rival candidate, but I don't believe there is a serious paid news problem in mainstream channels at the moment. There is a problem of paid news in mainstream regional papers even during elections, I mean, the big newspapers during elections. The smaller papers and smaller TV channels live by it and that is where the problem is. I mean, the regional channels in both television and newspapers is where the political problem is at its greatest, the national channels have a little bit more muzzle or the national newspapers have a little bit more muzzle and it is primarily in regional papers. In national papers and national channels it is more the business guys, the corporate guys, through their private treaties and other forms who are responsible for paid news.</p>	<p>time – higher stakes</p> <p>examples of paid news in newspapers how detected</p> <p>paid news no serious problem in mainstream TV</p> <p>smaller papers and TV channels live by it (regional)</p> <p>national level more corporate guys, private treaties, etc.</p>	<p>paid news</p> <p>paid news</p> <p>paid news – details of sales</p> <p>paid news – details of sales</p> <p>paid news – details of sales</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> Paid political news, is it prevalent in mainstream English national newspapers – because a lot of it is laid at the door of what is called <i>The Times of India</i> business model?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> No, I haven't seen it, and I will be fair to <i>The Times of India</i>. I don't think <i>The Times of India</i> during elections engages in paid political news. I don't have any evidence to that effect. There are newspapers like <i>The Pioneer</i> which are BJP papers, but that they are 365 days of the year.</p>	<p>no evidence <i>TOI</i> paid political news</p> <p><i>Pioneer</i> extension of</p>	<p>paid news – details of sales</p> <p>politically owned</p>

<p>Is that paid news? I mean, I call it paid political news 365 days of the year. Will <i>The Pioneer</i> report a story of positive about the Congress? You will never see a story. Now, they are not being paid for that, but the newspaper has decided that it is the extension of the BJP. Is that paid political news? In that context, the national English language papers may take a political position. <i>The Hindu</i>, for the longest time ensured that any speech of Brinda Karat of the Left is given prominence or, with Subramaniam Swamy, that every press release is carried. That possibly reflects the ideology of the paper. But we have to make a distinction and I think, I don't think <i>The Times of India</i> engages in paid political news, their problem is the manner in which they use page three and Medianet, promote products and promote commercial entities.</p>	<p>BJP</p> <p><i>TOI</i> problem is page 3, Medianet, promotions, etc.</p>	<p>media</p> <p>paid news – background</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> What has happened to Indian journalism that we have come to a stage that the newspapers actually go out and extort money from politicians at election time?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> It is not just the newspapers, and the television channels, I think, it is the business model. How does, it has two things. One is the kind of people who have got into media, the kind of proprietors who at one time got into media, for whom the values and ethics don't really matter. Number two, and more seriously, is the business model. Your revenue model is so advertiser dependent, your newspapers are priced so low, television channels don't get subscription revenue from cable operators. As a result, you are entirely dependent on advertising revenue and once you have created that kind of a model, that model will</p>	<p>paid news due to business model</p> <p>ownership – ethics don't matter</p> <p>revenue model is advertiser dependent</p>	<p>paid news – background</p> <p>ownership</p> <p>business model</p>

<p>go through this kind of pressure wherein it becomes very difficult to get... well, elections are seen as a major source of revenue and therefore....</p>		
<p><b>SJ:</b> ... and it is unaccounted money for the most part.</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> It is unaccounted money for the most part, you know. Some of us are publicly listed companies, so it is difficult for us to have unaccounted money, but a number of them are not. A number of them are sole proprietorship concerns and I think it is the pattern of ownership which is important. Your sole proprietorship and a person may be a real estate builder, he decides to take over a television channel. For him, what is a television channel? It is there for his own protection or it is there for him to provide, you know, an alternative cash cow. Not even that, it is just to have some kind of a, I think.... You know, if you are seen as a builder, in society you may not get the status that you want, but if you are seen as a media baron you might have more status. I think the kind of people who are buying television channels today, because in television you need cash, a lot of the transactions that are going on with the cable operators are cash transactions, so you need people with cash, and so I think the kind of people now who are coming to own TV channels and possibly newspapers and certainly the business model which is entirely dependent on advertising revenue, therefore, the politician is also seen as an advertising revenue.</p>	<p>unaccounted money easier for sole proprietors</p> <p>builders and real estate want status</p> <p>people with cash needed in TV – cash to cable operators, thus real estate</p>	<p>ownership</p> <p>ownership</p> <p>ownership</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> You mentioned owner-editors. Obviously there is a conflict of interest there between the profit motive and journalistic values. You</p>		

<p>yourself are a part-owner and editor, how do you balance these two functions?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> I am not a, I don't see myself as a part-owner in the sense that I have a small stake as someone who helped set up a start-up in a large network. How do I balance the interests? I think I am conscious of the fact that we have to be a profitable entity because the last thing you want is to run into losses and then force people out, you know, very near to forced downsizing, and I am conscious of the fact that we have to be profitable much more than perhaps I would have been when I was at NDTV, where it was completely out of mind. But my core being, my core values and my core work is journalistic and I now increasingly believe that to be profitable you have to provide quality journalism. Increasingly, sponsors, or the quality sponsors who are willing to put big bucks, are those who will only come for quality, credible products, they don't want short-cut measure. You know the paid news comes when you don't have a quality product, in my view, or it comes through sheer greed. You know, in many cases it comes through greed. It is not that <i>The Times of India</i> would not be a profitable entity if it didn't have Medianet.</p>	<p>I am combining owner and editor perspectives</p> <p>sponsors want credibility</p> <p>paid news – no quality product, only greed</p>	<p>marketing vs editorial</p> <p>advertiser pressure</p> <p>paid news</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> Extremely profitable.</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> But, you know, if would be profitable in any case. Medianet is only a little bit of cherry on the top. So, where is that? I think it comes through greed. It also comes through lack of values, I think, you know, number of, you know, once you start seeing a newspaper or a television channel purely as a product with no interest in journalistic</p>	<p>greed – <i>TOI</i> Medianet lack of values</p> <p>newspaper only as a</p>	<p>paid news – background</p> <p>paid news – background</p>

values, then you will play around with it, then you believe that none of these things matter.	product – soap	
<b>SJ:</b> Do You believe that a kind of social responsibility is built into the definition of journalism?		
<b>RS:</b> Absolutely. I have always believed and there has to be a social responsibility, otherwise we might as well be selling soap, and I am not saying this in some kind of self-righteousness, but it is true that journalism has a certain unique selling proposition and the unique selling proposition is that the news is not a commodity beyond a point. Yes, we are commodified in terms of hundreds of channels, hundreds of newspapers all giving the same breaking news, to that extent you could argue that news, too, has got commodified. But I think there is a certain essential ethical code to journalism because, you are telling you know, if you are selling a cake of soap, ultimately, it doesn't matter whether the soap is you know, the core of it is a certain... Telling a story, telling a news story which involves a certain xyz, a core to it, you know, who is the victim, who is the villain, you are telling a core story. You are just telling a story, as a story teller then you can't think, I believe, beyond a point will this story sell. Unfortunately, television ratings points in TV have created this impression that TV is box office, which it is not. TV news is not box office and it cannot be. You have to do a story essentially because it is a story and that is what gives journalism a certain core value which a cake of soap doesn't have.	social responsibility is built into definition of journalism  news is commodified, but essential ethical code  you can't think of story saleability  TRP chase is a problem	ethics discourse  journalism still good  journalism quality  TRPs
<b>SJ:</b> You have been in journalism for 30 years		

more or less		
<b>RS:</b> Twenty-four.		
<b>SJ:</b> Okay. How has the pressure on Indian journalism changed in these 24 years?		
<b>RS:</b> I remember, the first meeting of <i>The Times of India</i> in 1988, when I joined as a part of the editorial, Girilal Jain getting a phone call from his secretary saying that someone from the advertising wants to meet you. He said, please ask them that I don't want to meet them. I don't think any editor today would have the courage to say that, and I think it was clear that the marketing lived in its own world, editorial lived in its own world. I am not calling, I am not saying that was ideal, but I think there is always a need for a Chinese wall. Over time, the Chinese wall has been breached.	Girilal Jain refused to meet advertising department	marketing vs editorial
<b>SJ:</b> Who breached it?		
<b>RS:</b> Who breached it?		
<b>SJ:</b> In which organisation?		
<b>RS:</b> I think <i>The Times of India</i> started it because I was there at that time in 1988 when suddenly, in the first couple of years, if you went to the advertising floor, it was just another floor and in that two years they had marble floors, the whole place changed and it looked five-star suddenly, and the editorial remained where it was. I think, that was in the late 1980s and early 1990s period where the change was effected. There were good points to it. It made <i>The Times of India</i> a much more profitable entity, stronger financially. But I think what it did was, it made the editorial undermine the self-confidence as well as what you say... it undermined the self-confidence and over time the self-respect of the editorial, wherein	changes in <i>TOI</i> late 1980s to early 1990s undermined editorial	marketing vs editorial

<p>the editorial was constantly told that the marketing guys would decide the shape and directions of a newspaper to the point, you know, you are a great artist and I have seen it build up over time, that the amount of space that were there for editorial got reduced over time, the kind of editorial that you wanted to do, I think, got reduced over time. I think, it started in the late 1980s, early 1990s, there was also very good work done editorially. We did some fine stuff, covering the riots, Mandal... there was all that. At the core, even today, <i>The Times of India</i> editorially remains the fine product but the balance of power shifted. The balance of power shifted in a manner that editorial then felt more pressurised to fall in line. It was almost that if you wanted to become the editor of <i>The Times of India</i> you would have to be subservient to whoever was the CEO. You could not be Girilal Jain of 1988 who says I don't want to talk to him.</p>	<p><i>TOI</i> balance of power shifted away from editorial</p>	<p>marketing vs editorial</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> In some sense was Girilal Jain's attitude and his insistence on the Chinese wall, do you think that was responsible for this breaking of this wall, was there an impetus to it?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> Look, I think Girilal Jain was also doing it as a, my sense was that, I mean, eventually the Chinese wall was going to be breached. It is interesting that it happened around the time of liberalisation, we become a market economy, new products come in, foreign investors came in. It is part of the ... across India, I think the marketing man is becoming more and more influential. So, how could a newspaper completely remain impervious to that? Girilal Jain, did he accelerate the process? He might have angered the Samir</p>	<p>role of liberalisation and market economy  media commercialisation</p>	<p>business model – market driven  business model – market driven</p>

<p>Jains of the world to say that I am going to teach you a lesson, it is now my time. Possibly. But I think Samir Jain would have done it in any case. I think, it was inevitable and this has happened across the world that the balance of power would shift from editorial to marketing and to commerce. Now, the question is how of much space can you retain and I think that is the battle. It is a daily battle, a monthly battle, but it is a battle that is worth fighting. So, as an editor when someone comes to us, the good thing is that – I can only speak for myself and you can check it out – that the marketing guys know that they have to ask me before they go ahead, if I say they can't, they know that they can't have it. I have given them a half-hour slot in which they can do their focus properly, but they have been told that what are the rules under which it operates and they know that they would not tell me what are my headlines. My work, that is my space. It may be it is more limited than 10, 20 years ago, but it is my space and there they will not intervene. That is all you can do, I think. The era of the tough editor is obviously coming to an end, but you have got to fight for it. I think the marketing guys will eventually respect the guy who tells them why, because I come back to that, I believe quality editorial is the way in which the marketing guy also has a greater sense to get a premium value for your product.</p>	<p>was inevitable</p> <p>editors can try and set terms, coordinate with marketing</p>	<p>marketing vs editorial</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> Now, we were talking that the self-regulation in India is not working, whether it is the Press Council of India or NBA or the NBSA and so on. What do you think of the case for regulation, independent regulation?</p>		

<p><b>RS:</b> I don't see why India cannot have an Ofcom-like body, the problem with independent regulation in the Indian context is will the regulator be independent or will it be some <i>sarkari</i> body. If it is a <i>sarkari</i> body no, no, but if we can have an independent regulator, why not? It would be great. I do believe that an independent regulator will cheat, you know with power. Having said that, let me also say that 80 per cent of the time, journalists do basic journalism. Reporters are still foot soldiers who go out and do the story, cover the press conference, you know, they just go out there and tell stories. So, I am not willing to believe that the paid news has hijacked journalism or taken over journalism.</p>	<p>why not independent regulator</p>	<p>regulation</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> Don't you think that the culture of journalism has changed, journalists are being fed much more?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> Possibly. I think, the culture has changed perhaps even more in the context of, let us say, entertainment journalism, where if you write a bad review of a film, I am told that the guy will not give you access to the stars. To get access to the stars, you have to promote a film. I do know that, you know, even with political parties, the level of intolerance has increased compared to 20 years ago. If you are critical of a party, they tend to sort of back off from giving you interviews, so, I think, lots of that are happening but it comes with the territory. I think we have to accept that as an occupational hazard, I am not willing to concede entirely that the core of journalism has been completely corroded today. I do believe that, I think, the quality has declined, but, you know, let us not blame paid news, marketing men,</p>	<p>entertainment journalism has changed</p> <p>quality has come</p>	<p>paid news – background</p>

<p>commercial men for the decline in quality of journalism. We have to blame ourselves. At the end of the day we have debased journalism, we don't do enough homework, we don't do enough fact-checking, we don't invest enough in newsgathering. These are problems that lie within. We titillate audiences, we trivialise news, we sensationalise news, the marketing guys is not asking you to trivialise, titillate or sensationalise, you are doing it because your self-confidence has been undermined because, you, yourself has no longer any confidence in journalism as journalistic product. You believe that the audience out there wants titillation, wants sensationalism. You cater to the lowest denominator. Up to a point, we can blame paid news, but let us not blame paid news for the decline in standard. Standards have declined because of us.</p>	<p>down – only ourselves to blame</p> <p>list of problems with journalism – newsgathering budget, fact-checking, tabloid</p>	<p>journalism quality</p> <p>journalism quality</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> Would you say paid news is the result of the decline in standards.</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> Paid news is one of the fallouts, paid news could be one of the reasons, but it is not the sole reason, nor is it the sole fallout of the decline in quality.</p>		
<p><b>SJ:</b> Okay. Broadly speaking, what is the interplay between the government and the media industry? Who is scared of whom and who exerts what pressure on the other?</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> Look, I am not aware of how DAVP works, but obviously the government uses their advertising revenues also to muzzle the media or to make it fall in line. I am sure, it does that, which is why I believe that, you know. But I do believe that the more powerful newspapers and</p>	<p>Govt has limited</p>	

<p>TV channels are in a position to resist that, and I don't see that the government being able to beyond a point dictate the agenda. It is just that there are too many channels, too many newspapers now, someone will, you know. The government may put out an informal advisory, please don't show Anna's agitation, one guy may have it, 10 others won't. I think the DAVP revenues are important for the smaller and medium newspapers and small and medium channels, which is where the government is able to exercise disproportionate influence. If you are a regional channel, the size... Which channel, who is going to put how much money there, it makes a huge difference, but for those who are more dependent on MNCs, consumer products and large consumer durable products, it matters a little less.</p>	<p>capacity to exert pressure</p> <p>Govt ads matter more to smaller and regional media</p>	<p>govt pressure</p> <p>govt pressure</p>
<p><b>SJ:</b> Finally, what is good about Indian journalism today, what is better than it used to be 20 years ago?</p>		
<p><b>SJ:</b> That pause is a very telling pause.</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> It is a telling pause. It is a telling pause, because I am trying to get it right. It is a great question. What has become better? I would like to believe that there is an energy that perhaps was missing 20 years ago. Television broadcast has brought a certain energy and passion to journalism back and I have no doubt about that. We are all over the place. No place to hide and the good thing is there is an earthquake somewhere, a story somewhere, sooner or later it becomes national news. People will argue the Assam riots, you haven't covered it as much as that, my argument would be please see how the</p>	<p>now more energy in journalism</p>	<p>journalism still good</p>

<p>Assam riots would have been covered 25 years ago. There is far more coverage today than there was 25 years ago. So, I think, we are all over the place with a certain energy and passion and aggression which perhaps wasn't there 20 years ago, which is the positive that I take away. To the extent that we are able to put the politician in the dock, you don't only see him once every five years, you don't only see him cutting ribbons, tough questions are put to them. People are exposed, many of the corruption scandals have been exposed on news media. Across newspapers, the adversarial nature of journalism is still there, it exists, and I don't think it has been lost and I think it exists and it will continue to exist because quite simply the competition forces you to always constantly look for some way which you can distinguish yourself from your competitor to become better.</p>		
<p><b>SJ:</b> Rajdeep, thank you very much.</p>		
<p><b>RS:</b> Thank you very much. It has been a pleasure.</p>		
<p><b>(Recording ends)</b></p>		

### APPENDIX 3: THEMES AND CATEGORIES

The following table lists the five overarching themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, and the categories of codes that correspond to each of them. The five themes are listed in Column 1 of the table below. Column 2 lists the categories that correspond to each of the themes, in alphabetical order. Each of the categories in turn represents a cluster of the initial codes that were assigned to interview segments as part of the process that is illustrated in Appendix 2.

Theme	Categories derived from open coding
Explosive growth of media	Media differentiation Media growth Media history Media regionalisation
Competition and business models	Business model Business model – market driven Business model – profit supreme Business model – TV Marketing vs editorial Media audience Ownership
The emergence and practices of paid news	Elections Greed corruption Paid news Paid news – background Paid news – causes Paid news – details of sales
Regulation and external influences	Ethics discourse Journalism corruption Journalism motive Journalism power Journalism quality Journalism still good Journalism students Journalism training

	Paid news – PCI ECI Politically owned media Regulation
Pressures on journalism and journalists	Advertiser pressure Govt pressure Journalism financial pressures Journalism PR influence Journalism processes Journalism salaries Marketing vs editorial TRPs
(Miscellaneous; not used in this study)	DD/AIR/PSB

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