

Money, Media And Nationhood Corporate Influence On The 'Idea Of India'

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Abstract

This research paper explores the interplay between media, corporate interests, and the shaping of the 'Idea of India.' It acknowledges the pivotal role media plays in shaping public opinion and national identity but raises concerns about corporate ownership's impact on narrative diversity. Using qualitative analysis and socio-political context examination, it reveals challenges such as biased reporting and marginalization of alternative views due to corporate influence. The study emphasizes how corporate-driven media narratives can sway public perception and shape social discourse, potentially impacting the national identity. It advocates for transparent ownership structures and media regulation to counteract these effects. By emphasizing the importance of a diverse and independent media landscape, the paper underscores its role in upholding democratic values and promoting a nuanced understanding of India's identity. It offers insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and civil society stakeholders to foster media plurality, transparency, and democratic principles in India's media landscape.

Keywords: Democracy, Media, Corporate influence, Representation of narratives, Diversity, Idea of India

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India, a land of diversity and complexity, boasts a rich tapestry of cultures, traditions, and historical legacies that collectively define its 'Idea of India.' This idea encompasses the nation's shared identity, values, and cultural heritage, shaping the collective imagination of its citizens. The media, as a powerful vehicle of information dissemination and representation, plays a pivotal role in constructing and reflecting this national identity. However, the advent of corporate influence in media ownership and content production has sparked debates about its impact on the portrayal of the 'Idea of India.'

The role of the media in shaping national identity and collective memory has long been acknowledged by scholars and sociologists. The media do not merely inform us, but 'decide' what we know, how we know, and most importantly, how much we know. More than ever before, the media are increasingly in a position to set agendas, create meanings and structure reality (Saeed, 2013, p. 45). However, the growing concentration of media ownership among corporate entities has raised concerns about media plurality, impartiality, and the diverse representation of voices. The commercialisation of media and the race for higher revenues have also led to a shift in media content choices, with an emphasis on entertainment-driven content over informative journalism.

I. Research Objectives

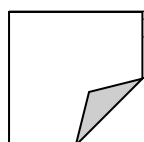
The objectives of this study are twofold. Firstly, it aims to analyse how the corporate influence on media coverage affects the public perception of the 'Idea of India'. Secondly, the study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for fostering a media landscape characterised by responsibility and inclusivity.

II. Research Methodology

For the purpose of the study, qualitative content analysis method is adopted. Top two reading newspapers of both Hindi (Dainik Jagran and Amar Ujala) and English (Times of India and The Hindu), have been selected for conducting the case study. The headlines of these newspapers were analysed for the purpose of data collection. Since, the nature of the study is qualitative, both primary and secondary data have been used.

III. Idea Of India

The 'Idea of India' is a dynamic concept encompassing the nation's rich cultural tapestry, historical journey, and collective identity. It embodies tolerance, coexistence, and assimilation, reflecting India's diverse heritage shaped by numerous civilisations and empires. The struggle for independence, led by figures like



Mahatma Gandhi, unified people from various backgrounds in their quest for freedom, laying the foundation for a democratic and inclusive India. Post-independence, the framers of the Indian Constitution, under Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's leadership, established a secular and democratic framework emphasizing justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. India's economic trajectory since independence has been guided by efforts to alleviate poverty, empower marginalised communities, and foster self-reliance.

The 'Idea of India' continues to evolve, acknowledging historical realities while embracing cultural diversity and democratic values. It serves as a beacon of unity amidst societal progress and emerging challenges, symbolising the aspirations of its people for a prosperous and inclusive future. In essence, the 'Idea of India' celebrates unity in diversity, secularism, and inclusivity, striving to unite all citizens under the common identity of being Indian.

IV. Concentration Of Media Ownership

The concentration of media ownership among corporate entities is a growing concern in the media landscape of many countries, including India. It refers to the phenomenon where a few large corporations or conglomerates own and control a significant portion of the media market. This consolidation of media ownership can have profound implications on media plurality, editorial independence, and the diversity of voices represented in the media.

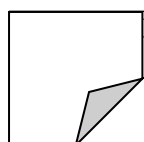
In India, the concentration of media ownership has become more pronounced over the years, with a handful of corporate entities holding sway over a substantial portion of the media industry. The Media Ownership Monitor, a research project carried out in India by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Delhi-based digital media company DataLEADS, analysed 58 leading media outlets with the largest audience shares in India. The research revealed that the country's print media market is highly concentrated. Four outlets – Dainik Jagran, Hindustan, Amar Ujala and Dainik Bhaskar – capture three out of four readers (76.45% of readership share) within the national Hindi language market (*Media Ownership Monitor: Who owns the media in India?*, n.d.).

V. Key Factors Contributing To Concentration Of Media Ownership:

- **Economic Factors:** The media industry requires significant capital investment, making it difficult for smaller players to compete with well-established corporate entities. Large corporations with access to substantial financial resources can invest in state-of-the-art technology, talent, and distribution networks, gaining a competitive advantage over smaller media outlets.
- **Cross-Media Ownership:** Many media conglomerates own multiple media outlets across different platforms, such as newspapers, television channels, radio stations, and digital media platforms. Cross-media ownership allows them to amplify their reach and influence, creating a media ecosystem dominated by a few corporate players.
- **Mergers and Acquisitions:** Mergers and acquisitions are common strategies adopted by corporate entities to expand their media presence. Consolidation through acquisitions of smaller media companies allows conglomerates to strengthen their market position and enhance their control over the media landscape.
- **Regulatory Environment:** The regulatory environment may not effectively address concerns related to media concentration. Weak regulations or lack of antitrust measures can pave the way for further consolidation of media ownership among corporate entities.

VI. Implications Of Concentration Of Ownership On Media Plurality And Diversity Of Voices

- **Limited Range of Perspectives:** Media ownership concentration can lead to a reduction in the number of independent media outlets with diverse editorial perspectives. As conglomerates prioritise commercial interests and corporate narratives, they may homogenise news content, presenting a limited range of perspectives on important issues. This can result in a lack of in-depth analysis and critical reporting on various topics.
- **Suppression of Alternative Voices:** Independent and smaller media outlets that offer alternative or dissenting viewpoints may struggle to compete with well-funded conglomerates. As a result, their voices may be marginalised or suppressed, reducing the diversity of voices represented in the media. This can lead to a less vibrant public discourse and limit the public's exposure to diverse opinions.
- **Influence on News Agenda:** Media ownership concentration can allow corporate entities to set the news agenda and influence public discourse. Editorial decisions may be influenced by the owners' business interests or affiliations, potentially leading to biased or selective reporting. This influence on the news agenda can impact public understanding of critical issues and influence societal perceptions.



- **Commercialisation and Sensationalism:** With profit motives driving media content, concentrated ownership may prioritise sensationalism and entertainment-driven news over substantive and informative journalism. This focus on attracting larger audiences to maximise advertising revenue can result in a decline in quality journalism and may prioritise sensational headlines over substantive reporting.
- **Decline of Local and Regional Voices:** In some cases, media conglomerates may centralise content production, leading to a decline in regional and local news coverage. Smaller or niche media outlets that cater to specific communities or regions may struggle to survive, resulting in a loss of voices that represent the local context and concerns.
- **Potential Self-Censorship:** Journalists and media professionals working in outlets owned by conglomerates may face pressures to align their reporting with the owners' interests. This can lead to self-censorship and reluctance to pursue critical or investigative journalism, impacting the diversity of news and information available to the public.
- **Impact on Democratic Discourse:** A diverse media landscape is essential for fostering a well-informed citizenry and vibrant democratic discourse. Concentrated media ownership can hinder the democratic process by limiting access to diverse viewpoints and reducing public participation in informed decision-making.

The influence of corporate interests on media content choices has become an increasingly prevalent concern in modern society. As media organizations seek financial stability and profitability, they often form partnerships or are owned outright by large corporations. This integration can lead to conflicts of interest, as corporate entities may exert their influence to shape the content produced. Advertisers and sponsors also hold sway over media content choices, as their financial support often comes with expectations of favorable coverage or avoidance of controversial topics that could alienate target audiences. As a result, critical issues may be underrepresented, and sensationalism or superficial reporting may prevail, hindering the media's role as a fair and impartial purveyor of information. The preservation of journalistic integrity in the face of corporate interests remains a significant challenge, necessitating public awareness, media transparency, and a commitment to maintaining the fundamental principles of unbiased reporting.

VII. Money And Media Content: Entertainment V/S Information

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in media towards an emphasis on entertainment-driven content over informative journalism. This trend is driven by the quest for higher readership, clicks, and social media engagement, as media organizations compete for the attention of an ever-distracted public. As a result, news outlets increasingly prioritise sensational and emotionally charged stories, often at the expense of substantive reporting on critical issues. Infotainment, where news is packaged as entertainment, becomes the norm, leading to a dilution of important news and complex topics.

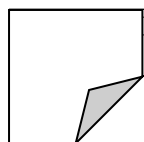
This shift towards entertainment-driven content can have several consequences. First, it may lead to a decline in public awareness and understanding of significant global events and societal challenges. When news is reduced to bite-sized, easily digestible bites, readers may lack the necessary context to form informed opinions. Second, this trend can erode trust in the media, as public perceive news outlets as prioritising entertainment value over factual accuracy and journalistic integrity. The focus on sensationalism can also perpetuate misinformation and contribute to the spread of clickbait and fake news. The debate over the relative importance and impact of entertainment versus informational media content has been ongoing. Critics argue that the proliferation of entertainment media has led to a decline in the quality and depth of informational content, as audiences increasingly seek out escapism and mindless entertainment (Postman, 1985).

While entertainment-driven content can attract a broader audience and generate higher profits, it challenges the fundamental purpose of journalism: to inform, educate, and hold power to account. Striking a balance between entertainment and informative journalism is crucial in preserving the media's role as a reliable source of information in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Media, Politics, and National Identity

The nexus between corporate media and political interests has long been a subject of scrutiny and concern. As media organisations seek financial stability and profitability, they often form intricate relationships with political entities and powerful corporate players. This interconnection can manifest in various ways, such as media ownership by individuals with political affiliations, cross-ownership between media conglomerates and other industries, and the symbiotic relationship between politicians and media outlets for mutual benefits. Politicians often leverage their relationships with media organizations to control the narrative and shape public opinion in their favour. Access to media platforms can be strategically granted or withheld, allowing politicians to manipulate the flow of information and avoid tough questioning or scrutiny.

Furthermore, media outlets may act as conduits for disseminating political propaganda, blurring the line between objective journalism and partisan advocacy. This can lead to a decline in independent and critical reporting, hindering the media's role as a watchdog and check on government power.



The symbiotic relationship between corporate media and political interests can have profound implications for democratic societies. While media can foster a sense of unity and cohesion, it can also perpetuate divisive narratives, exacerbate social tensions, and promote exclusionary or discriminatory notions of national identity (Billig, 1995).

Framing the 'Idea of India'

Corporate media plays a significant role in shaping narratives that influence public perceptions and construct the 'Idea of India.' As media outlets owned and operated by profit-driven corporations, they wield substantial influence over the content presented to the masses. Through editorial decisions, content choices, and framing of news stories, corporate media conglomerates have the power to mold the nation's identity and historical memory. Their financial interests and business affiliations can potentially impact media coverage, leading to the prioritisation of narratives aligned with specific agendas. How media shapes the narrative and influence people's perception can be understood with the help of following case study:

Case Study: "Farmers' Protest in India (2020)"

The farmers' protests, which began in Delhi on November 26, 2020, have been called by some observers as the "largest and longest peasants' struggle in the history of modern India". Three contentious farm laws, which were promulgated via an ordinance by the Union government, triggered the protests. These were the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and the Farm Services Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act. The laws dealt with the sale of agricultural produce, their hoarding, agricultural marketing and contract reform farming among other things, which would essentially open the floodgates for the entry of private players into the agricultural sector (Frontline, 2022).

The issue quickly became a matter of national importance, and the protests saw thousands of farmers, mostly from the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, taking to the streets to voice their dissent. They argued that the new laws would lead to the dismantling of the existing government-regulated agricultural system, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by large corporations and undermining their traditional farming practices.

What Media reported:

Dainik Jagran:

- "Farmer Protests 2020: Kisan ko bhi pta, nahin mani ja sakti unki mangein"(Yadav, 2020)
(Farmer Protests 2020: Farmers also know, their demands cannot be accepted)
- "Farmers Protest 100 Days: Barbadi ki aur le ja rha hai andolan, kya Kisan hi Kisan ke dushman ho gye?"(Pokhriyal, 2021)
(Farmers Protest 100 Days: The movement is leading to destruction, have farmers become enemies of farmers?)

Amar Ujala

- "Kisan andolan: Kanoon vapasi aur MSP par fansa pench suljhana hoga mushkil"(Mishr, 2021)
(Farmer's movement: It will be difficult to resolve the problem of return of law and MSP)
- "Krishi kanoono se Punjab mein Congress ki rajneetik fasal lehlahai"(Vajpayee, 2021)
(Congress's political crop waved in Punjab due to agricultural laws)

Times of India

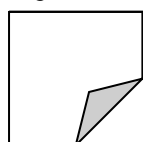
- "Farmers protest: Why it may be a pivotal moment in India's growth story"(Bloomberg, 2021)
- "Talks with govt.: First sign of rift among farmer unions"(Singh, 2021)
- "Protest against agri laws: 200 days on, farmers in no mood to relent"(Kamal, 2021)

The Hindu

- "Reaping the Whirlwind: On farmers protests
Farmers need more than the verbal assurances on continuance of MSP, guaranteed procurement"(Reaping the Whirlwind: The Hindu Editorial on Farmer Protests, 2020)
- "Bharat Bandh: Farmers hold mass rallies across the country
If there is bill wapsi, only then there will be ghar wapsi, says Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait"(Correspondent, 2021)

VIII. Findings And Discussion

Almost all the print media outlets that have been selected in this case study, framed the farmers' protest in ways that focused primarily on the disruption caused by the protests and presented the issue as a law and order problem. These media narratives highlighted incidents of violence, clashes with law enforcement, and the impact on daily life, while overlooking the core issues and grievances raised by the protesting farmers. These



outlets emphasised the inconvenience faced by the general public due to road blockades and disruptions in transportation. The focus on isolated incidents of violence also overshadowed the broader demands of the farmers and their concerns about the potential impact of the agricultural laws on their livelihoods. Furthermore, the media outlets also highlighted the government's viewpoint that the laws were necessary for agricultural reforms and development. This framing often depicted the protests as politically motivated, and certain narratives attempted to discredit the farmers' movement by labelling it as influenced by opposition parties.

In comparison to Hindi language newspapers, English language newspapers came up with more sensible headlines and less sensational coverage, especially *The Hindu*. They focused more into the reasons behind the farmers' protest and the complexities of the agricultural laws. They gave voice to the farmers' perspectives and concerns, contextualising their demands within the broader economic and social context.

The farmers' protest case study exemplifies how print media can shape narratives and influence public understanding of complex issues. The framing of the protests in media outlets, influenced by corporate interests and political affiliations, can potentially distort public perceptions and priorities. However, independent media plays a crucial role in providing more nuanced and balanced coverage, offering diverse perspectives and fostering informed public discourse. Media plurality and journalistic integrity are essential to ensure that issues of national importance are presented in a manner that accurately reflects the concerns and aspirations of all stakeholders involved.

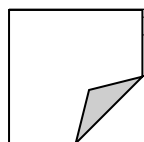
IX. Recommendations For A Balanced Media Landscape

Creating a balanced media landscape is essential for a healthy and informed society. A well-rounded media environment should encourage critical thinking, promote diverse perspectives, and uphold journalistic integrity. Here are some recommendations to achieve a balanced media landscape:

- **Media Literacy Education:** Implement comprehensive media literacy programs in schools and communities. These programs should teach people how to critically analyse news sources, recognise bias, fact-check information, and distinguish between opinion pieces and objective reporting.
- **Transparency in Ownership:** Ensure media companies disclose their ownership structures to the public. This information is crucial for audiences to understand potential biases or conflicts of interest that could influence the content they consume.
- **Journalistic Ethics and Standards:** Encourage adherence to high journalistic standards across all media outlets. Promote accuracy, fairness, impartiality, and accountability in reporting. Establish clear guidelines for handling sensitive topics and corrections of inaccuracies.
- **Diverse Ownership and Voices:** Promote diversity in media ownership to avoid concentration of power and influence in the hands of a few. Encourage representation of various social, cultural, and political perspectives, giving voice to marginalised communities.
- **Public Funding for Journalism:** Support public funding for independent journalism, especially for investigative reporting and coverage of critical issues. Publicly funded media outlets tend to have less commercial bias and can prioritise public interest over profits.
- **Support for Local Journalism:** Strengthen local journalism by offering financial incentives or tax breaks to media outlets focusing on local news. This will help foster a sense of community and keep citizens informed about issues affecting their immediate surroundings.
- **Public Engagement and Feedback:** Foster a two-way communication between media outlets and their audience. Create platforms for public feedback and engagement to address concerns, correct errors, and build trust with the audience.
- **Government Support for Press Freedom:** Ensure that government protects and upholds press freedom. Independent media plays a crucial role in holding those in power accountable and providing unbiased information to the public.
- **Encourage Non-profit Media:** Support the growth of non-profit media organizations that prioritise public service over profits. Non-profits can focus on investigative journalism and covering stories that may not receive enough attention in commercial media.
- **Civic Journalism Initiatives:** Promote civic journalism initiatives that involve citizens in the reporting process. This can help in uncovering local stories and diverse perspectives often overlooked by traditional media.

By implementing these recommendations, policy makers can foster a media landscape that encourages critical thinking, promotes diverse viewpoints, and delivers accurate and reliable information to the public. A balanced media environment is crucial for a well-informed citizenry and a thriving democracy.

X. Conclusion



In conclusion, this research paper sheds light on the intricate relationship between money, media, and the construction of nationhood, particularly in the context of India. Through an in-depth analysis of corporate influence on the "idea of India," This study has uncovered the multifaceted ways in which powerful interests in the media landscape can shape public perception, policy discourse, and the very essence of national identity. The findings underscore the critical importance of a balanced media landscape that upholds journalistic integrity, transparency, and diverse representation. Addressing the challenges posed by corporate influence on the media requires a collective effort from media professionals, policymakers, and the public at large. It is essential to nurture independent journalism, support non-profit media initiatives, and enhance media literacy education to empower citizens to critically engage with the information they consume. By safeguarding the integrity and plurality of media, we can foster a more informed and resilient democracy that truly reflects the aspirations and values of the diverse populace that makes up the tapestry of India.

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