

Deconstructing 'Ethics' in Journalism: How Indian Media is Neglecting its Social Responsibility?

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Abstract – A famous proverb of Journalism says, "If a DOG bites a man it's not NEWS, but if a MAN bites a DOG, it's News." But that does not necessarily mean that you need to stick to 'Unusual' to gain popularity and stardom. The media is playing the role of the 'MIRROR' which reflects the times and society we live in. In this scenario, the social responsibility of the media becomes much more important. But, does this 'MIRROR' reflect or refract? This paper focused on how media is neglecting its social responsibility and is showing half-baked truth to the audience.

Ethics in journalism are based on professional conduct, morality and the truth. Not adhering to these fundamental principles leads to misrepresenting or misleading members of the public. Professionally, betraying media ethics could result in a journalism career being destroyed. But the main question arises, "Does these ethics practically exists in news organizations now?" The answer is a big NO.

Most of the news media companies have become a 'saleable' product in the hands of power. On the contrary, in the current scenario, the media is following the 'Magic Bullet Theory of Mass Media' unlike consumers. With the 'hashtag era', overhype and aggressive coverage is the new phenomenon of selling news these days, as it increases Target Rating Point (TRP) giving more business to media houses. Every news story resembles a Tehelka like expose- corruption, sex and violence and there is always a doctored videotape.

It's time for Indian media to breakout the common storyline like Bollywood movies and comprehensively debate on issues which have significant effect directly or indirectly on people. The Indian media is often criticized for its deteriorating reporting standards, jaundiced coverage of politics and regurgitation of online trends as prime-time news. We as a media in a democratic India, cover 'Trending' news rather than 'newsworthy' information.

Media often portray non-issues as real issues, while the real issues are sidelined. Indian media, nowadays, are behaving much like Queen Marie Antoinette, who said that 'if the people had no bread, they should eat cake?'

Index Terms – Broadcast News, Digital Media, Fake News, Indian Media, Media Ethics, Social Media, Social Responsibility, Viral News, Yellow Journalism

1. WHAT IS NEWS?

News is a report of current events. There is no definite definition of news. It is information about something that has just happened or will happen soon. News is a report about recent happenings in a newspaper, television, radio or internet. News is something that is not known earlier. We can safely define news as a development that has happened in the past 24 hours which was not known outside and which is of wide interest to the people and which generates curiosity among listeners or viewers. So, does all information are newsworthy?

1.2 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INFORMATION AND NEWS

Information is different from news. News should give something new to the readers, viewers or listeners from the pre-existing data and information. For e.g.: The different slabs of income rates are information. But during the

budget, if the government plans to increase or decrease the income tax rates, it will become news.

1.3 WHAT IS 'VIRAL' NEWS

Is 'Trending' being the new viral content in the era of tweets and hashtags? There is no exact definition of viral news in the dictionary of journalism and mass communication. After the advent of social media, the concept of the viral news came into existence. Anything out of the context information can be viral content. Any piece of information which is way beyond the perception of normal human beings is viral content. Human minds used to think in a very straight and stereotypical way. The idea that deviates from the perception is Viral. The hypodermic needle model (also known as the hypodermic-syringe model, transmission-belt model, or magic bullet theory) is a model of communication suggesting that an intended message is directly received and wholly accepted by the receiver. Today 's media is partially following the communication model.

The media is playing the role of the 'Mirror' which reflects the times and society we live in. In this scenario, the social responsibility of the media becomes much more important. However, Indian media is neglecting its social responsibility

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and is showing half-baked truth to the audience.

2. NEWS VALUES

News Values or News Criteria are certain guidelines that are used by the media outlets such as print and broadcast media to determine how much prominence to give to a news story.

2.1 PROMINENCE

Stories involving well-known places, companies, groups or people, especially well-known personalities. For e.g.: If Ranbir Ghosh falls from staircase and broke his legs, then it will not be news. But if Ranbir Kapoor falls and broke his leg, it will be a news.

2.2 PROXIMITY OR CLOSENESS TO HOME:

Events occurring in the newspaper circulation area or the broadcast area are likely to be of most interest. 2,000 job losses in Taiwan won't get a mention. However, 200 redundancies in Mumbai may well make the front page of the local paper.

2.3 TIMELINESS OR IMMEDIACY:

News gets out of date quickly; it's timely if it happened recently. What is deemed "recent" is related to the publication cycle of the news medium in which the information appears. Currently, COVID-19 related updates are current news and people would be more interested in it than the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack.

2.4 CONFLICT:

Stories about people or organizations at odds with each other. Information has conflict if it involves disagreement between two or more people. Conflict has drama. This category includes wars, strikes, revolutions, secessionist groups, tribal and clan fights, elections and the power battles of politics.

2.5 BIZARRE OR OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY:

What deviates sharply from what you would expect and experience of everyday life, unusual, strange or wacky.

2.6 HUMAN INTEREST:

People are interested in people, so personalize your story. Human Interest stories is a quality of a story or report, as in a newspaper or on a newscast, that engages attention and sympathy by enabling one to identify readily with the people, problems, and situations described. Examples might be a child going abroad for surgery; a pilot recovering from injuries received in an air crash and determined to fly again; or a man with a collection of a million picture

postcards.

3. ARE JOURNALISTS FOLLOWING ANY 'CODE OF ETHICS'

Ethics in journalism are based on professional conduct, morality and the truth. Not adhering to these fundamental principles leads to misrepresenting or misleading members of the public.

Professionally, betraying media ethics could result in a journalism career being destroyed.

But the main question arises, "Does these ethics practically exists in news organizations now?" The answer is a big NO.

On the contrary, sticking to your ethics and morals may land any journalist into trouble. A suitable example would be the FIR against The Tribune newspaper and its reporter Rachna Khaira following her report on how anonymous sellers over WhatsApp were allegedly providing access to Aadhaar numbers for a fee.

Most of the news media companies have become a 'Saleable' product in the hands of power. Bennett, Coleman and Co. Ltd, which owns the Times of India, is reported to have asked celebrities and the wealthy to pay for favorable coverage. They have offered a "private treaty" agreement, which accepts an equity stake in a company in return for favorable coverage. The New York Times described "private treaties" as an example of the commodification of business.

On the contrary, in the current scenario, the media is following the 'Magic Bullet Theory of Mass Media' unlike consumers.

The magic bullet perspective, also called the Hypodermic Needle Model, is a model for communication. Magic Bullet theory has been around since the 1920s to explain how mass audiences might react to mass media.

4. ETHICAL PROBLEMS THAT PLAGUE INDIAN JOURNALISM

From the Radia tapes in 2010 to the Essar leaks, Indian journalism has been creaking under the burden of unethical practices. Some of the scourges of the Indian media are as follows:

4.1 PAID NEWS:

Paid news is a phenomenon in media, which refers to the systematic engagement of mainstream media outlets in publishing favorable articles in exchange for payment. This

type of news is typically sponsored by politicians, businessmen, and celebrities in order to improve their public image or accomplish political goals. The Election Commission is reported to have identified more than 1,400 cases of paid news between 2009 and 2013, during which elections were held in 17 states of India. One person involved, Deepak Chaurasia, host of India News, is accused of being a promoter of paid news in India. Also, there was a video in which Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal was seen playing the role of a part-time editor and advising the journalist on which part of the interview should be played up more.

4.2 BLATANT BLACKMAIL:

In 2012 senior editors of the television channel Zee News were arrested for allegedly demanding Rs 100 crore from Jindal Power and Steel Ltd. In return for this pay-off they offered to dilute their network's campaign against the company in the coal scam. The blackmail was exposed when JSPL chairman and Congress MP Naveen Jindal conducted a reverse sting on the network's executives.

4.3 FLAWED MEASUREMENTS OF AUDIENCE REACH AND READERSHIP:

The yardsticks to measure the reach and impact of the Indian media are dubious at best. Ratings consultants are paid off by TV channels to tamper with the system and they do so in ingenious ways.

Republic TV had run into the bad books of the NBA, which in a letter to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), had complained that the channel flouted the latter's intercommunication regulations with regards to distribution.

After this, four major English news channels — CNN-News 18, Times Now, India Today TV, NDTV 24*7 and NewsX —switched off Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC).

According to BARC's viewership data, for the week commencing 6 May till 12 May 2017, Republic TV got 2.11 million impressions, followed by Times Now at 1.4 million, NDTV 24*7 and India Today at 0.35 million, and CNN News-18 at 0.31 million. Notably, Goswami's channel went live from 6 May 2017.

5. WHAT MAKES AN IMPACT TO THE NEWS NOWADAYS

5.1 THRESHOLD:

The bigger impact the story has, the more people it affects, the more extreme the effect or the more money or resources it involves, the better its chances of hitting the newsstands.

5.2 FREQUENCY:

Events, such as motorway pileups, murders and plane crashes, which occur suddenly and fit well with the newspaper or news broadcast's schedule are more readily reported than those which occur gradually or at inconvenient times of day or night. Long-term trends are unlikely to receive much coverage.

5.3 NEGATIVITY:

Bad news is more exciting than good news. Stories about death, tragedy, bankruptcy, violence, damage, natural disasters, political upheaval or simply extreme weather conditions are always rated above positive stories such as royal weddings or celebrations. Bad news stories are more likely to be reported than good news because they are more likely to score high on other news values, such as threshold, unexpectedness, unambiguity and meaningfulness.

5.4 UNEXPECTEDNESS:

If an event is out of the ordinary it will be more likely to make it into the news than an everyday occurrence would. As Charles A. Dana famously put it, "*If a dog bites a man, that's not news. But if a man bites a dog, that is news!*"

5.5 UNAMBIGUITY:

Events which are easy to grasp make for better copy than those which are open to more than one interpretation, or where understanding of the implications depends on first understanding the complex background to the event.

6. THE 'HASHTAG' ERA:

The cultural premium now placed on recording and broadcasting one's life and accomplishments Nuance, difference, and complexity evaporate as one scrolls through these endless feeds, vaguely hoping to find something new or important but mostly resigned to variations on familiar themes. In a digital landscape built on attention and visibility, what matters is not so much the content of your updates but their existing at all. They must be there. Social broadcasts are not communications; they are records of existence and accumulating metadata. The point of being on social media is to produce and amass evidence of being on social media. In this environment, interiority, privacy, reserve, introspection – all those inward-looking, quieter elements of consciousness – begin to seem insincere. Sharing is sincerity. Removing the mediating elements of thought becomes a mark of authenticity, because it allows you to be more uninhibited in your sharing. "*Pictures or it didn't happen*" – that is the populist mantra of the social networking age.

This is also the unspoken thought process behind every blog or re-tweet, every time you pin something that has already been pinned hundreds of times. Placing it on the blog or in your Twitter stream acts as a form of identification – a signal of your aesthetics, a reflection of your background, and an avatar of your desires. It must be held, however provisionally and insubstantially, in your hand, and so by reposting it, you claim possession of it.

News in the digital landscape have stated circulating among the readers and viewers in a very speedy fashion. But somehow, the real content or the news values of the news items have gone missing. Journalists have started circulating paid news. Those will have paid them much, they will start promoting using tweets and hashtags more without remembering the code of ethics. They have become saleable in the hands of money, power and fame.

7. NEWS AFTER THE ADVENT OF TECHNOLOGY:

All major news providers have been transformed by technology and the opportunities it offers over the last 20 or so years. Social media is the latest tectonic plate to move and change the landscape. Powered by these changes, news has become 24 hours a day; immediate; available on new platforms and mobile. And now the latest powerful tool to change news - *social media*.

All big news organizations are plunging into the world of social media, looking at its extraordinary newsgathering potential; its potential as a new tool to engage the audience; and as a way of distributing our news.

The digital platform acts as a tool to take people to our journalism on the website, TV or radio. It allows us to engage different and younger audiences differently.

8. HOW MEDIA IS USING THESE ELEMENTS TO CREATE CONTENT:

8.1 POSITIVE CONTENT IS MORE VIRAL THAN NEGATIVE CONTENT:

In today's generation, bad is the new good in the media industry. Any good initiative by a well-known reputed person will obviously become news. A viral content will generate when a good initiative has been done by a very corrupt and bad person. Though the initiative is good in both the case, but the stereotypical society has a perception of viewing things in a similar perspective. Any deviations from their routine perspectives can result in creating viral content. For e.g.: If a donation camp has been organized by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, then it will be a news item. But what if, Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar is organizing a donation camp and a peace rally for the citizens.

8.2 CONTENT THAT EVOKED HIGH AROUSAL EMOTIONS IS MORE VIRAL THAN CONTENT WITHOUT EMOTION:

Any content that evoked high arousal emotions, be it positive emotions or negative emotions, has the tendency to become news. Stories dealt with sensitive issues and could connect masses, have the tendency to become news. For e.g.: In case of a national crisis, if the President or the Prime Minister keeps mum and does not show any emotion, then he will be tagged as being ruthless or inhuman. The piece of information will likely become a viral content. People will have the time and space to discuss about the issue. But in case of false accusations and allegations, the news is likely to become negative news content.

8.3 PRACTICALLY USEFUL CONTENT GETS SHARED:

In the era of tweets and hashtags, people like to share useful content or piece of information that is likely to benefit friends, followers and other people. Information with a social message or a positive thought or any upcoming events, people like to share or circulate it among friends.

8.4 CONTENT WITH HIGH SALEABLE EQUATION:

Any content that has an entertainment quotient with a high level of TRP catcher in it, can become a viral news content. People likes sensational news item with high dramatization power.

8.5 CONTENT WITH SEXUAL OR OBSCENE CONTENT:

Any content with sexual content or controversy has the ability in becoming a viral content. Any content with derogatory dialogues or speech which could arise a conflict and has the ability in becoming a viral item.

9. SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE:

What do you think is a bigger problem – the sharp hike in daily commodities (Such as vegetables), or the sentiments surrounding Sanjay Leela Bhansali 's Padmaavat?

- Price hike of vegetables
- Tussle between Karni Sena and Sanjay Leela Bhansali 's Padmaavat

What makes a news story go viral?

- Prominence
- Unique
- Controversy
- Human interest

Given below are four different headlines. According to you, which one of them got more coverage from media?

- Padmaavat release controversy
- Laloo acquitted in Fodder scam case
- Internet sensation Taimur Ali Khan Pataudi
- Abduction and forced marriage of eligible grooms in Bihar

Given below are four different headlines. According to you, which of these topics should get maximum coverage from media?

- No tax or at least lower taxation on sanitary napkins
- Women safety in India
- Petrol price hike in major cities
- Section 377

Do today 's media organizations select news on the worthy of news values?

- Yes
- No
- May be

Does Yellow Journalism is the new agenda in media?

- Yes

- No

Do today 's journalists follow the standard code of ethics?

- Yes
- No
- May be

Does journalist gave biased news in today 's generation?

- Yes
- No

After the advent of technology and new media, does the newsworthy decrease?

- Yes
- No

In the era of hashtags, trending and tweets, does original news and content really exists?

- Yes
- No

Does technology have a positive or negative effect on the news?

- Positive
- Negative

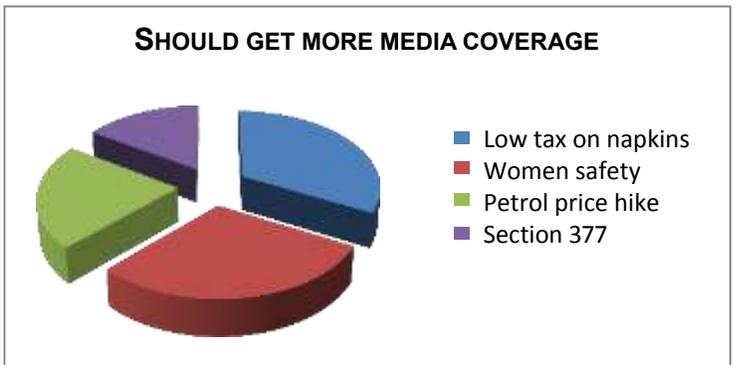
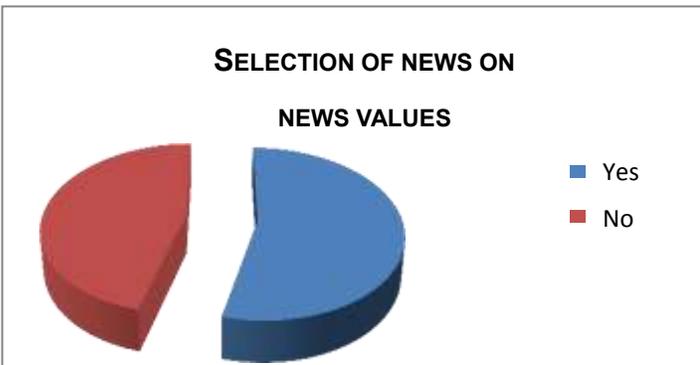
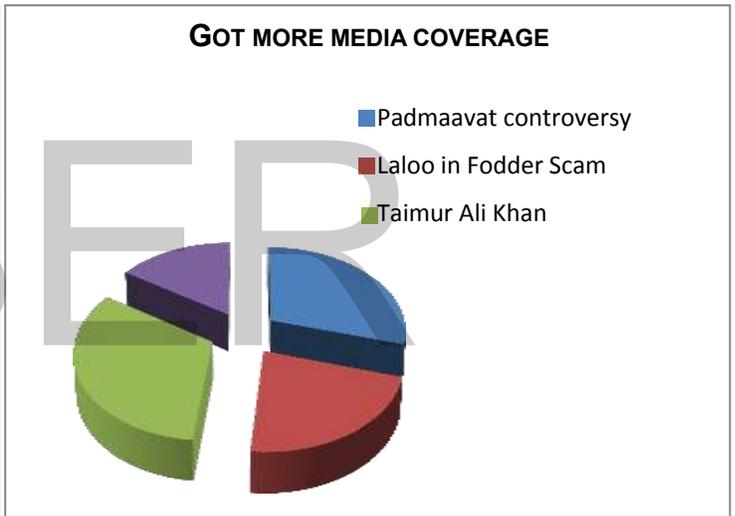
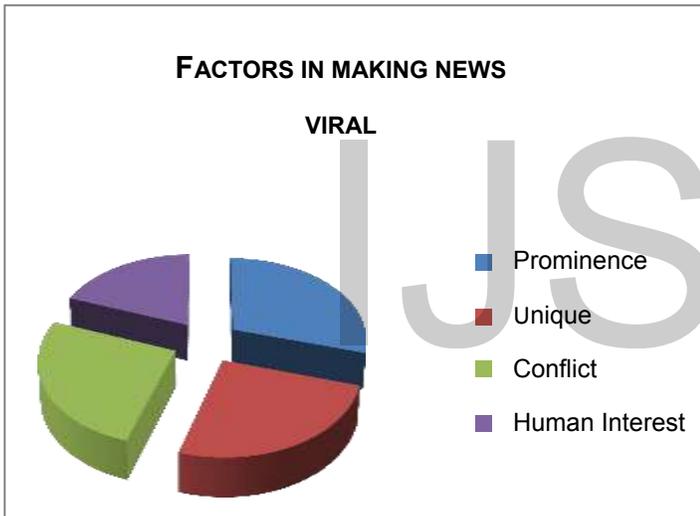
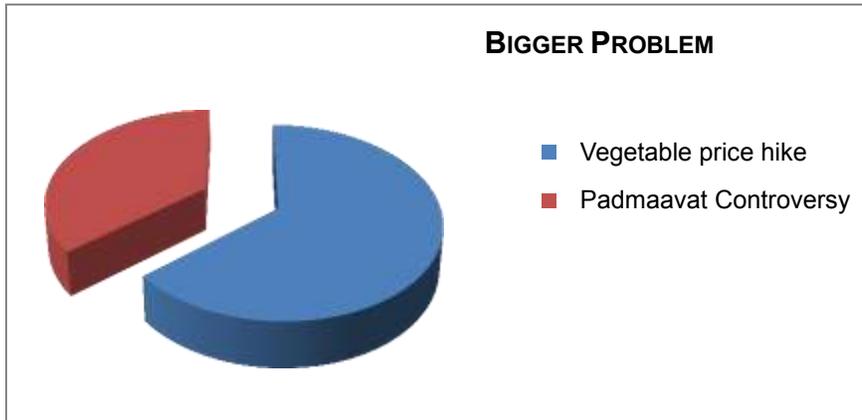
Today's' journalists are saleable products. Do you agree with this statement?

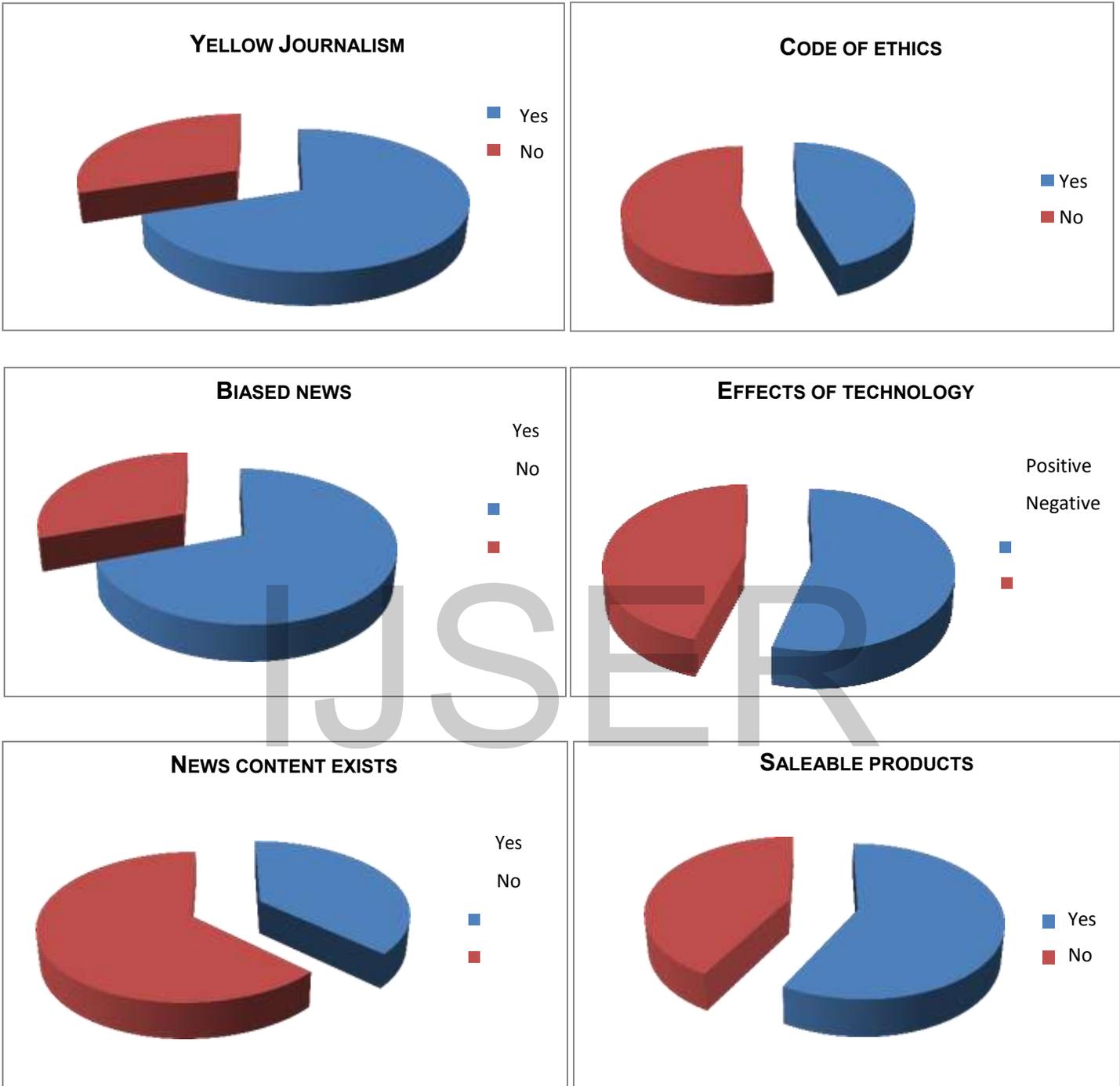
- Yes
- No

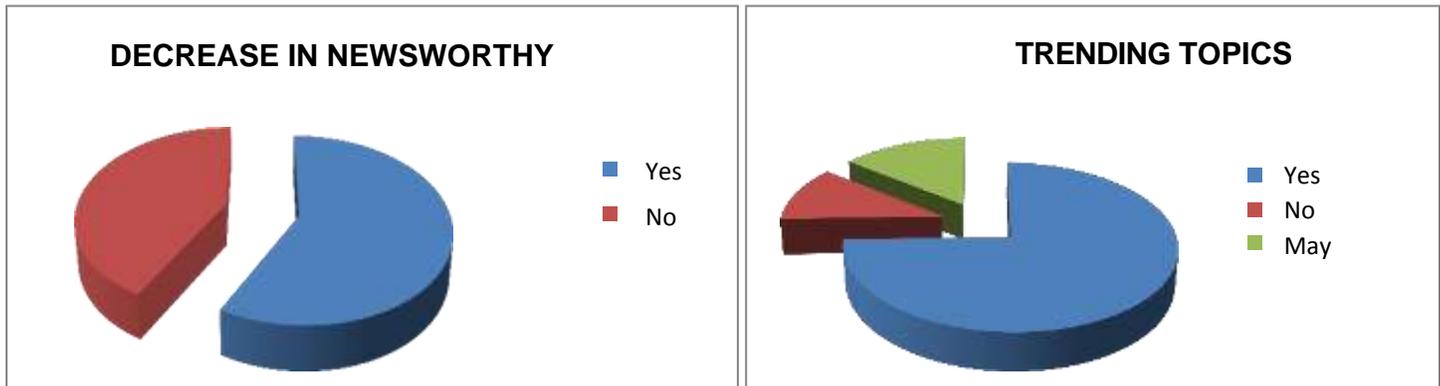
Do you think Indian media covers 'trending' topics rather than newsworthy information?

- Yes
- No
- May be

BASED ON THE SURVEY REPORTS WHICH WERE CONDUCTED AMONG 250 PEOPLE OF VARYING AGE AND PROFESSION, THE RESULTS ARE PRESENTED IN PIE DIAGRAMS BELOW.







10. CONTENT ANALYSIS:

Given below are three sets of fictitious news items, which news items would you think will receive the highest media coverage in recent times?

1. A 25-year-old man marries a 17-year-old girl
 2. A 55-year-old man marries a 15-year-old girl
-
1. A husband beats his wife on a street
 2. A lover kissed his girlfriend on a street
-
1. A man and a woman got married and they lived happily ever after
 2. A woman and a woman got married and they lived happily ever after

The Option 1: In all the cases, option 1 will not become news because these are the standard protocol of our society. It is very acceptable fact that a 25-year-old man gets married to a 15-year girl. In this case also, the girl is adolescent. A husband has the right to beat his wife and the public will not even utter a single word in our society. Love has no language, religion or sexual orientation. But our society has set a standard to it. A man and a woman can marry but a woman and a woman cannot marry.

The Option 2: In all the cases, option 2 can become trending or viral news because these are the deviations of ideas. These ideas are not being set or accepted by the society. Anything which is not acceptable in the society can become news. A 55-year old man cannot marry or fall in love with a 15-year old girl. In this case also, the girl is adolescent. A lover cannot show his

love in front of the public, especially when we are surrounded by self-claimed gods. It's unethical. But a husband has the right to show his anger towards his wife in front of the public. It's ethical. A woman marrying a woman is against law and unethical. Does love have any language?

11. CONCLUSION:

Today's media organizations are biased in delivering content to the audience. Journalists' are known as the fourth estate of any society who follows standard code of ethics. The scenario is somewhat different. Yellow Journalism has taken the path in almost every media industry.

With the 'hastag era', overhype and aggressive coverage is the new phenomenon of selling news these days, as it increases Target Rating Point (TRP) giving more business to media houses. Every news story resembles a Tehelka like expose- corruption, sex and violence and there is always a doctored videotape.

It's time for Indian media to breakout the common storyline like Bollywood movies and comprehensively debate on issues which have significant effect directly or indirectly on people.

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Media often portray non-issues as real issues, while the real issues are sidelined. Thanks to our 'Social Media Generation', media nowadays have the tendency to make any piece of information viral. Just like any good news story opens with a strong lead – the most important piece of information in the story, a social lead is needed to create interest on social

media.

While the ethical journalism demands fairness, accuracy, competence, professionalism, reaching for the truth, completeness of story, understanding, objectivity, avoiding bias, the question arises – Are we following it?

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