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**NEWS AS COMPROMISE!- THE INDIAN NEWS MEDIA AND THE EVOLVING TREND OF PAID NEWS****Dr. Sony Jalarajan Raj\*, Rohini Sreekumar<sup>1</sup>, & Nithin Kalorth<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Monash University, Sunway Campus, Malaysia<sup>2</sup>School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala, India**Abstract:**

India's media market has emerged in recent years as one of the most competitive and profitable in the world global scenario. However despite the nation's status as the world's largest democracy, India's news media have been criticized for their emphasis on entertainment values at the expense of critical, pro-social, and investigative forms of journalism. A related development has been the increasing influence of political parties in the news content development, a practice which is named 'paid news', an Indian version of 'manufacturing of consent'. This controversy came to the fore during the (April-May, 2009) Indian parliamentary elections when numerous overtly favorable articles and news reports emerged in the Indian media that contained no disclosure of the monetary transactions that facilitated their publication/broadcast. This development poses serious threats to the continued advancement of a vibrant Indian mediated public sphere, and instead represents a deliberate attempt to manufacture popular consensus. This article details these unethical news practices in Indian news media and argues that this form of contemporary Indian journalism is a violation of the core values of the profession and their relation to the democratic process. This research paper is a qualitative work relying mainly on textual and content analysis, which include analysis of interviews, newspaper articles and paid news contents.

**Introduction**

India's media market has emerged in recent years as one of the most competitive and profitable in the world which is said to be twice as profitable as its global counterparts (Press Council of India, 2008). Even though new media has influenced the decline of traditional media globally like print and television, these journalists are by and large honored and accepted as the moral guide in the Indian society (Thakuria, 2010). Apparently, while the newspapers in Europe and America are losing their readership each year, the Indian print media is gaining momentum in number, circulation figure and market revenue (Vaidyanathan, 2011). The media here prides itself for having sown terror among corrupt lawmakers through television sting operations and other exposes, as well as for having kept the spotlight on high-profile crime cases (Chakraborty, 2010). It has grown in range and sophistication and is now immensely powerful and even feared not only by the public but by the organs of state (Verghese, 2009). However despite the nation's status as the largest global democracy, India's news media has been criticized for its overt commercialism and emphasis on entertainment values. A demeaning trend identified recently in Indian print media is the overt influence of politicians/ political parties in the manufacture of news, which is referred to as 'paid news' by the Press Council of India. They defined it as 'any news or analysis appearing in any media (print or electronic) for a price in cash or kind as consideration' (Press Council Report, 2010). Media organizations in India have been criticized for providing coverage only to the political parties and politicians who had provided these companies with remuneration. This controversy came to the fore during the April-May 2009 Indian Parliamentary elections when numerous overtly favorable articles and news reports emerged in the Indian media. It came with no disclosure provided to viewers and readers with regards to the monetary transactions that took place between political candidates and media organizations. This form of 'paid news' is published/broadcasted in a manner that deliberately serves to mislead audiences in regards to the distinction between news and advertising.

This mortifying trend shook the media industry as well as the society mainly because newspapers were part of the reverend heritage of India, a tool used by the freedom fighters to unite, socialize, activate and arouse the Indian citizen against the British tyrannical rule. Moreover, the father of Indian nation Mahatma Gandhi initiated his movement with the moral power of active journalism. But after independence, it seemed to be in a quandary- whether to be an adversary or ally to the government. However, the First Indian Press Commission in 1952 recommended that the press should help secure and protect social order taking into consideration the importance of justice, in political, social and economic scenario (Kumar, 2001). Subsequently the democratic India began to consider media as the fourth important pillar after legislature, executive and judiciary set-up (Thakuria, 2010). Dispiriting practices like paid news poses serious threats to the continued development of a healthy Indian mediated public sphere, and instead represents a deliberate and conscious effort to manufacture popular

consensus and mass consent. This article exposes these unethical news practices in India and argues that this contemporary Indian journalism is a violation of the core values that have traditionally informed journalism and its relation to the democratic process in this rapidly developing country.

### **Paid News Syndrome – A Novel Concept**

The media landscape of India was transformed in the 1990s under the impact of 'neo-liberal, market-oriented economic policies' (Thussu, 2000, p. 324), and so today, the Indian media is passing through a 'dramatic shift in favor of consumerism,' with a steady increase of advertising revenue from 30% in 1990 to 45-55% some ten years later (Sharma, 2002). Moreover, to stay unique in the cluttered newspaper market, most of the Indian newspaper had redesigned to include attention grabbing headlines with colorful supplements like *City Life* and *Sunday Magazine* which only contains entertainment and celebrity driven stories, gossips and fashion (Rao and Johal, 2006)

Precisely, the media industry in India and elsewhere has become increasingly difficult to regulate due to several reasons: technological developments, the globalization of media conglomerates and the trend of certain suppliers and creators of news (public relations practitioners, advertisers and interest groups) getting closely involved with the working of media organizations. In India, political news has historically dominated the content of news since newspapers itself flourished in India because of political causes and needs, the practice they inherited from the days of Indian independence struggle (Mishra, 2003; Reddi, 1989). Hence society, media and governance is so confusingly interlinked that it has become a complex phenomenon to form a public sphere.

One of the other outcome of the so called 'Murdochization of the Indian press' (Sonwalkar, 2002) is 'paid news', a new journalistic practice of producing news according to the payment developed during the fifteenth general elections to the Lok Sabha (April-May 2009). The trend was quite anticipated as globalization of the media has led to a dramatic rise in entertainment-oriented news agenda, commoditization of news, and rise in sensational journalism (McDowell, 1997; Shah, 1998; Thussu, 2002). The origin of paid content, lethal combination of three 'M', namely, the *media*, *money* and *mafia* (Thakurta, 2010), in India can be traced back to 2003, when *Times of India*, India's largest daily newspaper, started a division called 'Medianet', with a rate card for the sale of news. It was the first instance when the 'walls' that separate advertising, management and editorial in a newspaper organization was breached (Dalal, 2003). However, it was only over the last few years and since 2009 in particular, the phenomenon of paid news acquired a treacherous dimension by entering the sphere of political reporting on candidates contesting in elections. Numerous favorable or complimentary 'news' reports and feature articles on representatives of political parties, including candidates who have been contesting elections, have appeared in newspapers and television channels across the country in the run-up to the *Lok Sabha*<sup>1</sup> as well as state legislative assembly elections. In addition, owners of media organizations have financial relationships, including share-holdings, with advertisers, resulting in only favorable information about such advertisers getting disseminated and unfavorable information against them getting blacked out (Press Council Report, 2010). As the veteran journalist C.P Rajasekharan lamented, "News has become a commodity; and it may become propaganda at times" (As quoted in Nettikara, 2009). For instance, Rahul Gandhi the scion of India's ruling political dynasty, campaigned in a Delhi constituency during the parliamentary elections for the candidate, Sandeep Dikshit, who is the son of the state's high-profile female chief minister, Sheila Dikshit. Many channels were not willing to telecast it unless, he is willing to pay the amount the channel demands (Rahman, 2010). "The channel even said they would arrange the crowds," the dubious Mr. Dikshit told Outlook magazine, which broke the story in their December issue. Outlook also quoted Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda's (who allegedly paid for favorable news during the assembly elections in October) similar situation.

*When I noticed the leading paper of my state printing baseless reports on its front page day after day, I called them up and offered money to print the right picture. The paper in question apologized. They even returned the money taken from my rival to publish news items against me. I was aware that packages were offered to candidates from my party, but my state is small and people can see through sponsored reports... The journalists are not at fault here because fact-finding journalism has now become a commercialized activity with the present owners having turned newspapers into a business proposition.*

Much of the media were reluctant to take up the issue of paid news to the public fearing the revelation of their own new managerial and financial arrangements (Ravi, 2010). An adversary to this attitude was the, The Hindu with their rural reporter, P. Sainath who raised the issue into some higher levels of exposition through bringing forth the scam of Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan alleged to be using the media to further his political interests. Hence whether the Indian media likes to admit it or not, journalism is up for sale, the essence of which was completely implicit when a top management executive from *Punjab Kesri* (readership 1.04 crore) admits that the newspaper made anywhere between 10 crore and ` 12 crore during the assembly election season (Raman, 2009). Sushma Swaraj, Member of Parliament belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party, rightly commented that the "paid news" phenomenon had "started out as an aberration, went on to become a disease and is now an epidemic" (As quoted in Thakurtha, 2010). As former editor of *Hindustan Times* and *The Indian Express*, B.G. Verghese, who is a signatory to a complaint to the Press Council of India, puts it

*This carries with it a corresponding responsibility imbued with a sense of trusteeship in providing the people what kind of information needed. It is in this regard that we must lament a disgraceful fall in standards as revealed by well documented stories of the sale of electoral coverage by sections of the news media through 'packages' relating to the kind of treatment sought with the kind of information needed for democratic participation, empowerment and informed choice. (Verghese, 2010)*

It was a meet of South Asia Free Media Association (India chapter) in Mumbai during the first week of December 2009 that the issue of paid news was officially discussed with serious concern, which was followed by the annual general meeting of the Editors' Guild of India during the fourth week of December, where most of the members expressed concern at the growing tendency of a section of media groups (both print and visual) to receive money for some 'non-advertorial' items in their media space (Thakuria, Nava; 2010). The editors' guild sent a letter to each of its member-editors throughout the country asking for pledges that his/her 'publication/TV channel will not carry any paid news as the practice 'violates and undermines the principles of free and fair journalism'. It opined that it had always stood for publication of news which is in public interest; news which has been gathered due to the professional efforts of journalists; and news which is not influenced by malice, bias, favouritism or monetary influence (Editors Guild of India, as quoted in CNN-IBN, 2009). A detailed discussion on the subject took place in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Indian Parliament) during which Information & Broadcasting Minister Ms. Ambika Soni stated that the government was actively considering the option of providing more powers to the Press Council of India to check this phenomenon which is undermining the credibility of the media and democratic processes (As quoted by Joshi, 2010).

### **Ethical Perspectives of *paying-for-the-news***

In a modern democracy, election campaigns have been considered as a three-player game- *politicians, public and media* (Covington, Kroeger, et al., 1993), the so called 'Golden electoral triangle', in which media forms the most critical corner of this triangle to fill the vacuum created by the declining influence of politicians upon the citizen (Patterson, 1994).

Ethically analyzing the paid news, three levels of fraudulence can be sieved out. First, the reader of the publication or the viewer of the television programme is deceived by putting them in dilemma, whether to take it as an advertisement or independently produced news content. If those stories were news, then how come the same news story appears in different newspapers? Same story about the 'fine qualities as a leader' Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr. Ashok Chawan (Sainath, 2009) appeared in three different newspapers (Marathi dailies *Lokmat, Maharashtra Times, Lokmat*) with only the differences in headlines. There is no mention of the word advertisement or sponsored feature next to the item in any of the newspapers, so supposed to be taken as news. P. Sainath, with his obtrusive quest for truth, did an ardent research into the issue and come up with glaring evidence to support his claim of paid news.

*"...his "day to day accounts of election expenditures" do not reflect any real spending on ads. All candidates are required by law to submit their campaign expenses accounts to the district election officer within 30 days of the declaration of results. Mr. Chavan's accounts, which are in The Hindu's possession thanks to an RTI application to which the appropriate authorities responded with commendable speed, claim a total expenditure of just ` 11,379 on advertising. Indeed, he had a mere six advertisements in print and these cost a trifling ` 5,379. (The rest was spent on slots on cable television.) Moreover, all his print ads went to a single newspaper, Satyaprabha. That is a small daily in the district of Nanded. Yet Mr. Chavan was the focus of scores of full pages in very major dailies. If those had been ads, they would have cost crores of rupees..."* (Sainath, 2009)

The extraordinary coverage the Chief Minister received during the poll campaign cannot be called advertising since none of those full pages bears that word. Secondly, if it was advertorials, then, by not officially declaring the expenditure incurred on planting "paid news" items, the candidate standing for election violates the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, which are meant to be enforced by the Election Commission of India under the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Press Council Report, 2009). Finally, by not accounting for the money received from candidates, the concerned media company or its representatives are violating the provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 as well as the Income Tax Act, 1961 among other laws.

The modern communication mediums advance public interest by informing the public of the events and development that have taken place and thereby educating the voters, a role considered significant for the vibrant functioning of a democracy (Madhok, 2008). Apart from commercialization, the increasing marketization of news, has created a facade of media plurality when in fact it is 'contributing to a democratic deficit in the world's largest democracy' (Thussu, 2005). By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the media instead of being a vehicle for advancing freedom and democracy started becoming more and more a means of making money and propaganda for the new and powerful classes (Sridhara, 2003). The globalization has paved way for a commercialized society, where role and function of government has been altered by capitalized economy (Sridhara, 2003).

A prerequisite of democracy, therefore, is the democratization of communication, which in turn requires the empowerment of individual (Philip, 1995). The media facilitate this process by providing a pitch for public debate and construct public opinion. People should have free access to the knowledge and information they require, they should be able to discuss matters of public interest with their equals in order to influence actions taken. As (McChesney, 1998) posits media outputs are commodified and are designed to serve market needs, not citizenship needs. The 'commercial model' has its own serious limitations, which tends to erode the public sphere and to create a 'culture of entertainment' that is incompatible with democratic order (Sridhara, 2003). Public sphere is a realm where opinions particularly focusing on the needs of society are freely and openly exchanged between people, unconstrained by external pressures. (Habermas, 1991, p 176). Any discourse on citizenship is appropriate only in the background of democracy and civil society, because citizenship is regarded as a fundamental plank of democracy (Sridhara, 2003).

In today's world of ever-increasing mass global communication networks, the media in all its forms whilst far from ideal is widely regarded as the closest thing the world community has to the existence and further attainment of a public sphere (Dana, 2006). The public sphere generates opinions and attitudes (Soules, 2001) and is a foundation for "emancipatory social thought" (Holub, 1997). Ideally it is a mediator between society and state, the source of public opinion needed to affirm and guide the affairs of state (Soules, 2001). Habermas recognized that we should not "harbour any illusions about the condition of a public sphere in which commercialized mass media set the tone." (As quoted in McChesney, 1999). In the transactions in the public sphere, the media are not a neutral participant or an impassioned chronicler. Instead they are either a legitimizer of the status quo or an innovator of the existing social equilibrium (Panikkar, 2004). Biased reporting combined with factors like manipulative publicity and mass advertising have been described as "the colonization of the public sphere by systems of authority." (Soules, 2001).

Public opinion is very important for policy makers in their decision to go to war and in the lead up to war. Because of this many policy makers and elites in the government need to make their case to the public through the news media since there is almost no other way for the public to hear their message otherwise on a daily bases. Since the news media has natural organizational filters in how they give the public their news. Policy makers have to frame their message in a way in which they know will give the viewer the most impact of what they want them to hear. In reality mass media has moved away from positive expectations of civil society (Sridhara, 2003). George Gerbner argues that,

*"Our children are born into homes in which the dominant story tellers are not those who have something to tell but a small group of global conglomerates that have something to sell... Fewer sources fill more outlets more of the time with ever more standardized fare. Alternative perspectives vanish from the mainstream. Media coalesce into a seamless, pervasive, and increasingly homogenized cultural environment that has drifted out of democratic reach" (Gerbner, 2002)*

The Indian situation is not very different from what Gerbner has described. Both public and private media have failed the nation in creating well-informed and enlightened citizen. Except for the pre-independence nationalist press, the performance of privately owned print media, cinema and public broadcasting have not raised to the expectations of a growing democracy, but only aim at reinforcing the status quo (Gerbner et al., 1979; 1987). Media seems to have an agenda setting function and this agenda come to be perceived as an important element on the public agenda (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997).

(McCombs, 1997) argues that this agenda effect works in two dimensions – affective and substantive. In the former dimension, the qualities attributed to the candidates, whether it is positive or negative, influence the voter's perception about those candidates. In the second dimension, the attributes projected by the media influence the kinds of characteristics the voters think the candidates should have (McCombs, et al., 1997). Similar examples of compromise in news can be drawn from the Ranchi edition of *Dainik Jagran*, which published two "news" items on page 7, both relating to the *Chatra Lok Sabha* constituency. The first item was in favour of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) candidate Mr. Nagmani (one name) with the headline stating: "Nagmani is getting support from every class and section" virtually declaring that he would become the undisputed winner. The same page had another "news" item claiming that Mr. Arun Kumar Yadav, a candidate belonging to Janata Dal (United), who contested from the same constituency, would emerge a "clear winner". Both the items do not carry any byline although the font used is different from the font used for other news articles in the publication. In both these dimensions, paid news have set certain agenda and become successful to greater extend.

Bourdieu says in the *Rules of Art* that fields are "social microcosms, separate and autonomous spaces in which works are generated". In Bourdieu's conception of field theory the activities and practices of the news media fall into the general field of cultural production (Bourdieu & Nice, 1980). Paid news became a greater ethical concern, since journalism with its populist subject matter and mass audiences is situated at the "heteronomous pole" of the field; that is, it is strongly dominated by the external pressure of economic power, which Bourdieu insists has a "powerful determinative effect... in the contemporary historical context" (according to Benson 1998, p 488). Adding to this (Benson & Neveu, 2005) said,

*"Because fields are closely intertwined and because journalism in particular is such a crucial mediator among all fields, as the journalistic field has become more commercialized and thus more homologous with*

*the economic field, it increases the power of the heteronomous pole within each of the fields, producing a convergence among all the fields and pulling them closer to the commercial pole in the larger field of power”.*

News is meant to be objective, fair and neutral – this is what sets apart such information and opinion from advertisements that are paid for by corporate entities, governments, organizations or individuals. Journalism has often been understood as a set of practices described as “doing news work” including gathering, presenting, and dissemination of news (Zelizer, 2004,). According to Callahan (2003)

*“Journalism is a practice and profession dedicated to truth and common good. It is now recognized as inevitably a moral enterprise, and there is a universal standard for journalism that applies cross-culturally and will apply in the future. The universality of ethical standards of journalism exists because ethics and morality are universal human enterprise based on the discovery of universal moral truths by human beings with a common human nature always and everywhere”.*

Indian media, when compared to its global counterparts, enjoy comparatively more freedom under a democratic and secular government (Chakravarty, 2003; Ravindranath, 2004, Rao, & Johal; 2006). The independence of the media facilitates adherence to democratic norms. Article 19 of the Constitution of India confers the right to freedom of speech and expression to all citizens of the country and to the media as well. It is upon this right that paid news started flourishing. The government can impose restrictions on the right to telecast and broadcast only on grounds specified in Article 19 (2)<sup>2</sup> and not on any other ground. The paid news impinges on the people’s right to know by dishing out the positive aspects of the contesting candidates and the political parties. Half truths and untruths would become part of news and it would help to confuse and mislead the readers and viewers resulting in violation of the right of the people to know the truth (Indian Journalists Union Memorandum, 2009).

It can also be argued that the proliferation of the “paid news” phenomenon can be related directly to the diminution of the role and the status of editors in media organizations and the erosion of the freedom enjoyed by journalists under the Indian Working Journalists Act. As more and more senior journalists choose to work with their employers under fixed term contracts, they opted out of the protection that was accorded to them under the provisions of the Act. . With managers playing a more influential role in the selection and presentation of news, it was not surprising that the importance of the news started getting determined by the revenues that would be generated for the media company. News has become commerce. Managers have increasingly taken over from editors, some of whom have fallen prey to bloated salaries and perks. For instance, a four-page special on an independent candidate from Varanasi (in Uttar Pradesh), with the sponsored tag at the bottom of the last page in a leading Hindi newspaper, *Hindustan*, went against the rules set by then editor Mrinal Pande. She says,

*“I had laid down specific guidelines for sponsored features during elections; these were flouted without even informing the editor in charge. Among other things, it was the paid-for news arrangement that made me put in my papers. In the end, it is important to keep one’s integrity intact...”* (Raman, 2009)

Unless Press Registration Act get reviewed, the position and status of editors are in threat, since, the editor is even now responsible for everything published, including advertisements. At this juncture it is so important to remember that despite strict censorship and restrictions, India was home to some celebrated journalists like Mahatma Gandhi, Kuldip Nayar, B. G Varghese, Pothan Joseph, M. J Akbar, Arun Shourie, Vinod Mehta etc who not only made history, but helped convert pre-1947 missionary journalism into an organized industry, lending it strength and direction.

### **Press Council- Resolution and Committal?**

The Press Council of India (PCI) was established in 1966, with funding from the State, as an autonomous, non-official, and statutory body comprised of political appointees, journalists, and editors (Sawant, 2003), which is intended to “preserve the freedom of press and to improve standards of newspapers and news agencies in the country” (PCI, 2005). Press Council of India established a committee to examine violations of the journalistic code of fair and objective reporting as the recommendation from Indian Election Commission to define what constitutes paid political news, so it can adopt appropriate guidelines. The report of the two-member sub-committee was originally scheduled to be released on April 26, 2010, but its release was then deferred and the report referred to a larger group of Council members who were to decide, within three months by July 31, 2010, on how it should be presented because “some council members argued that it would destroy the publishers’ credibility and hurt their long term interest” (Outlook, 2010). July 30, 2010, the PCI came out with a much watered down version of the report without any of the specifics detailed in the original which explicitly named newspapers and channels — including some of the biggest groups in the country — seen as having indulged in the “paid news” practice.

*“What it hides is that a 71-page document which describes in considerable detail how exactly the phenomenon of paid news operates, has been watered down to a 13-page non-controversial statement which gives four recommendations, all requiring action by the government by amend two existing laws, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and the Press Council Act, 1978, giving the Press Council more powers.” (Chhokar, 2010)*

The original report was reduced to a mere footnote, saying that it ‘may remain on record of the Council as reference document’ (Final Report by Press Council, 2010). But that possibility too is uncertain since the website bears no such reference documents. ‘In the journalist Sainath’s word, the PCI has simply buckled at the knees before the challenge of ‘Paid News’;

*“A body entrusted with ‘Preserving the freedom of the Press and improving the standards of Press in India’ has set an appalling standard. The guardian of Press freedom stands as an arbitrary censor of truthful journalism. It has acted less like the ‘watchdog of the Press’ that its ideals call for. And more like the lapdog of the powerful media owners who stood to be exposed by the report of its own sub-committee.” (Sainath, 2009)*

Chhokar, (2010) has somewhat similar concern or criticism about Press Council

*“The other irony is that this body the stated objective of which is “to preserve the freedom of the Press” is, itself, and in effect, asking for more governmental interference! The Press Council Act was enacted in 1978, in the afterglow of the lifting the infamous Emergency, and one of its stated functions is “to concern itself with development such as concentration of or other aspects of ownership of newspapers and news agencies which may affect the independence of the Press.” To what extent has it fulfilled this function is left to the judgment of the reader (Chhokar, 2010).*

Press Council in 1996, formulated norms of journalistic conduct in order to ensure high professional standard and ethical practice, which later on 2005 was updated ‘on the basis of adjudications and other pronouncements and cover to a large extent almost every aspect of compulsions and compunctions in journalistic practice’ (Press Council, 2005). In Part-B of this norms, under clause (e), it is clearly mentioned that the ‘Press shall not accept any kind of inducement, financial or otherwise, to project a candidate/party... are not expected to indulge in unhealthy election campaigns, exaggerated reports about any candidate/party or incident during the elections’. In spite of codes formulated by the Press Council, individual firms have drawn their own charter of journalistic practice, but none came into practice. But self-regulation is not adequate for checking rampant malpractices and corruption that have assumed epidemic proportions in many sections of the print medium as well as the television medium. Despite these written codes, it is such a pity that some members of the PCI itself mainly those representing media owners worked to scuttle the explosive original report (made by two-member subcommittee comprising Paranjay Guha Thakurta and K. Sreenivas Reddy) and all references to The Working Journalists Act. Out of the 24 of the full 30 member PCI, who attended the July 30 meeting, 9 (including the chairman) were in favour of the report being *annexed* to the "final" report, 12 opposed it and 3 remained non-committal (Outlook,2010).

Congress MP Meenakshi Natarajan proposed in May 2012 the Print and Electronic Media Standards and Regulation Bill to impose a government appointed regulatory authority on the media, ‘to impose certain crucial reasonable restrictions for the purpose of protecting national interest’ (as quoted in Dasgupta, 2012). Even though the congress party (the national government) is distancing from such a bill, similar proposal had been made by the present Chairman of Press Council of India, Markandey Katju, however he preferred an independent statutory Board like Press Council can fulfill it provided it should enlarge its scope and authority.

Even the self-regulatory industry bodies like Press Council of India and Editors’s Guild is in many ways not genuinely regulatory because of its limited legal power and bureaucracy. For instance Editor’s Guild, an industry body with the same Editors of newspapers and television channels whose legitimacy is questioned, cannot do anything further other than condemning the practice and forming an ethical committee<sup>3</sup>. Correspondingly, Press Council of India, constituting by 20 media persons (out of 28 seats) are also not completely legally authoritative, but also is unwilling to utilize the little command they have in controlling the media, which is evident in watering down the report of the subcommittee. The absence of a regulatory body like SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) or TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) does not pose a challenge as, the constitution as well as the State has certain statutes guarding defamation, official secrecy, obscenity or even have the power to ban a newspaper or television channel which is not completely put to action. Hence, whether a regulatory board is set up or not, the main issue in India is how well they practice their power and authority.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The central feature of the media globalization is larger cross border flows of media outputs, growth of media transnational conglomerates, centralization of media control and spread and intensification of commercialization. Paid news is only one of the unconstructive trends of a modern journalistic activity, where earning profit has become the priority rather than social responsibility, while making the reader or the viewer unable to distinguish between news reports and advertisements/advertorials. It is at the utmost concern of Indian society as media had a very democratic and responsible role in the formation of a liberated society in India even before attaining independence. Commercialization and erosion of journalistic duties began to filtrate in Indian media with the outset of Liberalization policy of Indian government in 1991. From then journalism turned to be more concerned with survival of a business entity rather than a social service. Rao (2010) identified commercialization and regionalization as trend of contemporary newspaper industry in India. When newspaper and television channels began to emerge countlessly previously unseen by the market, there began a frantic competition to capture readers and viewers. Operating under a dual product market, media came under the overt influence and directive of advertisers. Hence soft news like entertainment, film reviews, lifestyle, fashion etc. captured the space of political news stories. Moreover, in order occupy the harrowing advertisers and to niche the audience, interest-specific supplements and pullouts born out like Times of India's *Times Wellness*, *Times Drive*, *Times Property*; Hindustan Times' *HT City*, *HT Café*, *Brunch*, *HT Education* etc.

Amidst these gimmicks by advertisers, media is again approached by political parties for their individual or party-specific goals. Even though politically oriented newspaper thrived during the pre-independence era, this recent trend is quite different as the former used to be laden with a sole cause of social activism and liberation. Rao (2010) calls this 'trans-institutional' character of present day journalism, where by journalism could not be separated from political institutions and practices. According to her, journalists are getting more and closer and personal with politicians, there by moving away from collecting factual information. Paid news comes at this juncture making the relation even more practical and mutually beneficial. The 'Nira Radia tape' scam, in which transcripts of some radio conversation between Radia (a political lobbyist) and some of the journalists and politicians to mediate in some misgivings between the Congress and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Political Party of Tamil Nadu), actually took into mainstream the close alliance between journalists and politicians in making news. Even though the recording was done as part of the investigation of the 2G scam, it triggered concern regarding the integrity of politicians as well as journalists alike about the mutual lobbying that they practice.

Even after the uproar created by paid news in India, newspapers still are tranquilized by the financial fortune put forward by political parties; a recent example could be the one when Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalitha celebrated her first year in office by buying the full front pages all the major English newspapers in India (on 16 May 2012) including The Hindu, Business Standard, Times of India, The Economic Times etc (Sahni, 2012).

Elections have become a very high stakes game as candidates and parties pour in huge sums of money to ensure a win. The golden electoral triangle of news media, politics and public, hence, turn to be a complex phenomenon, with media capturing the pivotal corner. The roots are, therefore, in the intense competition and complete commercialization of media and politics, and this was inevitable (Sastry, 2010). In India, it is a huge threat not only to democracy, but to the journalism practice, as Indian media market is rocketing unlike its counterpart, which in turn develops stiff competition and profit. Paid news is a threat to the formation of a healthy public sphere, particularly about political scene. Even though Press council of India is the apex body of media, particularly newspapers, its powers are often limited, particularly in taking action against management practices. Since paid news is not limited to national newspapers, but explicitly seen in regional media, it is not practical to have a centralized council to scrutinize the issue. The structural change of media from a profit-making one to a not-for-profit model, either as a society or trust, much like educational and religious organizations can make some changes in the grave practices of media (Sastry, 2010). Media industries must think about the possible options in which the fourth estate will serve as a legitimate guide of the society like making Ombudsmen a mandatory post in all industries serving as an impartial mediator between media, politics and readers.

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