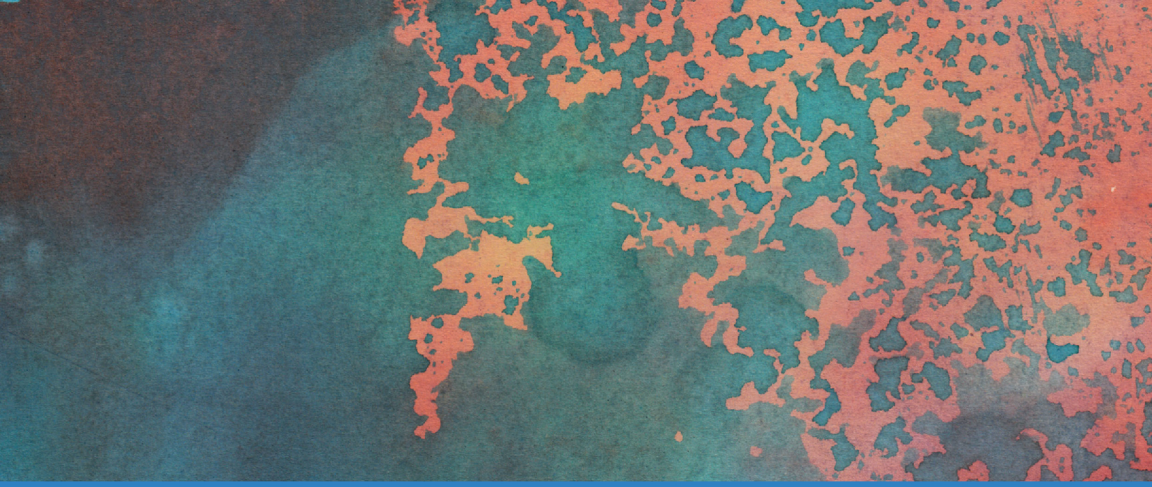

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GLOBAL EXPERIENCES

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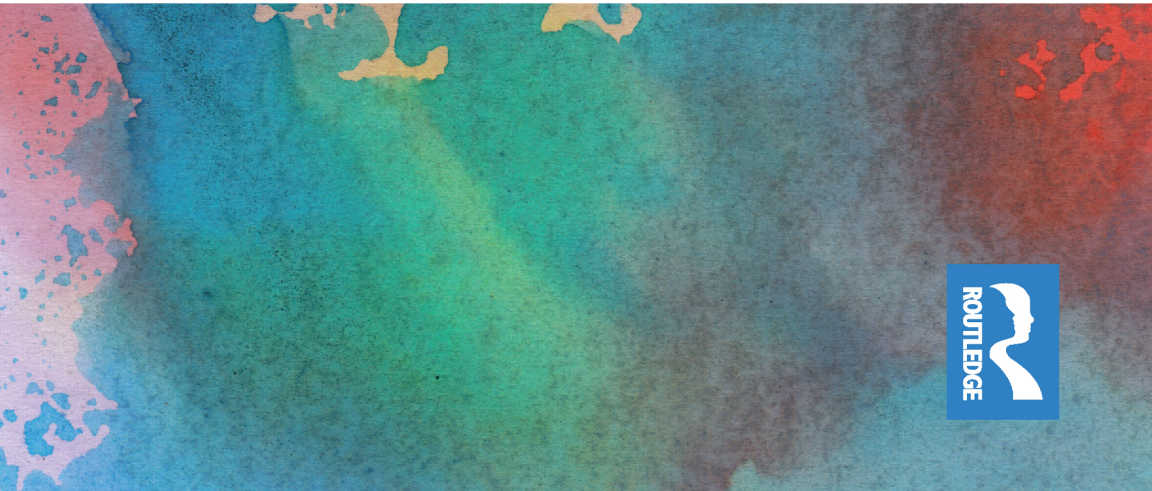

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This book provides case studies, many incorporating in-depth interviews and surveys of journalists. It examines issues such as journalists' attitudes toward their contributions to society; the impact of industry and technological changes; culture and minority issues in the newsroom and profession; the impact of censorship and self-censorship; and coping with psychological pressures and physical safety dilemmas. Its chapters also highlight journalists' challenges in national and multinational contexts. International scholars, conducting research within a wide range of authoritarian, semi-democratic, and democratic systems, contributed to this examination of journalistic practices in the Arab World, Australia, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Denmark, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, Samoa, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States.

Eric Freedman is Knight Chair and Director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism in the School of Journalism at Michigan State University, USA.

Robyn S. Goodman is Professor of Communication Studies at Alfred University, USA.

Elanie Steyn is Associate Professor and Head of Journalism in the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma, USA.

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Global Experiences

Edited by Eric Freedman, Robyn S. Goodman, and Elanie Steyn

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To the courageous, creative, perseverant, and ethical journalists, fellow media workers, and press rights defenders around the world who remain committed to the mission of journalism.

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4 TV News in India
Journalists in Transition

Indira S. Somani and Jane O'Boyle

Introduction

As the world's largest democracy, India faces unique challenges that directly impact journalists and news organizations. Although relatively young, it has a booming economy and one of the world's largest news media industries (Statista, 2017). Digital technology and social media are changing the shape of news and encouraging more participation and consumption from large, remote populations. Subsequently, journalists' roles are evolving alongside the numbers and diversity of news consumers. Journalists' traditional roles, work ethics, professional standards, technological tools, and societal roles confront social barriers such as religious intolerance, language differences, class disparities, and workplace challenges. Based on interviews with practitioners at English- and Hindi-language national television news outlets, this chapter examines pivotal issues, particularly professional and personal attitudes, at the forefront of their work environment.

Until 1991, the only television channel in India was the government-run Doordarshan. Economic liberalization in 1990 coincided with the growth of unregulated cable television and the introduction of satellite, which created significant changes for broadcasting. The government eased its restrictions, allowing private broadcasters to own and operate commercial satellite systems (Chadha & Kavoori, 2005) and allowing foreign investment into the media sector.

In 1991, the STAR Network (now owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation) started broadcasting across Asia from Hong Kong (Thomas & Kumar, 2004). Initially there were four channels: STAR Plus, an entertainment channel largely made up of Euro-American programming; Star Sports, largely airing Euro-American sporting events; BBC News, the British Broadcasting Corporation's worldwide news service; and MTV, the American music channel (Kumar, 2006). CNN/Headline News and CNBC also started broadcasting Indian news in English.

CNN NEWS18 is an English-language news television channel. It is a partnership between TV18, one of India's leading television broadcast

networks, and CNN International, the number-one international news brand. In 2005, CNN entered India by partnering with TV18 to launch an English-language news channel. The channel became number one in ratings in a record six months.

In 1992, News Corp. acquired a 49.9% share in the Hindi-language commercial channel Zee TV. Founded by Subhash Chandra, Zee TV's strategy was to provide viewers with what the state-owned Doordarshan did not: a Hindi-language equivalent of Star TV's English-language news, soaps, sitcoms, talk shows, game shows, and more (Kumar, 2006). Zee TV established itself as a major network with an estimated reach of 140 million people, as well as international distribution in countries such as Great Britain and the United States. In 1999, Chandra bought back Murdoch's stake in Zee TV (Kumar, 2006) and indicated to media executives that Hindi-language programing is the best way to reach a mass audience. Star TV lost viewers to Zee TV's Hindi-language programming, so it, too, started new channels in Hindi and regional languages (Thussu, 1998). Other commercial networks also developed programs catering to regions that were not Hindi-speaking. Sun TV and Eenadu TV began programming in regional languages, as did Aaj Tak, which used a global media format (live shots, ticker tape, reporter packages) while still showing national news coverage (Chadha & Kavoori, 2005).

Since the advent of 24-hour news channels, journalists have faced a steep learning curve. Throughout the country, there are now more than 100 television news channels, as well as scores of regional channels and programs in 17 languages (Chadha, 2017). Such diversity adds to the technical challenges of producing and reporting news by increasing pressure to integrate innovation and dimension into news and how it is presented. Chadha (2017) cautioned that the rise in competition in the Indian TV news industry invites troubling structural trends such as rising commercialism, cross-media concentrated ownership, and growing investments from non-media corporations and politicians.

This study reflects interviews with major TV news producers and reveals several trends. Perhaps unique to India, regional news channels empower viewers more than any media of the past. While economic liberalization has helped create the growth in cable news channels, the original news channels were presented mainly in English and targeted largely an upper-class population. To inform citizens, reach more diverse audiences, and acquire a large loyal viewership, media executives have expanded regional TV news not only in subject matter but also in presentation style and language.

Statement of the Problem

There is little research to date on the relatively young India TV news industry, and none that focuses on the professional challenges and

steep learning curve of television news reporters and producers. This formative study examines the state of television news reporting and programming from those on the front lines, how they are adapting models from more established TV news markets, and elements in this news industry that are unique to India and its scores of languages and diverse cultures.

Method

The principal researcher was based at the Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media in Bangalore, where she conducted general research about Indian media and its effects on the global diaspora. As a former television news producer and member of the South Asian Journalists Association, she used her contacts to connect with news media executives and then found other participants through snowball sampling (Berg, 2007).

Each interview was conducted on-site at the subject's office or conference room at the news organization in November 2011 or January 2012. In-depth interviews in English were video-recorded and conducted in Mumbai, Delhi, Noida, and Chennai. Forty-nine people were interviewed, 26 of whom were television news producers, correspondents, managing editors, and news executives. The others were writers, producers, and executives of production at television companies. The researcher's university's Institutional Review Board approved the interview questions with informed consent from each subject. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. After transcription, the authors identified patterns in the transcripts, which became the themes of analysis here (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Findings

Participants emphasized not only the relative newness of India's TV news industry, but also the cultural distinctions that contrast sharply with news channels in Western nations. The interviews revealed several trends unique to the Indian news industry:

- Hindi channels are much more dramatic than English channels, with the former's news more sensationalistic as it uses shorter sound bites to attract viewers;
- TV journalists have much less training than in the past due to the rapid increase in the number of channels. There is little on-site reporting and less-than-vigilant fact-checking;
- Social media presence is very important, particularly to appeal to younger audiences and provide feedback to journalists;
- Business news channels in English and Hindi have found great success; and

- TV news in regional languages empower viewers with little to no previous visibility in society. The multitude of languages and ethnicities makes India a unique market for the TV news business. Diversity is widely accepted and regional news channels are growing.

The following interview excerpts reflect these themes:

News is More Sensational

There is pressure to be first on air with a news story. With this pressure to be first comes news presentation in a hurried manner. Television networks have yet to determine how much news, entertainment, and sports to include in newscasts to appeal to viewers as ratings continue to drive advertising revenue. Therefore, news organizations are trying to determine the right balance of news, entertainment, and sports to earn credibility and ratings.

Rajdeep Sardesai, former editor-in-chief of CNN-IBN, currently anchor of India Today TV:

> I think Indian news is much more frenzied in the manner in which it is produced and packaged and sent out to the viewer. From what I can see of American television, it is still a little bit more leisurely compared to Indian news, which is in your face and more "tabloidized" compared to the news that I see in the U.S.

Vikram Chandra: former CEO of NDTV, currently NDTV consulting editor:

> Our brand is very important to us, and for that reason we still have documentary-style programming, with quality writing. The longer format style of journalism has started to deteriorate a bit. It has tended to get slightly more sensationalistic, you know, a little more hysterical in recent years, and hopefully that's going to change.

NDTV stands for New Delhi Television, which started in 1988. The longer format, documentary-style news story airs in the format of news magazine programs in the United States like "Dateline" and "60 Minutes." The sensationalistic style may be a way to attract more viewers. Another way to attract viewers is to cover movie stars and sports.

Pankaj Pachauri, former managing editor of NDTV, currently founder, GoNews24x7:

> News was a really low-hanging fruit in Indian television. The media has become desperate, and in that desperation it has become dumbed down and there is a backlash against media on these issues:

> "Why are you always showing the Bollywood actors and actresses? Why you are always showing cricket? Why you are always showing astrology?"

Radhakrishnan Nair, managing editor, CNN News 18:

> There are three Cs that we believe sells: crime, cricket, and cinemas. Now we are looking for multi-layering of information and better, more compelling quality of graphics, production elements. If you watch a Hindi channel, it is very compulsive, a mindset to get a general entertainment viewer by making news more entertaining, more dramatic, more fictional. India wants its news. You go and ask a rickshaw fellow who might not know how to read and write, but he will have a solid intellectual take on a political situation.

Nair introduces the concept of the three Cs, which he believes leads to more viewers. But not all Indians want features on crime, cricket, and cinema; many still want news about what is happening in the country.

Satish Singh, former editor at Zee News, currently consulting editor with News Express:

> Many channels just try to get away from the mainstream and put on entertainment, sports, superstition, sensationalism, and so forth, as their core element. Zee Network decided to just cut away from the rest and just bring sense and a bit of relief because our job is not to entertain, but to inform and empower.

For years, only state-owned Doordarshan presented the news. In the 1990s, economic liberalization changed this by allowing the creation of commercial news networks. Increasing competition empowered citizens because competition increased the quality of content.

Insufficient Training

Producers emphasized that although many TV jobs are available for recent college graduates, newcomers may lack the training or experience to start at the network level. Local U.S.-type news stations do not exist to the same degree in India; instead "local" channels cover whole provinces, unified by languages such as Tamil or Bengali. These regional channels are virtually national networks in their own right; therefore, young reporters have little opportunity to train at small TV stations. In addition, many journalism programs are theory-based without professional training, unlike many U.S. programs. Younger TV journalists may have never been in the field before and may still be learning how to be reporters.

Radhakrishnan Nair, managing editor, CNN News 18:

> In the process of gathering news, sometimes we also see this competition that is making the media also lose values. In the rush to be first with news, we also tend to make wrong decisions… suddenly you see most of your journalists not wanting to crosscheck their facts. They want to be first on the air with news. There is impatience among the younger journalists…in the system just to compete, to be seen on air, be on live TV; come what may. I have to ask my reporter 10 questions because the reporter could be young, not experienced, not being aware that he is being used, because everybody will tend to use us.

Ritu Kapur, former features editor with CNN-IBN, cofounder and CEO, Quintillon Media:

> The good thing is that if you are a young television reporter trainee, you get to grow up very fast…because today you are a trainee and tomorrow you are out there reporting and maybe two years down, you are a senior producer.

Importance of Social Media

It may be universally true that TV news producers are still catching up with implementing social media and using it to engage a more youthful viewership. Nevertheless, tools such as Twitter also reshape how news is produced. Journalists and anchors such as Barkha Dutt find that audiences respond instantly and critically, thereby increasing her desire to get the story complete and correct.

Barkha Dutt is the former NDTV anchor and group editor and an award-winning journalist with more than two decades of reporting experience.

> Twitter gives you a volley of feedback but how you filter that feedback is a complicated process because, for example, the political right in India is much more organized online than the center or the left. For example, you will get accused of being anti-right. I am "anti-national" because I have had an interesting conversation with two outspoken intelligent Pakistanis. But on the other hand, if I get feedback saying, "You're interviewing [Pakistan President Pervez] Musharraf and you went so quick on this particular question. You should have asked him that," I'll tweet back saying, "You have a point. I should have thought of that." Sometimes you'll get ideas: "Such and such thing has happened in Mumbai. You haven't done anything on it," and I'll say, "That's a great idea."

Booming Business News Channels

Business news TV channels have learned that targeting small investors and individual consumers is key to strong ratings. They are moving away from "classist" English language and typical investment experts. These programs aim at less-educated viewers and housewives, using popular features such as astrology and mythology to put business strategies into perspective. These channels will continue to expand in languages such as Bengali and Urdu, leaving the English-language business channels to target corporate and elite investment groups. This is one example of the great distinction in Indian television news: the growth of diverse languages in an industry that was once strictly English and Hindi.

Alok Joshi, managing editor at CNBC Awaaz and CNBC Bajar:

> But there is room for improvement. Most business media address the issue from the corporate perspective instead of looking at it from the investor, consumer, or the small stakeholder's perspective. So, we also have a mythologist who translates the ancient mythological themes into present-day life. He analyzes present-day situations in the light of what has been written in our sacred literature.

Sajeet Manghat, national news editor at BloombergQuint:

> Content has evolved a bit because you are getting more interactive with the customer or the investors. Unlike the U.S., where you are addressing the institutional investors, in India you are addressing the retail investors. The psyche of targeting them is totally different. You know, day traders, they buy in the morning, sell in the evening or buy it now and sell five minutes later. That day trader many times is watching your channel on mute. He doesn't listen to what you are saying, but he is watching and he is reacting to what's on the channel.

Samir Ahluwalia, Zee Business news editor:

> Today there are six business channels in India, two of which are Hindi, four of which are English. One of the things which went behind launching the channel in Hindi was that we realized that the only English business channel used to be watched on mute. People used to just keep watching it for the tickers, the stock prices, and we realized there was an opportunity.
>
> There are people in smaller towns and cities across India who invest their money in the stock market, they don't necessarily understand the language which is being spoken on that channel. We thought,

> let's create a channel which is not just seen but also heard. We have had a show specifically on housewives' investments and a lot of younger people are now investing in the markets.

Regional News Channels Empower Viewers

Although English and Hindi are the official languages, the country has 447 languages and dialects. Nearly 30 additional languages such as Bhojpuri and Rajasthani are officially recognized and spoken by millions and tens of millions (Lewis et al., 2014). While there are many dialects in other nations such as in China, there is no place else on earth that has had the opportunity to create and market start-up TV news channels to such immediate and vast audiences. Indian audience members are still new to commercial TV news, and the industry is still learning how to produce broadcast news that presents more than one side of a story. While the economic liberalizations that caused a surge in English-language news channels did not initially create coverage in all regions of India, that is beginning to change. Media executives are trying to empower viewers; to do that, they must communicate in viewers' regions with their native languages and focus on more than major national headlines.

Javed Ansari, senior editor of political affairs at Headlines Today:

> We try and get the point of view of people who really matter but who are not heard of, or who do not get as much prominence as the celebrities. If we are talking of a budget, we need to talk not just of how it affects the Chamber of Commerce, but also how it affects the common man. If prices of petrol go up, it's the common man who is going to be pinched the hardest, not some corporate honchos. So we need to get his views or people who represent him.

Nilendu Sen, former executive editor at Aaj Tak News, currently a television consultant:

> Aaj Tak became synonymous with a sense of empowerment. It created a communion between lots of people who had something to say, who were frustrated at not being able to air their grievances. They were almost throttled, and here was the channel that jumped into the market and took on that agenda.

Prabal Pratap Singh, managing editor of News 18 India:

> The television industry is not destroying Indian culture. Rather, we are helping the society to understand. The television industry has empowered the common man. They think that through this medium they can get things done, which they want to do. Of more than one

> billion people, 40% are on the margin of development, so it has given them a space.

Barkha Dutt, former NDTV anchor:

> I personally advocate about informal style. I will break into Hindi every now and then or use a Hindi phrase that everybody understands. There are intangible Indianisms. For example, there's this lovely word, "jugaad," which refers to the Indian ability to innovate their way out of any crisis, and so you can refer to broad areas of cultural commonality that tend to hold this country together. Similarly, you are seeing a number of regional channels where despite being upper middle class [and fluent in English], someone may want to watch their news in Bengali or in Tamil.

Suhasini Haidar, former senior editor at CNN-IBN, currently diplomatic editor of *The Hindu*:

> It's very much expected that it won't be the government's line you follow but an Indian line. I think in a country that has many religions, regions, castes, subgroups, all kinds of things, we have all grown up with a lot of conflict between them…. It's not just a race issue or single point between immigrants and non-immigrants but upper caste, lower caste, one type of Muslim versus another type of Muslim, Muslims versus Hindus or Christians. You grow up very sensitized to the idea of trying to keep conflict at a minimum. And every bit of research that I have ever been shown by marketing and advertising folks shows the bulk of the audience is moving towards regional news.

Pankaj Pachauri, founder, GoNews24x7:

> The languages are being helped because the market is in that language. For example, we had now four or five Bhojpuri television channels. Bhojpuri is a dying language but the Bhojpuri TV revived the Bhojpuri film industry, and it revived the language.

Rajen Garabadu, former chief executive producer, CNN-IBN, currently chief executive producer, IBN18 Network:

> It is imperative for every broadcaster and news channel to respect each group, each community, each regional language and avoid things which could appear as insensitive to a particular ethnic group. It's got to be clearly balanced so that no particular group feels that it's over the top or it's not covering their side.

Ritu Kapur, cofounder and CEO, Quintillion Media:

> There are certain things you have to be careful about when it comes to religion. Culturally and demographically, India traverses a huge breadth and length, and so the kind of responses that we get from the Tamil audience is often very different from the response we get from a Punjabi audience or a [Uttar Pradesh] audience or Bengali audience. The Bengali audience is asking for more intellectual content, you know, while Chennai seems to be doing well with the more aggressive content.

Satish Singh, consulting editor, News Express TV:

> We have some four thousand languages, dialects. We have numbers of religions, cults, sects, and all. It's a common program you see, in terms of dress, culture, salary, co-existence, coherence. Until and unless we give voice to all the religions or languages, India's existence will be threatened. At the same time, with all kinds of languages, we need to cater to those audiences.

Vinay Tewari, consulting editor, Headlines Today, India Today TV network:

> You have a state-language channel reporting things very differently from how another channel would. For instance, there is a riot that has happened, a communal riot between Hindus and Muslims. It is possible that an English [language] channel may not say that it is a riot between Hindu and Muslims. It may say two communities.

Conclusion

India's young TV news industry is well-positioned to keep up with the increasing changes in media technology, consumption, and production. Chadha (2017) suggests that the uncertain foundations of the growing TV news industry in India may render journalists increasingly vulnerable to oversight by elites and that the political economy of the industry is not as rosy as it may appear. Nevertheless, the professional journalists and news producers interviewed did not reveal such tendencies; there were no mentions of "management" intruding on the news production or agenda. These top-rated television journalists, whose roles have evolved at a record pace with the privatization of television, now embrace the cultural diversity that sets their nation apart. Diversity may add to the technical challenges of producing and reporting news but also helps define Indian identity as TV news empowers residents by providing information that can help society.

The shift away from state-controlled news has created TV news that is more sensationalistic, with shorter and more dramatic stories involving celebrities and sports stars. Part of this also may be due to what Rodrigues (2014) identified as paucity of content diversity among TV news channels because they all cover the same stories. This is the nature of 24-hour news channels around the world, each covering the same stories in similar styles. However, India's cultural diversity provides opportunities to appeal to both specific and national audiences in unique ways. Due to lack of resources and with no real history of local TV news operations, some news channels find themselves adapting to regional identities to build trust and ratings with audience loyalty. Moreover, it seems new regional channels are being created as quickly as the cable spectrum allows for them. As a result, there may be challenges in regulating the growth of such news channels and maintaining quality reporting in the growing competitive market.

As with TV news channels around the world, social media is changing the landscape and adding "second screens" for journalists and TV programs. India has surpassed the United States in internet traffic and now has 684 million mobile media users (Chaudhry, 2016). As social media use grows, so too will the consumption by younger generations—mobile online platforms may well be what keeps TV news alive and flourishing, both in India and around the world.

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