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# Credibility In Professional Journalism And Mass Communication Among Indian News Channels

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## Abstract

Television news programmes are the primary source of information for the public. India is one of few countries that provide news broadcasts in both English and regional languages. Cities like Bangalore are so diverse that they have 24-hour news networks that broadcast in both English and Kannada. It seems to reason that local news, especially if it is generated in the language of the people, would carry more weight than news broadcasted from faraway cities like Delhi or Mumbai. Several studies have shown that viewers of local news stations are more likely to trust such stations than viewers of so-called national networks. There are nine factors that contribute to overall trustworthiness. The researchers are curious as to whether or not this theory is correct, and if so, why. A questionnaire-based audience perception research and in-depth interviews with the directors of programming at local news stations would be used for this purpose.

**Keywords:** credibility, local news channels, 24x7 news channels, online news, newspapers.

## Introduction

One may get their news fix from print, broadcast, or online media. In this new context, it is reasonable to question the reliability of the news since the news's point of origin becomes a crucial factor in determining both its accessibility and its reliability. Given the abundance of available options, trust in the news

depends mostly on the reliability of its sources. We've heard people say things like, "Well, if it's on the BBC, it must be true." For instance, the world's oldest news agency, Reuters, places great emphasis on fact-checking its stories before distributing them to other media outlets. It is willing to let a rival surpass it if doing so would protect its reputation. As a result, Reuters's news is relied upon heavily by media outlets and regular citizens alike. It took a long time for Reuters to build its reputation, but it would only take one fabricated article to destroy it.

**Proliferation of News Channels in India :** There is a plethora of TV news networks in India. At first, progress was sluggish when the government made the historic decision to allow commercial and international broadcasters to enter the market. After a sluggish and choppy first decade, the organisation finally began to find its footing. After gaining popularity in Hindi and the regional language networks, an English news channel, Star News, was launched in 1998. Years later, though, it transitioned into a nonstop news broadcast. With the exception of Times Now, which originated in Mumbai, most other English news networks focused on national news from Delhi. There were a few successful regional English channels, but the most majority have either shut down or gone multilingual.

The India Today Group's entry into television, the monthly video magazine News track, began in 1988, giving Aaj Tak a head start. Instead than starting a channel from scratch, the group rode on the success of Doordarshan. The organization's first project was the 20-minute daily news broadcast Aaj Tak (until date), which debuted in 1995. It was so popular that Doordarshan quickly began airing imitating shows like Saptahik Aaj Tak and Business Aaj Tak. Newstrack evolved into a weekly series for the Metro channel and aired for a year on Star TV in 1998 before it was cancelled. Later, once NDTV abandoned the slot, the Aaj Tak crew took over and broadcast live coverage of the network's 1998 and 1999 national elections. The 1998 coverage lasted 72 hours and was broadcast live on Doordarshan, whereas the 1999 coverage lasted 45 hours. The popularity of Aaj Tak the show was enough to persuade Arun Purie to launch Aaj Tak the television network.

After failed talks with CNN to launch a joint news channel in India, Purie opted to launch India's first private news channel using a low-cost, high-technology model: Aaj Tak. The station may have been the first anywhere to fully automate its newsroom. This meant that non-linear technologies were used for all editing, which greatly facilitated the production process. Studio and equipment costs were greatly reduced by the rapid pace of technological obsolescence. TV Today spent \$4,000-\$5,000 on tiny Panasonic cameras whereas NDTV spent around \$20,000-\$25,000 on large Sony cameras. The very little amount of money needed to spend in hardware was a major contributor to its success.

Another first for Indian television was the use of mobile outside broadcast (OB) vans, which Aaj Tak launched. The capacity to create live broadcasts outside of the studio on short notice is something that other networks lack since they have permanently installed V-SAT infrastructure at their bureaus around the nation for live coverage. Two early OB vans costing Aaj Tak Rs. 36 million could transmit live to a satellite within 15 minutes after arriving on site. Due to the aforementioned factors, Aaj Tak was able to recoup its startup costs in less than a year and go on to become the undisputed industry leader in the field of news. The forceful usage of Khari Boli, the language of the Hindi heartland, is credited by some for the show's success, while others point to the show's live transmission as the reason for its popularity.

**Media Power Cartels :** It is widely held that the English-language media has an outsized influence on the central government and its policies. The Indian Express and The Hindu are legendary publications that challenged the government and helped to topple it in one way or another. Today, the 247 English news networks seem to be the ones in charge. The current administration is heavily influenced by the four major and widely watched networks, NDTV 24x7, CNN-IBN, Times Now, and Headlines Today. These outlets' coverage of events like the CWG and 2G Spectrum crises have placed the government on the defensive and prompted significant policy changes. The government seems to be reacting swiftly to the "will of the people," as portrayed by the news media, after hearing the channels' warnings.

Udaya TV launched in 1994 as the first Kannada satellite station in Karnataka. In 2006, Ravi Prakash of the Sneha Television Network launched TV 9, a Kannada news station known for its bold reporting. In 2007, Anita Kumaraswamy (wife of former CM H D Kumaraswamy) launched Kasturi News 24, with the slogan "muktha, nirbheetha, and nyayasammatha." In 2008, Rajeev Chandrashekar, an MP and businessman, launched Suvarna News 24X7, and in 2010, Murugesh Nirani, the then-Minister of Industries, launched Samaya TV. There have been reports circulating that Janashri had changed ownership since 2011 when it was launched by current owner Gali Janardhana Reddy.

Kannada news networks, including the newcomer Public TV (which launched on February 12, 2012), are in a fierce battle for viewers' attention by providing constant "breaking news" coverage of every conceivable topic. The fate of Public TV, which hopes to challenge TV9's dominance, hangs in the balance on whether or not Ranganth's name alone will be enough to attract viewers. Crime, sex, scandals, sensationalism, political voyeurism, and news items that are otherwise out of the usual are the bread and butter of these networks. There is a major threat to Kannada television's legitimacy. Peeping Toms are being created at will by Kannada television. The local stations have been dishing out a steady diet of scandal, crime, sleaze, stings, and lowbrow comedy in an effort to attract viewers and boost their ratings. Journalists often have access to sensitive materials about the personal lives of others. Even if they manage to get their hands on a divorce petition involving a celebrity, they have no right to make its contents public.

**Credibility Assessment by Viewers :** An significant factor in determining a news organization's influence or power on a country's power structure is the public's opinion of that organization's credibility. The only method to find out how much faith people have in the media in the modern day is to conduct a research on the topic. It is difficult for any media outlet to sustain widespread deception for long when news can be independently verified. People's confidence in a certain news outlet is based on a variety of objective and subjective factors. For instance, even among newspaper subscribers, The Hindu has widespread credibility as a national news source. This didn't happen overnight, obviously. This legitimacy took the newspaper in question

a century to earn. Everyone took note when The Hindu adopted a different approach during the discussion on "The Indo-US civil nuclear bill" and accused the government of selling out to the United States. The public's trust in it increased as it became clear that the organization's stance was motivated entirely by politics and national interests. While newspapers have been around for centuries, cable news networks have just been operating for the last decade. Media outlets like Times Now and CNN-IBN have only been around for six years. While NDTV 24x7 has been around for 25 years, the actual 24-hour news channel is just 8 years old. This raises the question of how to choose which television network may be trusted over others. The only reliable method of answering these and similar issues is to conduct an audience research.

According to a number of surveys, public trust in the news media (such as newspapers and television networks) is on the decline. One theory puts the blame on the increasing dominance of media conglomerates like News Corp. People's trust in the media continues to decline in tandem with the narrowing range of topics covered. As more people seek out large media outlets to take advantage of their economies of scale, the situation will only worsen. There is an unprecedented plethora of data at our fingertips now, made possible by a proliferation of mobile, cloud-based, and user-friendly information systems. More individuals have access to more sources of information than ever before because to the proliferation of digital media material made possible by the Internet. This opens up a world of possibilities for education, friendship, and fun. However, it may be challenging to determine the quality, reliability, and authenticity of a source of information. The problem of credibility, defined here as "the objective and subjective components that make information trustworthy in the current media environment," is explored in depth throughout this collection of data.

When someone is communicating with you, their credibility as a source is measured by how credible you find them to be. This field of study was launched in the twentieth century, with a heavy focus placed on it during World War II when the United States government attempted to employ propaganda to win popular support for the war effort. In the 1940s, Yale University psychologist Carl Hovland and his colleagues conducted

experimental investigations for the War Department. Together with Muzafer Sherif, they expanded upon the work of scholars from the first half of the 20th century who had established a Source-Message-Channel-Receiver model of communication to create their own theories of persuasion and social judgement. The Indian media's tale during the last 20–30 years may be one of immense financial success, but it is also the one of a steady erosion in journalistic standards. The media sector is currently worth 1.5 percent of GDP, reflecting the industry's growing significance. The majority of the country's roughly 350-plus news stations are losing money. Only the very highest earners can compete financially with Western media outlets.

### **Review of Literature**

Journalists' reputations have taken a hit due to the revelations made public in the recorded talks of corporate lobbyist Nira Radia (Narasimhan, Oct-Dec 2011). To help Radia influence ministry formation in the union government after the 2009 general elections, top journalists may be heard on the recordings agreeing to conduct errands for her. In addition to offering her extensive advice on how Mukesh Ambani of Reliance Industries, one of her top customers, should defend his case in court, the recordings show them getting dictation from her on what to write. Radia is also heard in the discussions berating journalists for their news coverage and bragging to others about how she bribed some "worthies" into doing work for her. According to Vasanti (2011), the mentioned journalists are among the most senior in their field and serve as gatekeepers for their respective newspapers. According to their chats, it seems like these reporters were not only collecting information from Nira Radia but were also on extremely friendly terms with her. The job of the journalists and that of Radia seem to blur into one another, with no clear delineation between the two. Since this exposure, these journalists have continued their brash behaviour and refused to take any responsibility, thus undermining their credibility and the image of the fourth estate as a whole. It has been startling to observe how the mainstream media, especially the hyperbolic TV news stations, have sought to stifle any debate of this problem. This has led to the public's suspicion that the media is shielding its members from scrutiny.

Professor of Journalism at Ohio University Hugh Culbertson saw a trending story and ran with it. Editors all throughout the nation were worrying that their reliance on anonymous sources was undermining the credibility of the media. Most said they were obliged to utilise anonymous sources because of the level of competition, even though 81% of them found that kind of source to be less credible. More than half of sources, editors believe, would go on record if reporters pushed harder to reveal their identities, yet one third were "unhappy to a large degree" with how anonymous sources were treated at their own publications. Unnamed attribution was seen as a "crutch for lazy reporters," according to Culbertson.

To explain the actions of the corporate news media in the United States, Herman and Chomsky provide a "propaganda model" in their book *Manufacturing Consent* (Chomsky, 2002). Before delving into the details of the propaganda model, they declare their core premise that mainstream media "work to mobilise support for the privileged interests that control governmental and corporate activities." In a "society of concentrated riches and substantial conflicts of class interest," propaganda is "a very essential component of their entire service" in the media. The media's inability to reach a unanimous consensus on any given subject helps maintain the system's credibility and legitimacy. Both Herman and Chomsky freely admit that there is substantial disagreement and discussion on a variety of topics. However, they argue that the dominant media only allows "responsible" viewpoints that are acceptable to a certain subset of the elite. When the ruling class is in agreement on an issue, the media will invariably follow suit. No disagreement will be tolerated, much less recognised, unless it can be used as a source of humour.

**The Bandwagon Theory** : Researchers looking at how audiences process information have pointed to bandwagon theory as a potential explanation (Sundar & Nass, 2001). According to Chaiken (1987), the heuristic "if many believe a view is legitimate, the opinion is probably accurate" is used by many individuals. As a result, people may reduce the amount of mental energy they put on cognitive selection by simply adopting the opinions and preferences of others around them. Even in interactions with new people, the bandwagon effect may be motivated by a desire to feel a sense of belonging (Byrne, 1961).

Researchers in the field of communication have long been curious in how viewers interpret the news they see on television. Research suggests that presentation aspects, such as the substance of news stories and the qualities of the news presenter, might affect how credible they are perceived (Austin & Dong, 1994; Markham, 1968). One such factor may be watching shows on a high-definition (HD) television.

The research found that viewers' judgements of a program's legitimacy might be affected by its production values. This indicates that credibility is dependent on factors other than the reliability of the source or messenger. Journalists in Slovenia were polled and the majority said that established news outlets are more trustworthy since they have been around longer and have established a track record of reliability and accuracy as a result (Steensen, 2011).

Some of them made reference to the "excellent reputation" that established news outlets had garnered over the course of their careers. Most of them credited their "good experiences" as readers or journalists with the conventional news media for this reputation, whereas they had unfavourable, little, or no exposure to the internet news media. Several respondents said that the credibility of the media is tied to the "excellent," "experienced," "acknowledged," and "distinguished" reporters and editors who work for certain outlets. They opted for more established news outlets because they know they can trust the journalists and editors there. The third reason people believe conventional news outlets more is because they provide more reliable news.

Many respondents felt that internet news sources were less reliable than their more conventional counterparts because they tended to focus on more dramatic stories. Public affairs included things like politics, the economy, society, and the environment, while sensational news included things like celebrity gossip and lifestyle tips. Respondents believe that conventional news outlets are more reliable than their digital counterparts because they provide more "exhaustive," "in-depth," and "accurate" coverage, while the latter only provides "surface," "quick," and "unverified" coverage.



As a result, conventional media journalists are held in higher esteem than their internet counterparts, with the major justification being that the latter take a more professional approach to news creation. In fact, several of the respondents said that the conventional news media's journalists are more trustworthy because they more clearly distinguish between facts and views. Journalistic writing in the internet news media was also critiqued for being too short, too shallow, and full of spelling and punctuation errors. The training and experience of reporters is another factor that contributes to their higher credibility. Respondents believe that offline journalists have a higher level of education and experience than their digital counterparts.

When asked why they prefer online news outlets, respondents most often cited the speed with which they can receive information. Some of them claimed that internet news outlets are reliable because readers may weigh in on stories after they've been posted. As a result, the audience continually checks the authenticity of each news story, each journalist, and the medium itself. As a result, some respondents believe that online news media are much more reliable and of better quality than conventional news media, which hide behind their inaccessibility, because of the receivers who are active frequently check authenticity in this manner.

Two Telugu news channels were studied (Regional news channels living up to their promise in AP, 2004), and the results revealed that viewers spent much more time with Telugu news and significantly less time with Hindi news. The implication is that regional news programmes are more popular than national (read: Hindi) ones. Similar results were shown for regional news networks, which saw an increase in viewers while English and Hindi news channels saw a decrease (Sarkar, 2011). Especially in the South, where the number of regional language news stations has increased, viewers now have a choice, and the preference for programming in their native language seems to have positive effects. But what worries me most is the competition between English and Hindi national news stations to attract viewers with sensationalist stories.

Due to the news industry's reliance on dramatic events, 2008 was a strong year, what with the Mumbai Terror attacks and the drama surrounding the adoption of the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Bill. Some Kannada speakers believe that

existing news outlets place too much emphasis on religious and political figures (Is there room of another Kannada media channel?, 2012). On February 12, 2012, public television was introduced, with seasoned journalist H.R. Ranganath at the lead. His reputation as a no-nonsense Editor at Kannada Prabha inspires optimism that Public TV would finally achieve its goal of providing fair and balanced news. Public TV's stellar success one year after broadcasting may be attributed to the high quality and reliability of the programming.

Several factors contribute to viewers' inclination for regional programming. There seems to be a problem with coverage and relevancy in addition to the language choice. Stories and concerns that affect the lives of ordinary Bangaloreans get substantial attention on the city's local news stations. Some of this preference for national news networks over regional ones might be attributed to the city of Bangalore's global atmosphere. People from outside the state often watch in either English, if they are from a more affluent background, or Hindi, if they are from a more middle-class background and live north of the Vindhya Mountains. The study's most compelling conclusion would be that English-language news networks are more popular among news consumers because of the international backgrounds of their viewers. Even now, English is seen as the key to success in India's competitive job market. People believe that their command of the English language, whether at home or in the workplace using the colonial language, will elevate them to the status of society's elite. This is why many people in the survey choose to watch national stations in English.

The rapid transformation of Indian society is a boon for regional news stations, especially in the city of Bangalore. The consequences of the economic imperative unleashed a little over two decades ago are becoming apparent. Cities in India are seeing a demographic shift, with residents from farther afield increasingly choosing to settle there. The media landscape is adapting to the new fact that most Indian languages are spoken in India's tier 1 and tier 2 cities. When National Integration and nation building were the only goals, a single language in India might be forced on the whole people. Today, news channels are being created in a variety of languages to meet the needs of a diverse and expanding audience.

## Conclusion

It was assumed in 1995, when the Hindi news channel Aaj Tak debuted, that private networks, as Doordarshan had done for almost three decades, would eventually attract an audience from throughout the country who spoke Hindi. Regional news networks broadcasting in local languages have proliferated throughout India in the last decade. This is to be expected, considering that the top five newspapers in terms of audience and circulation all happen to be publications written in languages other than English. After the top three newspapers in Hindi (Danik Jagaran), Malayalam (Malayalam Manorama), and Tamil (Daily Thanthi), The Times of India falls to number eight. There are just eight English-language news networks and slightly more than 10 Hindi-language ones. However, there are about a hundred and more on the way in other Indian languages, making up the vast majority of news channels in the country. There is an overabundance of English-language news networks, and soon enough, Hindi will join them. Economic realities and social and political factors in India are propelling the growth of regional language news stations. Regional news centres are popping up in almost every Indian state, reflecting the genuine character of India: unity in variety.

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