Paid news in the indian media media essay

Media

AbstractThe emergence of Media Corporation, through growing cross media ownership is having their impact on media's public service commitments. In recent times, the Indian media and its journalistic practices have been criticised for breaking the trust of the public. Indian media have successfully succeeded in growing their economy through cross-ownership and advertorials. Under the influence of profit making, commercial interests which are controlling the news content, as editorial contents are being sold like other commodities. This commercialization of the media content is evident in phenomena like paid news. News is meant to be objective, fair and unbiased. This is the only difference between news and opinions. But, recently, the lines between news and advertisements are blurring because paid advertisements are deceived as news which favours a particular organization or a person by selling editorial spaces. The media organizations misguide the readers by providing no true information to them. By doing this, the media questions its own credibility and is fast losing the trust of the society. The readers/viewers cannot distinguish the difference between a news report and advertorials. This paper argues that the media is no longer the fourth estate of journalism and has become like any other marketable product with reference to paid news. The face of journalism in India has changed. The press is mostly owned and controlled by the 'capitalist class' (i. e. the rich and powerful in society; opinion leaders; gatekeepers), who can use the press to report facts which are convenient to them. Over years, the ownership pattern, organizational structure and the content of the newspapers have changed. They are on sale for paid news and private treaties. In addition, this paper also tires to observe the impacts and analyse the responses of the media, civil society and the state on paid news. Paid

News and the Private Treaties Phenomenon1" Paid news is run to pass off an advertisement, apiece of propaganda and advertisement... pass that as news, pretend that it is news that is " paid news" – P. Sainath. It is a deal signed by the media organizations with an individual especially corporate houses and the candidate standing for elections, assuring them a fixed amount of coverage through advertisements and news reports in favour of them. In addition, additional fee can be charged to run negative campaign against their rivals. The paid news operation is done secretly and no disclosure is made before such news printed or broadcasted. Journalists willing or otherwise practice this phenomenon on a large scale. Journalists who do not wish to practice this phenomenon are either sacked from their organizations or the individuals are denied coverage and also suffer media blackouts. 2The advertisers, who are ever anxious to catch consumers off guard, believe that 'simply there cannot be a better way of breaking into consumer mind space than disguising the brand messages as news, which is more credible and convincing than raw advertising,' says Santosh Desai, managing director and CEO, Future Brands. Such content is priced more than the regular advertising rates. Private TreatiesPrivate treaties are signed with corporate organizations because media owners want to grow their organizations. In 2002, Bennett, Coleman and Co. Ltd (BCCL) launched this phenomenon of private treaties by singing deals with potential advertisers who could not afford mainstream advertising in return for equity shares in their companies. Many corporate leaders say that when the news space is available for sale, there are many buyers for it, especially when it meets their needs. Example: In The Times of India, Delhi Edition, Olay brand articles were a part of paid marketing campaign by Proctor and Gamble, India. The

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) reported that media organizations are entering into agreements called private treaties with corporate organizations whose equity shares are listed on the stock exchanges that come out with public offer of their shares. The media organizations are picking up stakes in companies and in return are providing favourable coverage through advertisements, news reports and editorials. Repercussions of Selling Editorial SpaceMost media organizations are interested in making profits for which they sacrifice the ethical norms of journalistic practice in favour of paid news. The first paid news phenomenon was broken down by P. Sainath. Paid news is common in Lok Sabha and state assemblies' elections especially in states like Maharashtra and Haryana. [3]As per media reports, the size of the 'paid news' market in Andhra Pradesh in the elections in 2009 alone, was said to be over Rs 1, 000 crore. In Maharashtra, it is said to be in multi thousand crores. A lot of evidence is available of the malpractice. Example: Ashok Chavan used the print media effectively during the Maharashtra state elections in 2009. Identical articles with similar photographs and headlines appeared in publications carrying by-lines of different authors around the same time praising both the candidates claiming that both are likely to win the election, hints at paid news phenomenon. Nowhere, in the publication, there is any indication of such news reports which have involved financial transaction or has been sponsored by certain individuals or political parties. Press Council of India's draft report of enquiry titled 'Paid News: How corruption in the Indian Media Undermines Indian Democracy' points out that the deception that 'paid news' involves takes place at three distinct levels (Sainath, 2010a): 4The reader or the viewer is deceived into believing that what is essentially an advertisement is in fact, independently produced news content. Moreover, candidates contesting elections do not disclose the true expenditure incurred on campaigning thereby violating the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, which have been framed by, and are meant to be enforced by, the Election Commission of India under the Representation of the People Act, 1951. The newspapers and television channels concerned usually receive funds for paid news in cash and do not disclose such earnings in their company balance sheets or official statements of accounts. Thus, 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. Edelman, an independent public relations firm, in its 2010 Trust Barometer Survey states that the Indian news media have been losing their credibility and trust among its people.[5]Over the past two years, trust on television news dropped sharply from 61 per cent to just 36 per cent, that of business magazines has gone down from 72 per cent to 47 per cent, and that of newspapers has gone down from 61 per cent to 40 per cent. Trust in the media in India as a whole declined by 7 per cent (from 65 per cent in 2009 to 58 per cent in 2010. This decline in trust speaks volumes about the future role of the media in India and the threats to its hard earned freedom. According to the 2nd Press Commission report, the role of press should be constructive critic. It must oppose an official policy when needed; support it when it can at most of the times, bring out instructive opinions on important issues covering all aspects/ angles to provide knowledge to people. Journalists are accepted as moral guides in the Indian society. They are accepted because of the foundation on which the concept of media freedom was built. India guaranteed freedom of speech and expression to its citizens. It is a fundamental right under Article 19(1) (A) of the Indian Constitution, which allows everyone to express their views as well as allows the right to print matters which are borrowed from someone or printed under the direction of that person. Paid News Syndrome and Need for Greater AccountabilityThe paid news syndrome has become a debateable topic for various platforms. When the credibility of the media is lost, its freedom gets restricted. Hamid Ansari, the Vice President of India said " The explosive growth in the media had highlighted the fact that the Fourth Estate is only one among the pillars of democracy that has an identifiable commercial and profit facade." Strongly arguing against paid news,[6]Arun Jaitley claims those who are in a position to pay more for information expressed as paid news shape the human minds in this country accordingly. This cannot be free speech. At best, it could be trade, it could be business, and, therefore, the government has to take this out of the arena of free speech and put it in the arena of business or trade, all in public interest. Favouring deterrent penalty against those who indulge in such practices he suggests that 'in the case of (a) candidate, it has to be an offence under election law (The phrase) 'corrupt practice' must be amended in the Representation of the People Act and this should be a ground for setting aside the election and disqualifying the candidate, and if parties indulge in this…there must be action against this." Paid news is a kind of corruption which needs to be regulated within same way the other organizations are dealt with. News media organizations should mention at the bottom that the news has been paid giving people the choice. Example: Bombay Times mentions advertorials under its masthead. To prevent this paid news business one needs an ethical and powerful regulatory mechanism. Certain norms should be made mandatory. The Press Council of India can try an arrest the media owners when they involve in media irregularity (paid news). Legal and Ethical Framework against Paid NewsThere is no specific law against paid news. We need to implement a strong law which will stop this malpractice. However, there are some provisions which are relevant to this malpractice. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has following suggestions: 7Disclosures regarding the stake held by the media company may be made mandatory in the news report/article/editorial in newspapers/television channels relating to the company in which the media group holds such a stake. Disclosure on percentage of stake held by media groups in various companies under such 'private treaties' on the website of media groups may be made mandatory. Any other disclosures relating to such agreements such as any nominee of the media group on the board of directors of the company, any management control or other details which may be required to be disclosed and which may be a potential conflict of interest for the media group, may also be made mandatory. The Press Council of India's guidelines for financial journalists framed in 1996 contain the following guidelines relevant to paid news: 8Financial journalists should not accept gifts, loans, trips, discounts, preferential shares or other considerations which compromise or are likely to compromise his position. It should be mentioned prominently in a report about a company that the report has been based on information provided by the company or its financial sponsors. When trips are sponsored for visiting establishments of a company and hospitality extended, the author of the report who has availed of such facilities must invariably state these in his report. A reporter who exposes a scam or brings out a report for promotion of a good project should be encouraged and awarded. A journalist who has a financial interest in a company (including holding of shares) should not report on that company. The journalist should not use for his personal benefit or for the benefit of his relations or friends, information received by him in advance for publication. No newspaper owner, editor or anybody connected with a newspaper should use his relationship with the newspaper to promote his other business interests. The Election Commission guidelines prohibit television channels and radio stations from broadcasting election campaign during the period of 48 hours prior to the scheduled polling, but the same is not applicable to print media and hence newspapers are free to carry election campaign related news and advertising even on the morning of polling. Secondly, political parties are prohibited either to paint advertisements or stick posters on the walls. Thirdly, candidates are not allowed to deliver speeches after 10pm. In order to keep a check on the expenditure incurred by political parties, their candidates and also to ensure that no one prints any material in the form of advertisements, pamphlets etc., the Section 127 A of the Representation of the People Act 1951 provides that ‘ No person shall print or publish, or cause to be printed or published any election pamphlet or poster which does not bear on its face, the names and addresses of the printer and the publisher thereof’. Paid News and Maharashtra State Assembly Elections, 2009Election results: Candidate Ashok Chavan won the elections against Madhavrao Kinhalkar by 1, 20, 849 votes against 13, 345 votes. Chavan’s advertising expenditure: According to the Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 states that candidates must submit their campaign expenses accounts to the district election officer within 30 days of the declaration of results. In addition, day to day accounts must be submitted. The spending limit imposed on contestants is Rs. 10 Lakhs. Chavan had spent less than Rs. 7 Lakhs on his election campaign. He claims that he spent mere Rs. 5, 379 on newspaper advertisements during the 2009 state assembly elections. Additionally, Rs. 6000 were spent on cable television advertisements.

Information of Chavan apperead in:

The Pudhari, a Marathi daily on 7 October 2009, had reporters name at the bottom. The Lokmath, a Marathi daily on 10 October 2009, attributed to special correspondent. The Maharashtra Times on 10 October 2009 had no byline. On 12 September 2009, the Lokmath published a four page colour supplement ‘ Ashok Prav’ or ‘ The Era of Ashok’. This was followed by full page information about Ashok Chavan till voting day. A limited check by The Hindu turned up around 47 full pages of news stories praising Ashok Chavan mostly in colour. Such news items appeared between 1st and 12th of October 2009, in multiple editions of the Lokmath. On 13 October 2009, Lokmath published ‘ Vikas Prav’ or ‘ The Era of Development’', centered on Ashok Chavan and the progress of Maharashtra under his Congress party. None of these news reports carried the words ‘ advertisement’ or ‘ paid for’. What was this information all about then? If the media organizations had declared the news reports as advertisements, Chavan’s expenditure would have exceeded than the amount he claimed. 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.