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### Abstract

Media are today central institutions that create even ‘construct’ meaning, make sense of the world around us, provide arenas for public discourse and are arguably the life blood of a democracy. This thesis is organized around a conceptualization of media of news and information as key to the debates surrounding the wider implications that media have on democracy and development.

The rich primary data from extensive content analysis of leading TV channels followed by interview schedules with the audiences across the National Capital Region reveal that media particularly television news are crucial to an informed public participation in a deliberative democracy.

A critical review of the growth of television in India is taken up while following closely the Prasar Bharati debates on the autonomy of the Public Service Broadcaster to analyze some key issues that have been instrumental in the framing of television policy in this country. Following liberalization and the coming of the Murdoch driven STAR package in India, a drastic change in both ownership patterns, production and distribution of television content as also of the boom of 24/7 news channels that happened suggest both a huge audience base and a swelling market for advertising revenues. An exhaustive analysis of these trends followed in the political economy of communication tradition reveal close linkages between transnationalization of media, the pouring of the FDIs, the commercialization of television, heavy reliance on advertising and the blurring of the boundaries between news and entertainment as the qualitative and quantitative content analysis revealed. Some of these findings hinting at greater sensationalism in a rating points driven commoditized mediascape are corroborated and upheld by the other two research instruments used – those of interview schedules with the members of the audience and questionnaires with media experts, editors, reporters and producers from leading private TV news channels as well as the public service broadcasters both Doordarshan and the BBC. The larger shift in discourse both within media organizations as also in the policy instruments from the citizen to the consumer signal and augur a diminishing proportion and prioritization of development reportage and a paradigmatic shift in the newsroom editorial practices and a redefinition of conventional news values. In this new media milieu, the study reveals, that the knowledge gap increases and people have poor recall value of major debates since there is an overall depoliticization of hard news. The audience themselves used to less deliberative nature of the new television culture find themselves more attracted to soft programming and infotainment genres causing a decisive shift in content strategies including that of the Public Service Broadcaster.

The conclusion suggests that there is an urgent need for self-regulation as much as there is value in reintroducing public service imperatives within the media. Also there is a need felt for a greater public engagement with the news media.

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