Coping with change in India's media

Struggles of English-language journalists in an evolving mediascape

Abstract: In recent times, journalism, worldwide, has been undergoing significant changes. Some of the major revolutions have occurred in India, the world's largest democracy. The size and face of Indian news media have seen rapid transformations owing to major economic, technological, and political developments in the country in recent decades. The focus of this research is on how India's English-language media are dealing with the various changes, including digital disruptions and other pressures under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Hindutva' government. The insights are drawn from the experiences and perceptions of a sample of journalists at the forefront of covering major events. Being in the coalface, these journalists are bearing the brunt of the developments, both good and bad. The email interviews reveal that while the English-language media may be a small part of India's vast national media landscape, they are also buffeted by some major developments in the country, and fighting to maintain their independence in the face of some powerful trends and influences in technology, politics, and commerce.

Keywords: democracy, email survey, English-language media, India, journalism practice, journalists, media in society, technology

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Introduction

AS AN integral part of a country's national fabric, the news media sector is confronted by changes in the political system, the legal framework, and in technology. These developments impact on the professional practice of journalism in various ways, with implications for the country and its citizens. This article looks at the impacts of economic changes, technological advancements, and political developments on India's English-language media through the experiences of some seasoned journalists. India's English language

media are a small but important segment of the vast Indian news media landscape. The impacts on the English language news media could provide some cues and clues about developments on media on a larger, national scale.

The aim of the study is to contribute to the understanding of journalism in non-Western societies. As Josephi (2007) and Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) note, there are different and changing journalistic practices across cultures, which suggest that the notion of a dominant model of journalism is untenable in the 21st century. India, with its rich history and diverse cultural traditions, is the largest democracy in the world, with a media sector to match. If journalism as the Fourth Estate is integral in maintaining the health of a democracy, then it is arguably of utmost importance in India.

This research is based on email interviews with journalists who, as the key stakeholders working at the forefront of news gathering and dissemination, are ideally positioned to experience, observe, and evaluate the seismic changes in the contemporary news media landscape. Changes in journalism practice in this article refer to changes in news reporting practices that occur due to various factors. The three main catalysts of change in Indian media have been the liberalisation of the media sector in the 1990s, followed by rapid technological improvements, and the overarching political developments (Ninan, 2012; Ranganathan, 2014 & 2015; Rao & Wasserman, 2015; Thussu, 2012).

Liberalisation facilitated an increase in the number of media outlets and products, and the diffusion of technology. These greatly increased the availability of and access to a multitude of print publications, news channels such as 24-hour television, and more recently, social media, which fuelled citizen journalism. In politics, the election of Narendra Modi's far-right government changed the national political climate. While economic liberalisation and technological developments paved the way for greater media diversity and accessibility, the political changes constrained free and independent journalism (Chakravartty & Roy, 2015).

Notably, technological changes have not been part of a natural incremental evolution, but a significant 'leap' that has come to be known as the 'digital disruption'. This has significant impacts that both advance and repress journalism. This is evident from this study's interviews with a sample of experienced English-language print, broadcast, and online journalists working for some leading Indian English-language media organisations. The journalists are at the cutting edge of the changes in their national media landscape and the impacts on reporting.

Ordinarily, change is a normal part of the evolutionary process of any media sector in any country. The difference is digitalisation, due to which the transformations are not just global but far quicker and far more profound than before (see Ninan, 2012; Rao & Wasserman, 2015; Thussu, 2012). Sen and Nielsen (2016) note that after initial hiccups, both internet use and digital advertising

has grown quite exponentially in India owing to the diffusion of mobile internet use. Consequently, India boasts the second 'largest number of internet users in the world'.

Given the complexity and diversity of Indian media, it is difficult to investigate all forms of journalism in the country in one study. In their comparative analysis of Indian and South African media, Rao and Wasserman (2015, p. 655) noted that it would be impossible 'to analyze the work being done in the Indian newsrooms of each of its 86,000 newspapers and weekly magazines, and its 300 news channels broadcasting diverse content to the Indian television-viewing audience'. As such, this research focuses on India's English-language media in order to understand some elements of the evolutionary process in the country's media. The English-language media are a relatively small but historically a significant part of the vast Indian media landscape. Sonwalkar (2004, p. 397) points out that 'English was the language of the colonial rulers and continues to be the language of communication of the government and most influential sections of Indian society'. The English-language media occupies a 'favoured position' in the country's media industry and is regarded as 'influential', 'competitive, pluralistic and not dominated by any single group or ideology' (Sonwalkar, 2004, p. 389). Outside Britain and the United States, 'India is the biggest market for English language publications (Sonwalkar, 2004, p. 397). Some notable English-language newspapers that represent India's quality press are part of this study. They include *The Times of India*, *The Hindu*, the *Hindustan Times*, and the *Indian Express*. These newspapers represent more than 60 percent of the overall circulation of English-language newspapers in India (Sonwalkar, 2004, p. 297).

Background

Currently, India's population stands at 1.2 billion with more than 623 million males and more than 586 million females (Population Census, 2011). This makes India the world's second most populous nation after China (Mody, 2015; Thussu, 2012). The country has a 74 percent literacy rate and as the leading economy in South Asia, boasted a growth rate of between five and six percent per annum since 2003 (Corbridge, 2010; Population Census, 2011).

Media liberalisation and technological advances

Since the liberalisation of the media sector in the early 1990s, both the print and broadcast media have generally thrived in terms of quantity and financially. Whether media are thriving professionally in terms of quality is under debate. Prior to the reforms, Indian television viewers were served by the state-owned public broadcaster, Doordarshan, but now both foreign and local television channels proliferate. These include the Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), as well as local channels such as Zee TV, NDTV, and Sun TV (Rao, 2009). In all, the number of television channels

ballooned to more than 90, with India now the 'third largest cable TV-viewing nation in the world, after China and the United States' (Rao, 2009, p. 478). The expansion of television, particularly English-language satellite television, has been attributed to increases in advertising income, increases in consumption of consumer goods, the growth of the middle class (Mehta, 2008), and the production of entertainment programs such as reality television, lifestyle shows, and the crime genre (Khorana, 2012; Mehta, 2008 & 2014; Neyazi, 2011).

In print, Indian newspapers continue to increase circulation, in contrast to some Western countries where the digital disruption has devastated the print sector (Ninan, 2012; Rao, 2009; Thussu, 2012). The Registrar of Newspapers for India (2016-2017) reports more than 14,000 English-language publications and over 46,000 vernacular language newspapers. The English-language publications have a total circulation of over 56.5 million while Hindi language publications boast a circulation of over 238.9 million (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2016-2017). Despite their proportionately smaller circulation, India's mainstream English-language newspapers are still agenda-setting for other media and influencing public opinion, government policies and agenda.

In all, India's English language newspapers recorded a circulation revenue of almost INRs34 billion (approximately US$445 million) in the 2019 financial year (Diwanji, 2019). This revenue may not come as a surprise: English is not just the primary language of 256,000 people, but also the second language of 83 million people, and the third language of another 46 million, making it the second most broadly spoken language after Hindi. Comparatively, 528 million people speak Hindi as a first language (Population Census, 2011; Rukmini, 2019).

India had 560 million internet users as at 31 January 2020—a penetration rate of 40.6 percent—compared to a 53.6 per cent penetration rate in Asia as a whole (Internet World Stats, 2020). India had more than 1,127 million mobile-cellular telephone subscribers in 2016, with 85.17 mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (International Telecommunication Union, 2016). Social media users totalled 258.27 million, an improvement on 168 million users over the previous year (Statista, 2018). YouTube and Facebook are the most popular social media tools, along with WhatsApp. There were 251,000,000 Facebook subscribers as at 31 January 2020—a penetration rate of 18.3 percent (Internet World Stats, 2020).

For all the challenges in the Indian media sector, the country still ranks better in international media freedom indices in comparison to neighbouring countries. In 2020, India ranked 142 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, lower than 138 in 2018 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). The drop is attributed to the existence of a sedition law said to encourage self-censorship in a climate of heightened nationalism (Rangnekar, 2018). While press freedom weakened under the Modi government, other

regional countries fared slightly worse. Pakistan was ranked 145 and Bangladesh 151 in the same period. Sri Lanka was ranked higher at 127 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

Literature review

By any standards, the Indian media sector is both vast and complicated. Indian journalism has been described as a mixture of Western and local/indigenous styles (Rao, 2009). Following independence in 1947, the Indian media became more democratic and established its own unique journalistic style, including development-oriented focus on news that promoted nation-building, the well-being of citizens, poverty and hunger alleviation, and reduction in illiteracy (Rao, 2009).

Journalism before and after economic liberalisation

Ranganathan (2014) analyses the role that the Indian media played at various times in the country's history: Soon after independence, two national broadcasters, All India Radio and Doordarshan, occupied a dominant position on the airwaves and served as major propaganda tools of the government (Ranganathan, 2014) whereas during the national emergency (1975-1977), privately owned press fulfilled the fourth estate role. Ranganathan (2014) argues that the economic liberalisation of the 1990s was the single major factor that brought unexpected and comprehensive changes to Indian media and politics. The 'move to a social market economy meant a reduction in government control and enhanced privatisation'. The emergence of private satellite television channels surpassed state-controlled radio and television with their entertainment-driven programs (Ranganathan, 2014, p. 25).

Rao (2010) notes how a combination of economic and political factors turned newspapers into a profitable business. These included advertisements, changes in business practices, persuasive and powerful marketing, rising political interest, growing literacy, and improvements in technology. However, post-liberalisation, newspapers started to generate their own income through private businesses. This meant greater emphasis on private business news than political, government or cultural news, including a near-absence of international news. These developments were reflected in India's English-language press, such as *The Times of India*, that led the shift to infotainment.

Whereas the English-language press was infotainment-driven and paid little attention to regional and rural dwellers, the vernacular newspapers filled the gap. They focused on news that appealed to the lower middle classes, as well as regional and rural populations (Rao, 2010). Vernacular newspapers aimed to provide readers with highly valuable news about their locality, their district, and their state. Rao (2010, p. 102) observes that, 'The formula to go local has proven to be extremely successful and has delivered exponential growth, so that today

vernacular newspapers outnumber English-language newspapers.'

With advances in Indian journalism, some gaps have emerged. Ranganathan (2015) states that the Indian media's fascination for 'infotainment' is a consequence of commercialisation that has weakened the 'watchdog' role. Moreover, the focus on crime, politics, entertainment, celebrity and business news is reportedly matched by a decreased representation of the poor and marginalised. Rao and Mudgal (2015) note that the leading circulation newspapers devote only a small amount of space to serious problems in the rural parts of the country, such as malnutrition, hunger, and farmer suicides. Furthermore, there is the problem of paid news, whereby media outlets accept money from politicians, celebrities, and businesses, in exchange for positive coverage. Paid news is described as 'one of the most overt symptoms of media corruption' in India (Rao, 2016, p. 9). Other diverse elements that affect and afflict the Indian media include caste, class, gender, race, regional diversity, religion, different languages, and the growing impact of alternative media. These trends underscore Rao and Wasserman's (2015, p. 657) concerns that, 'journalism practices can undermine democracy if such practices are not attentive to the question of equality'.

Conceptual and theoretical frameworks

This study advances a general understanding of journalism as a public institution, and the challenges to journalism, especially in the face of pronounced and rapid changes. Institutional theories define institutions as 'social patterns of behaviour identifiable across the organisations that are generally seen within a society to preside over a particular social sphere' (Cook, 1998, p. 70). Cook argues the news media fulfil the key criteria that are essential to institutions: Journalism's practices are based on distinctive roles, routines, rules, and procedures that have endured over time and extend across news organisations. The news media are viewed by journalists, as well as by others, as presiding over a given part of social life. Similarly, Sparrow (1999) conceptualises the news media as an institution that stands for a public good and serves as the guardian of a democratic political system.

As an institution, journalism has specific functions and performs specific roles for society (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, et al., 2009). Journalistic practices are situated within a professional framework of values, rules, and routines. One of the questions examined by Christians et al. (2009) is not only what the role of journalism is in society but also what it ought to be. In their view, changes spawned by technological developments, globalisation, including an interconnected global economy have challenged the nature of journalism and democracy in our contemporary world.

Some scholars acknowledge the pressures that politics and economics exert on journalism (Cook, 1998; Kaplan, 2002; and Ryfe, 2006). Kaplan (2002) argues that journalism is deeply entrenched in political culture, while Ryfe (2006,

p. 139) notes that: 'Politics is much closer to the daily habits of journalists. In their search for political legitimacy, journalists find themselves in a complicated, uneasy relationship with public officials, and, more broadly, the political culture.' Sparrow (1999) accepts the impact that political forces have on news production, even though media organisations have merged into large businesses, with economics playing a more dominant and direct role in news production. These theoretical perspectives underline the key elements of this study in understanding the professional practices and everyday challenges of journalists in India's influential English-language media.

Against this background, how do journalists in India's English-language media perceive their professional practices and the challenges they face on their job? This study takes the following key questions to the journalists:

- In what ways have technological and political developments affected the work of journalists in terms of professionalism and the overall freedoms of the press?
- To what extent do politics, big business, and media owners influence news content and interfere with editorial decisions?
- How do journalists perceive their role in the context of the changes in their country in the coming years?

Methodology

This study conducted email surveys of English-language journalists across multiple platforms—print, broadcast, and online. Besides being cost and time effective, a great advantage of email-based surveys is the ability to bridge geographical divides (Ilieva et al., 2002; Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). The success of email (web) surveys is determined by the reliability of data collected (Coderre & Mathieu, 2004). Towards this end, we engaged the director of a media-training institute in India with strong ties to the industry to help identify and recruit respondents with the right experience and qualifications from the major English-language media organisations.

This qualitative research method aimed to use the journalists' narrative to understand journalistic practices and everyday challenges they face in the era of new technology, the changing face of political developments, and economic imperatives. We used email surveys because this allows respondents the anonymity that encourages them to be as open and as honest as possible in their reflections and contributions (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). Interviewees were purposively sampled and selected to include editors and journalists with minimum five years or more in the industry. This ensured they have sufficient experience to comment authoritatively on the issues at stake.

Interview sample selection

This deliberate sample selection procedure is also known as 'snowball' sampling, whereby a researcher asks key informants to suggest other people who have appropriate knowledge about the research topic (Obijiofor, 2015).

Sample size

Qualitative interview methodologies advocate a sample size that offers deep insights into the key issues under investigation. Patton (2002) and Tongco (2007) emphasise 'information-rich' cases relevant to the study, rather than a large sample. For this study, 35 journalists were contacted initially between November 2016 and January 2017, followed by email reminders. Eventually, we received 21 responses from journalists in 19 leading English-language media organisations. This number was considered adequate as it was comparable to previous studies of this nature (see Obijiofor, Murray, & Singh, 2017). The sample size is also affected by available time and the resources at the researchers' disposal. Of those who responded in this study, 16 were male and five were female, with an average of over 12 years' experience.

The media organisations the journalists represent include: *The Hindu (*Chennai); *The Economic Times*; *The Hindustan Times (New Delhi)*; NDTV India (New Delhi); *Indian Express* (New Delhi); *Business News TV* channel; *Times Now (Mumbai)*; *India Legal*; *Reuters India* (Mumbai); *The Times of India (Mumbai)*; CNBC Network 18 (Mumbai); *DNA India*; *Sakal Times (Pune)*; Rediff.com; *The Telegraph (Calcutta)*; Thomson Reuters Foundation, India; *Hotstar (*Mumbai); and Zee Media. This sample not only reflects a fairly strong urban geographic spread in the heartlands of the Indian news media industry, it also captures some of the country's leading media houses. One newspaper, *The Times of India*, is listed in the 2017 India's Readership Survey as 'the world's largest broadsheet English daily'. Similarly, *The Economic Times* is regarded as 'India's largest (and the world's second largest) financial daily' (*Times of India*, n.d.).

The data analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. Once data collection was completed, we read all transcripts multiple times to be fully immersed in the discourse. Thereafter, the responses were individually coded and clustered into themes that were markedly similar and those that were markedly dissimilar. The categorisation enabled us to identify, highlight, analyse, and contextualise the responses in order to arrive at a theoretically informed analysis of the data, based on the experiences and viewpoints of the frontline reporters and editors in our sample.

Findings and discussion

The results are divided into two subsections: the first discusses journalists' perceptions while the second analyses data on how the journalists are affected by the changes in the Indian media landscape.

Journalists' relationships with technology: Significant changes on the job

The biggest change experienced by the respondents is the movement of news towards online platforms, including increased social media use. This means gathering, producing, and reporting news for a greater variety of channels than before. An online media journalist said: 'The biggest change has been that news organisations of every type now have a presence on the internet and on social media, even if that is not their core focus.' Most journalists said they were active on social media. Even a print journalist with over 40 years' experience said he has to master the basics of the new technology to keep abreast of the changing ways in which news is gathered, disseminated, and consumed. This was necessary to maintain his position in the profession. The journalist noted the importance of sharing news content on social media and the benefits of Twitter and Facebook to reach politicians and other newsmakers far more easily than before. Similar sentiments were shared by a female online journalist. She said:

> When I moved to a digital news platform, I started looking at social media, especially Twitter, as a great medium to connect to the rest of the world. I reached out to people in many countries such as the US, Australia, Pakistan and Afghanistan through Twitter.

A television journalist stated that competition has 'quadrupled', thanks to social media: 'It just means that as a TV journalist, you have to be far faster.' These experiences reflect Deuze's (2008, p. 11) observations that technology is increasing 'pressures on journalists, who have to retool and diversify their skillset to produce more work in the same amount of time under ongoing deadline pressures for one or more media'.

One print journalist noted the value of using apps to interact and communicate with sources: 'There are many apps that allow me the anonymity and security I require to talk to sources over a secure line and get information from them without compromising on their identity.' Another journalist said: 'You can now see things like "selfie-interviews" rather than the "old-school" sit-down interviews. This is the new normal. One has to continually innovate'.

However, the problems of the new technology were also highlighted. One broadcast journalist said: 'On many occasions, rumour-mongering becomes a key source of information and the onus of verification becomes that much more cumbersome.' Journalists have to constantly watch social media for breaking news to ensure they do not play second fiddle in a highly competitive news environment. Frequent competition for breaking news leaves little time for journalists to verify news before dissemination. A female journalist said: 'The challenge (now) is to get real stories based on hard facts out to counter populist assumptions.' These comments indicate that while social media and citizen journalism may have

diversified news reporting and distribution, they carry some negative consequences for journalism practice, and make journalists' work to be complicated and risky.

Another downside of social media that has hit journalists hard is trolling. One journalist said: 'I faced a small dose of this when I tried writing to a BJP (ruling Bharatiya Janata Party) politician on Twitter and immediately got trolled by many of his supporters.' Reporters Without Borders (2017) regards trolling as 'hate speech targeting journalists (that) is shared and amplified on social networks, often by troll armies'.

The English-language media journalists' concerns about trolling reflect a broader national problem that underpins the tense relationship between journalists and the Modi government. *The New York Times* editorial of 17 August 2015 criticised the Modi government's moves to restrict Indian television networks from reporting freely, and the right of citizens to access the Internet (*The New York Times*, 2015). The soured relationship is at odds with promises of press freedom that Modi made soon after his re-election in 2018. In a widely quoted speech, Modi said: 'I want this government to be criticised. Criticism makes democracy strong' (cited in Madan, 2019).

Respondents also spoke of public perceptions of sensationalism and declining credibility of journalists who work in the national media. The blame levelled by politicians was picked up by their followers. The respondents felt that this trend also affected the English-language media and left it vulnerable to attacks, both from the public and the political establishment. A female print journalist said: 'There has been a certain attack on the media and its role in society originating from state officials and the public.' This observation resonates with journalists' views in a study on Fiji and Nigeria with regard to an adversarial relationship with their governments and politicians. These state officials used the media's alleged lack of professionalism to propose and impose harsher laws (Obijiofor, Murray, & Singh, 2017). One respondent felt that Indian audiences have little regard or respect for journalists, which matched the government attitude: 'The disdain for the news media in India… has received a stamp of approval from the PM and his government.' Another journalist added that 'once the media as a whole are left without credibility, they lose the faith of the people to act as a watchdog'.

Some journalists felt that journalism has been tainted by the increased amount of false news circulating online. This has compelled journalists to work harder to counter the false reports. A print journalist said:

> The internet, as helpful as it is, has also allowed for swift dissemination of false information. There are also many online 'journalistic' outlets that help in propagation of false information which further dents the media's personal credibility.

This statement reflects journalists' concerns about standards in general, including 'paid news', growing competition for news sources and content, and sensational and entertainment-driven news. In some ways, technological transformations have magnified the problem. The huge increase in the size of the media sector and the number of players has intensified competition. An online journalist notes, 'there is more quantity and less quality'. This view is reflected by Ninan (2012) in the analysis of Indian media trends:

> …ironically in India you have a situation where competition has led to less rather than more information and news gathering (Ninan, 2012).

The views indicate that generally, the negative impact of technology on India's English-language media and journalists is consistent with evidence presented in various studies (e.g., Stassen, 2010). The findings reflect the negative impacts of technology as reported in a comparative study of changes in journalism in Fiji and Nigeria (Obijiofor, Murray, & Singh, 2017).

Forces against editorial independence

Besides the impact of technology, political interference, advertiser influence and media owners exerting editorial control were also identified as key areas of concern. A broadcast journalist notes that, 'the control of the owner has only become more pronounced in the last few years. Ever since the new (Modi) government came to power, this trend seems a bit more disturbing and discomforting as an employee'. Another female journalist observed that, 'the current government, while more responsive to media queries and sharing data, is also more likely to lodge complaints/file cases/seek rejoinders to reports that show the government in poor light'.

Along with government interference, some respondents spoke of the prevalence of advertiser influence. Said a print journalist: 'Safeguarding advertiser interest is becoming more and more prevalent.' Another print journalist points out that, 'market forces have become stronger with the marketing department of every media house having better say in the news selection policy'. Another said: 'I have seen stories dropped/chopped to accommodate advertisements on pages.' Even the government was using advertising to influence media organisations, as related by a television journalist:

> Politicised interference in editorial content and staffing decisions remain a concern. We have witnessed cases in which this has enabled politicians to block our channels for broadcasting news that adversely affected their interests. National and state governments have used financial means, such as advertising purchases, to reward or punish news outlets for their coverage, which we have witnessed.

Another television journalist observed that, 'if promoters have some political affiliation then news will be delivered in that manner and real criticism would be avoided'. The study also found a connection between media ownership, media owners' political or corporate leanings, and editorial content. Many journalists said media ownership compromised objectivity in professional practice. A television journalist mentioned the difficulties experienced by news organisations that are funded by corporations. He said: 'No media entity can function without adequate financing, equity and support. Therefore, it seems to be quite a double-edged sword.'

A female print journalist described how the diversified business interests of media company owners into other sectors of the economy were impacting journalism: 'The motive of profits loom large as the organisation has invested in several businesses or has its own business offering, and often this interferes with the business reportage.' Pressures on journalists are attributed to media owners who view news as a form of profit-oriented business. A print journalist points out that, 'ever since newspapers became a product like any other brand of soap or toothpaste, the market forces have tightened their clutches over the media'. Another print journalist added that, 'investments in news media at best are about leveraging influence and buying out possibility of negative coverage'.

These comments support the literature on the growing commercialization of journalism across cultures, including the English-language media in India (Kumar, 2019).

The responses indicate that increased advertising means increased encroachment onto the editorial space, which was once considered sacred and separate from advertising. The journalists were concerned that the lines separating journalism and commercialism were not just becoming blurred but also had been crossed. This is the apparent trend in some other parts of the world. Since Fiji implemented media reforms in the 1990s, the media ownership structure has become increasingly corporatised, with allegations that certain Fijian media are in collaboration with business and the government in exchange for advertising contracts (Robie, 2014; Singh, 2015).

How changes in journalism affect journalists' performance on the job

Increased government influence and control over news narratives was also identified as a factor that has affected India's English-language media journalists in various ways. A female print journalist stated that events and political developments are now more cautiously reported than before'. Another print journalist said the Indian government 'has tried to send out a message that anything against government would not be tolerated'. Journalists felt that they are often seen by politicians as adversaries and portrayed as anti-government and anti-India. An online journalist said:

> The fact that a minister in the current dispensation coined the term 'presstitutes' is also an example of the disdain the establishment holds for the press. The government seems to believe that the media must be controlled and brought to heel, to control the narrative.

Journalists also spoke of what they felt was the pushing of the *'Hindutva'* policy by Modi. 'Hindutva' has been defined as 'an ideology that states that India is the homeland of the Hindus' (Ganguly, 2019). While non-Hindu Indians who recognise other beliefs are free to live in the country, they do so at the risk of subjecting themselves to leadership by Hindus. Ganguly (2019) argues the philosophy behind 'Hindutva' is 'deeply antithetical to the central tenets of Hinduism'. Respondents stated that those journalists who questioned the policy were trolled by Modi's 'Hindutva' supporters. They regarded this trend as a big threat to Indian journalism. Indian columnist Bhushan (2015) describes trolling as 'organised harassment' by a 'digital mob'—an 'ideological attack' on those who question Modi's Hindu nationalist vision.

Journalists' perceptions of their role in society

Most respondents felt that the difficult working conditions required journalists to play their watchdog role with even greater commitment. This view is consistent with the findings of a study of 1,800 journalists in 18 countries where increased state pressure on the media saw journalists more determined to uphold the watchdog role, regardless of the local culture or political climate (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). In this survey, a print journalist said: 'Actually, being a watchdog today is more important than ever. Times are bad and that is where a good journalist comes in to do a great job.' Another print journalist added that, 'good, unbiased and rigorous journalism is more important than ever'.

Changes expected in journalism practice in the coming years

Most journalists said the biggest change they expect in the coming years is the continuing growth and influence of the internet/social media on the profession. A print journalist said that, 'journalists will have to rethink how to produce their "content" as a lot of it will be consumed on mobile phones'. Another print journalist added that 'technology will decide content and new applications to seamlessly connect the print to the digital'. A television journalist said that, 'internet journalism and the new digital media will gradually start to play a more meaningful role, and one positive [of this is] the lack of regulation and relatively fewer restrictions'. These views are in line with Stassen (2010) who found social media will continue to play an important role in the future of journalism.

This survey's responses indicate that despite some misgivings, India's English-language traditional media are adopting the technology, which is helping them consolidate their position by, among other things, extending their reach and

influence through an online presence. Journalists in this survey indicated that they expected multi-lingual publications to proliferate more widely in regions throughout the country, partly as a result of mobile phone technology. A print journalist said, 'the English-language newspapers may see a rise in their print order due to the rise in literacy rate in rural areas'. A broadcast journalist said, 'Indian users of social media are exploding in numbers, and so is the number of languages they work in. Being a multilingual social media user gives me the perspective of several subcultures, their syntax, sensibilities and approaches.'

Conclusion

Interviews with India's English-language media sector journalists show that the significant impacts of economic reforms, technological advancements and political changes are taking a toll on journalists and journalism. While media have increased their reach and profitability, journalists are struggling with increased competition, and increased commercial and political pressure, which have added to the stresses of their jobs.

There is evidence of growing interference in editorial matters not just by government, but also by media owners and big business. Technology turned out to be a double-edged sword in that it has broadened the audience base and made interactions easier, while at the same time, increasing workloads and the risk of misinformation. A major concern was trolling, which had made journalists fearful about certain aspects of their reporting, especially in politics. This raises questions about the media's potency as a watchdog. Are India's English-language media, which enjoy the status of agenda setters, losing their bite?

Besides the celebrated watchdog role, another unique aspect of Indian media—the focus on development journalism—is also under stress. Commercial imperatives have changed both the content of news and the nature of news delivery, such as the 24/7 news cycle. Concerns surrounding the increased corporatisation of media ownership also surfaced, specifically the trend of media owners diversifying into other businesses by using the media arm to leverage new ventures. As one respondent put it, media owners now see news as a profitable commodity, like a 'brand of soap'. In a post-digitally disrupted news environment, the question is the full extent to which the English-language media have been affected by the pressures, and whether they still have the resilience to withstand the slings and arrows of their detractors, especially the aggression by Modi supporters.

This study's focus on mainstream English-language media highlights the need for further research into the other segments of the Indian media. For instance, how are India's vast vernacular media coping with the profound and rapid changes? In a climate where the national discourse is often based on ethnic, class, caste, political, and religious interests, the pressure of big politics and big business

on the news industry as a whole bears greater scrutiny, especially in India. It is important to conduct regular checks on the health of the Fourth Estate in the world's largest democracy.

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