
Economic Implications of Censorship on Media in a Conflict Zone (A Study of Media Ban and Censorship in Kashmir)

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Abstract: *The phenomenon of working and suspended news mediums and internet seems to have become a common order of the day in the Kashmir region. In the world where globalization reigns, outsourcing wins and decentralized tasks make things possible, internet runs as the blood for all these systems. Suspension of the same comes as a challenge and problem to many stakeholders. The government wishes to create a gag between what happens at the ground level and what people should hear. For that media and internet is suspended, slowed down or in worst cases banned. The end consequence of all these events and motives is the weakening of the media industry in Kashmir. People see disincentives coming from joining this field. As the field grows weaker, an important sector of the modern day growth tool kit lags behind. It adds to the problems of unemployment and economic stagnation and at the same time in the longer run fails to bring to surface the demands and wishes of the people. Chaos prevails, conflict continues and development faces a setback. This paper analyses the same and concludes by advocating a free and independent existence of the media entities.*

METHODOLOGY

Literature Review, Data Analysis, News Content Analysis

Keywords: *Advertisement, Ban, Revenue, Dis-Incentives, Economic loss*

1. RUNNING THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

Of late, the idea, incidence and growth of media in various forms has changed the life of every ordinary person. The growing awareness and the consequent information demands have paved way for the growth and development of the media industry. It at the same time has called for investments and innovations (industries, 2003). Adding all this up, the current day media is so efficient that all the coverage is a real time analysis. The 'live' updating system is in place and the events are traced in milliseconds.

The revenue generation process in the media industry however is not common or akin to any other industry. It is rather a complex and interwoven system of intricate relations that run parallel between a number of stake holders. It works as a circle between the media, advertisers and the consumers. Communication is involved at all the levels. The main source of revenue for the media house comes from the advertisers. The adds that the media sources carry come at a fair price born by the advertisers. There may be some other sources of revenue like the percentage profit from the sale of newspapers etc but that amount is always insufficient for the house (W He, 2013).

The salaries of employs, the cost of running the business, wear and tear and everything in between is managed by the revenue expenditure. As a result, the flow of smooth advertisements is the corner stone of existence for all such media entrepreneurs and stakeholders (C Kolo, 2003). If any sort of disruption takes place in the free flow of such advertisements and the consequent revenue the media firm comes under immediate financial crunch and in extreme situations may be pushed into seizure and closure.

2. ADVERTISEMENTS

A revolution of our modern times that has broken the myth of a number of ideas, principles and theories is the concept of advertisement. It comes with a bundle of positive and constructive effects but at the same time the ills of

advertisement are many(S Goyal). The foremost benefit of advertisements is that the mass awareness can be spread and social ills weeded out completely. Eradication of diseases like polio and hepatitis is due credited to the mass advertisement programmes run by the government. Social issues like child marriage, female foeticide and dowry have also been curtailed.

On the opposite end, the ills and problems created by advertisement also come in a long and rather unending list with every passing day. The making of advertisements as an idea is such that people are made to feel the need and necessity of things and events that didn't even exist up until some time back(JA Dean, Methods and apparatus for serving relevant advertisements, 2010). The concept of satiety¹ is destroyed. Ordinary customers are manipulated and sometimes even be fooled. Materialistic instincts of masses are given a hype and the desire for simplicity is curbed.

Taking all the positives and negatives aboard, it is indeed a truth about the present times that media and advertisement have taken hold of every aspect of an ordinary person's life. Any and every person living in the 21st century has at some or the other point in time been influenced by an(y) advertisement that the said person has come through (JA Dean, Methods and apparatus for serving relevant advertisements, 2010). A cursory imagination of an advertisement free life looks much simpler and basic. This in a way can be regarded as good and fulfilling, leaving an average person on a higher level of life-ladder².

3. ECONOMIC UPPERHAND

Since it is the summation of advertisers that pay the bill of the media houses, they expect certain favours in its place and in exchange. It has been seen that the media houses avoid certain topics. The main reason for the same is ascribed to the directions given by the advertisers to these media houses. Data from a survey reveals that more than 90% editors are pressurised by their advertisers to do a selective coverage or avoid a specific topic and 1/3rd of them actually do as directed(MJ Effendi, 2017).

Those who reject the dictates of the sponsors/advertisers take a huge risk as far the firm activity of the media entities is concerned. The advertiser can withdraw the advertisement from the said news channel or paper or whatever the media platform is and drain the financial resources of the firm(C Campbell, 2014). On an extreme level the nexus between the advertisers themselves can all of a sudden pull out advertisements from the particular media house and bring it to closure immediately.

This results in the infringement of the original truthful content for one and a propagandised information asymmetry³ for another. The information provided to the media users diminishes. And if it continues to happen, the concealing of facts takes over to the truthful coverage and provision of information(M Fan, 2007). The media turns into a propaganda agency and the credibility of the media from the said place is lost both for the locals as well as the international community.

4. CONFLICT AND MEDIA

There is an intricate yet sensitive relationship between media and conflict. The end purpose of media and all its agencies is to collect and present the reality with all the actualities maintained. Truthfulness is the cornerstone of this industry(Eilders, 2002). During the revolutionizing of the media especially with the growth of print and online ventures, the demand and supply of truthful accounts has been on rise. The decentralization has increased so much so that minute details are counted, accounted for and eventually presented.

In the conflict situation however, media cannot remain neutral. The presentation of facts and figures reflecting the ground level realities goes on increasing and the documentation growing over the course of time. in the modern

¹ The feeling or state of attaining complete satisfaction

² A dummy way of measuring the life satisfaction

³ The provision of only half and selective information while hiding and concealing the rest

globalized times, no nation wants the rest of the world to know that any sort of internal disturbance is going on (Jr, 1973). To prevent the same, at times media is banned and internet suspended. This aggrieved the media community for one and the continuous poking of nose of the government into its machinery, working and revenue sources makes the relation full with strife's.

The relation between media and conflict is circular and when things turn negative in place of harmonious, the vicious circle⁴ spells in. The state tries to keep the information limited and prevents the channels that circulate it amongst the masses (TE Nelson, 1997). Using various machineries the government keeps on doing things that keep the media at bay. The negative impacts keep on growing and the simultaneous influence and impact falls on the economic consequences. Economic processes and motives get hampered posing challenge on the smooth growth process of the economy (Rodríguez, 2011).

5. MEDIA IN KASHMIR

The media industry has shown a slow growth in Kashmir. A number of historic reasons lie behind it. Education was prevalent among the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims lagged behind in education. With the migration of the former to Jammu provision, it took some time for Kashmiri Muslims to advance in education and later on expand the horizons of knowledge. It was in the same wake that the birth and growth of media and its allied sources took some time to sprawl and mushroom in the Kashmir Valley.

As the conflict grew, it corresponded the time of growth of journalism in the Kashmir region. The reporting began to take place in all forms be it print or television. The awareness spread. More and more people understood it better (Gul, 2013). As days passed, the quality of journalism and mass communication improved and refined. But at the same time due to the existence of conflict and the attempts of the state sources to camouflage the same and present a rather peaceful picture, it never got sufficient grounds to grow especially in economic and monetary terms.

Outspoken bans have been a recurring feature of media outlets in this part of the world. Protests of journalists have also been common (Joseph, 2000). The challenging situations have always been there. As is the reality known about conflict, every party is at equal threat and risk from every other party, the members of journalism fraternity have seen a number of identified and unidentified violence and violation from time to time. Examples outnumber any other instance in the world outside (Ray, 2004).

Thus is the cumulative dis-incentive that accrues to the media industry in Kashmir. From state's poking nose in the freedom of press to the economic starvations and then to the extreme level of threat to life, the media in Kashmir is vulnerable (G Navlakha, Political Situation in Kashmir: Duped by Media and Government, 1996). The returns are less and the costs are very high.

6. PRINT MEDIA IN KASHMIR

Due to the absence of Multi-National Corporations in the Kashmir region, the main source of revenue for the media in general and print media in particular is the government. Both the state and the central government publish their advertisement through their respective organization (Correspondent, 2017). The organization of the state government being the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR); and the Central government's Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), forward advertisements to the media houses and go on about their regular business.

In Kashmir region there are 167 newspapers that are empaneled for the release of the official advertisements. The main newspapers including Greater Kashmir and The Mirror of Kashmir have deeper roots and an aged existence. They have been reporting from the ground zero for a number of decades on stretch. A summation of advertisements both government and private has been sustaining the existence of these and other newspapers (Agarwal, 2018).

⁴ Is a sequence of events that succeed one another, aggravating the situation and worsening it in every next spell

Due to a number of factors that feature back and again in this paper, the economic gains and returns from the media industry in Kashmir are very low. Only the people who find themselves passionate enough and strong to handle a life of lesser bounties survive in this profession. The media agencies in Kashmir are on the lower side of income, resources and funding's (Kissu, December). People find it tough first to make such a professional choice and then to survive in the media profession at all the levels.

On the other hand, the conflict situation and its direct impact on the media agencies brings a stronger blow to the existence and survival of this industry. Media essentially cannot be neutral in conflict situation. Nor can it shut its eyes to what happens at the ground level, in the coverage zone of its environment (Staff, 2017). Freedom of press is a primary characteristic of a democratic state. At the same time imposing restrictions on the media (be it on any accord) is an infringement with the basic nature of the democratic state.

7. THE RECURRING BANS

The first spell of ban on the media came in 2008 with the mass uprising that took place. Internet was banned thus the online portals seized. Next in the line were the local news channels. Those also saw the upper hand of the government and were barred from telecasting news and reporting any activity from the ground level (A Anjum, 2010). The last targets were the newspapers. The newspapers were banned and their offices sealed. The cumulative impact on the economic front was a huge loss made by these firms.

The spells continued in 2010 and 2012. The greatest jolt however came with the encounter of the young Hizb commander Burhan Wani in 2016. With the news of Burhan's killing spreading across the lengths and breadths of the state, every person hit the streets and the whole summer of 2016 witnessed uprisings of highest level since the 21st century. There was a suppression drive lead by the state and a simultaneous mass resistance lead by the ordinary people of the valley. The two parties were confronting on regular basis. Hundreds of youth dies, thousands got injured and many others were blinded by pellets (Ranganathan, 2013).

Newspapers on daily basis were reporting from ground zero. People were getting the updates and everyone was aware about the brutalities that were being conducted on a regular basis. It was when the ban on newspapers was again levied by the government. The ban was removed later after a due span of some months but the advertisements from the Central government's Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP) were banned. They haven't been revoked up until now. This cut the revenue of the media houses by half (F Nabeel). The survival of these firms was brought on constrained lines and the expenses gauged so as to keep them at a bare minimum.

Following the Pulwama attack in the month of February this year, the state government banned its advertisements in the two newspapers of Greater Kashmir and Kashmir Reader, putting a huge financial threat on the existence of these newspapers. Though no reason has been put forth by the state government despite the innumerable requests of the media fraternity, intuitively the journalists say that it is understood that these bans follow the directions of the national government to constrain and limit the existence in general and independent existence of media in particular in the Kashmir region.

8. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF MEDIA BANS

The first and direct impact of the ban on media comes on its long run existence. When the media house is seized and circulation of news stopped, the revenue accruing from the sale of the newspapers, channels and other sources pauses. No income is generated. The firm starts accumulating losses. The impact is distributed among the employees and each household that has a person/earning hand associated with this industry or media house gets to feel this negative impact (Chandran, 2017). The profession is seen and attributed as filled with dis-incentives⁵. In the long run this has a greater probability of translating into the abandonment of the field that eventually is the surviving rod of democracy and independent and free existence.

The steadily felt implication is the loss of revenue sources. Greater Kashmir with its sister Urdu newspaper Kashmir Uzma, employees a staff of five hundred. The media house claims that each day they sell around one lakh copies of

⁵ A factor/financial concern that discourages a particular action or activity

the newspaper. From 2016 onwards, when the central government decided to stop patronizing Greater Kashmir through advertisements, the media house began to run a loss of 10 lakh Indian rupees a month. And the latest ban beginning from February this year puts an additional loss of 15 lakh rupees on the house. What survives Greater Kashmir for now are the private advertisements that in no manner are sufficient to keep the working of the organization afloat and working (Furqan Faridi).

The media firm fears the disengagement of a number of staff members. Due to falling revenue it is not possible to run a big and decentralized unit. At the same time, the news house has to find ways and means to maintain a survival than to close down completely. It may go on cutting the salaries of the employees by 30-40% which will be a huge blow to them at the salary makes their two ends meet for thirty days in a row. The impact has begun to show as the current print of the newspaper barely runs to 12 pages which otherwise touched twenty.

This is the condition of the leading newspaper in the valley. The situation of other newspapers and news houses is worse. Their losses are lesser in numbers but much greater in percentage shares. Many of them have reached the point of closure and see their doom closer if the ban still remains in place.

9. INTERNET SHUTDOWNS

The state and government authorities switch to the shutdowns, bans and speed slowdowns of the internet as a measure that is called precautionary on the exterior but actually means to maintain the information gag so that people remain relatively calmer. This poses a direct impact on the media as the ground work that is done, is barred from publishing and spreading (West, 2016). The investments made in the attainment and refinements of such news items get wasted as the importance and durability of an average news item is closer to 24 hours.

The simultaneous advertisements are halted. With no advertisements, the revenue falls and it becomes tougher and tougher for the media enterprise to sustain for one and to bear the expenses of a big and decentralized staff. With the internet revolution, maximum loss to the media houses is set in place as the internet itself is barred, banned or halted. The people who are directly and indirectly associated with media face a sudden economic crunch and the indirectly related people and enterprises get to bear the consequences in next spans of time.

As a result, there is fundamentally a direct impact of internet ban on the media, its survival and growth of this industry in general. Being kept unfed in terms of content and (economic) resources, the media in Kashmir is left weak, poor and powerless (R Kathuria, 2018). Such a media has very less power to be vocal and to be an instrument and means of bringing the desired change by bringing to forefront the demands of the ordinary and common people.

10. HUMAN CAPITAL COSTS

The formation of human capital is a long run phenomenon. In the changing times, ever changing venues and ventures keep on engaging and disengaging people. The scenario that is trending currently is the online working system. It is innovative, efficient and broad based. Each single task can be carried out using the online podiums. In the same wake, online working, business and outsourcing has lately attracted a number of Kashmiri youth. There is education and skill prevalent on the higher scale amongst the young generation and carrying out nay job becomes easier for them (C Leberknight, 2018).

Over the course of last one and a half decade, a number of online ventures have come up. Their working, success and results have been on the higher side. Looking at the success story of the start-ups, new and more versatile people are coming into this field. The online business had just started to pick up when the first jolt to its steady beginning came. It was the first internet blockade of 2008 that kept at halt the whole working mechanism of online traders and employees.

The internet blockade was solely meant to create the news gag and to prevent the spreading of news from the ground level. It was initially the aim of curbing the press freedom that internet was closed down (A Kumari). The spiral impact came on the online businesses and portals. They began to face a huge loss on daily basis. Their client-ship was dimmed and lost over the course of extended ban. The losses accumulated so much so that many of these enterprises had to shut down due to unbearable and excessive losses.

The primary ban on media took in its ambit many direct and indirect ventures. The foremost being those associated with the media fraternity. The disincentives grew so much that the costs of pursuing this field and continuing working in it summed up to be quite high as compared to the benefits derived and accrued from it. This becomes the first casualty of media ban and a direct one. It pulls out people from a field of work and thus adds up on the pile of people who are unemployed and are out seeking jobs. It comes as an economic cost defined in terms of losses to the human capital generation and value addition to the field of services/knowledge sector.

Other victims and casualties of media ban include those associated with the online operations. This includes many micro level start-ups, IT firm employees, people doing the jobs that are out-sourced by the MNCs. It also has a negative spill over on the people who work from their homes and send their work online to their respective offices/heads. In all this the human capital formation is challenged (IM Ahmad, 2011). Not only a loss is suffered by them who work in this domain at the said point in time but a collateral loss and damage is caused to all as the potential job providers and job seekers see disincentives accruing to this field of activity.

11. CONCLUSION

Studying all the relevant aspects of conflict, some broader conclusions can be drawn. The first one is that the state should not expect the media to be neutral or facts concealing agency in the circumstances of an active conflict. At the same time, freedom to deliver the truthful messages is both the duty and aim of the contemporary media that shapes the ideologies of the global population.

The media fraternity in Kashmir with all the related and connected sectors is battling a survival. Funds are low, there is government intervention and the growth is stunted. This all sums up to add as a setback to democracy. In order to make globe a better place to live and grant human rights to all people, it is essential that the media is strong and independent enough to survive itself in the absence of any goodwill of any party.

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