

TRPs and Media Governance

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A new TRP scam that has come into fore has forced us to throw light on media governance. As media is considered the fourth pillar of democracy, proper control or regulation of programme content in media, be it digital or print, is very much necessary.

In news: Mumbai police have busted a TRP scam case.

Placing it in syllabus: Governance

Dimensions

1. In news
2. TRPs and their functioning
3. Other issues plaguing news media
4. Regulatory mechanisms in India
5. Reforms in regulatory mechanisms

Content:

In news:

- Rating agency **Hansa Services Private Limited**, a contractor of BARC, filed a complaint with the Mumbai police, alleging that some TV channels were manipulating their TRPs.
- The complainant firm said that the manipulated TRP ratings resulted in miscalculated targeted audience for the advertisers, which in turn resulted in losses of hundreds of crores of rupees because of the manipulated statistics of TRP.
- Two TV channel owners were arrested by the Mumbai police and directors, promoters of the third channel, Republic TV were investigated.
- Chief financial officer (CFO) of Republic TV, Shiva Sundaram, the founder, chairman and managing director of

Madison World, Sam Balsara, and the CEO of IPG Mediabrands, Shashi Sinha (latter two are media planners and buyers) were called by the police for questioning.

- A former executive for Hansa Research, responsible for running BARC's audience measurement service, was arrested.
- Upon interrogation, the arrested revealed that they were paid by certain channels to distribute Rs 400 to Rs 500 per month to households for keeping their channels on throughout the day.
- Republic TV issued a statement saying that Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh had made false allegations against the channel.
- The channel blamed that it was being targeted for its pursuit of the Sushant Singh Rajput death case.
- The petition filed before the Supreme Court by Republic TV was withdrawn after the apex court said that the High Court should first be approached.
- Republic TV moved the Bombay High Court seeking quashing of the FIR lodged against the channel by the Mumbai Police in the TRP scam case.
- The petition has also sought a direction to transfer the case to the CBI to ensure a fair and transparent probe.
- **The Bombay High Court directed the Mumbai Police to submit the progress report pertaining to the investigation into charges of TRP fudging by November 4.**
- The HC noted that Republic TV editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami was not an accused in the case so far and directed the Mumbai Police to issue summons to Goswami in the first instance if he is proposed to be added as an accused in the FIR.
- However, the bench said that in case of summons being issued, Goswami would have the liberty to move the HC for relief.

BARC:

- Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India is a joint industry body founded by stakeholder bodies that represent Broadcasters (IBF), Advertisers (ISA) and Advertising & Media Agencies (AAAI).
- Formed in 2014, it is the world's largest television audience measurement service.
- After its joint venture with TAM India, it is now the only ratings body for the broadcasting sector in the country.
- It currently measures TV Viewing habits of 197 million TV households in the country.
- It is guided by the recommendations of the TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB).
- BARC India is committed towards establishing a robust, transparent and accountable governance framework for providing data points that are required to plan media spends more effectively.
- It is set up to design, commission, supervise and own an accurate, reliable and timely television audience measurement system for India.

It releases **Broadcast India Survey**, an annual research study that gathers specific details of households and individuals to be used together with Census data in the preparation of universe estimates for TV audience characteristics like geographic, demographic, socio-economic status, etc...

TRPs and their functioning:

- Television Rating Point (TRP) is an **audience intensity measurement tool** which aims to identify how many viewers a particular programme on a particular TV channel is getting.
- The metric is calculated on a device which is attached

to a few thousands TV sets selected at random at the time of manufacturing.

- It is also popularly known as the **People's Meter**.

How is it calculated?

- The TRP device records the duration for which the programmes are watched.
- Calculated on a seven-day period, the data is released by the BARC on every Thursday and handed over to all TV channels.
- These numbers gathered from those TV sets are then treated by TV channels as a sample figure for reading audiences in different geographical and demographic sectors.

Importance of TRP:

- TRP has been the most significant parameter for channels and the program to promote and create more views so as to gain the popularity of a particular TV channel.
- It is a key factor in deciding the revenue of TV channels.
- The higher a channel's TRP, the more advertisements it will get, subsequently increasing their revenue scale.
- With fewer TRP ratings, TV channels struggle to get advertisers and may even lose the existing ones.

Other issues plaguing news media:

- With the rise of social media platforms the "Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression" is being used recklessly and carelessly by the citizens.
- There is a rise in hate speech, fake news and so-called anti-national activities online through defamatory social media platforms.
- Newspapers frequently over-dramatize some news stories just to sell more papers.
- In news channels sensational stories receive lots of

news coverage simply because they are exciting, not because they are important.

- Most news organizations lack proper internal guidelines for making corrections and do not even have a person designated to review and assess requests for corrections.
- While the media is busy covering sensationalist stories, issues that affect our lives and the whole world receive little attention.
- The reporting on national affairs by the major newspapers and channels have declined while the number of entertainment and celebrity stories has doubled. E.g. Dragging of Sushanth Singh suicide case.
- It seems clear enough that the market/profit mentality has won out. Media outlets are investing less in the quality of what they do.

Regulatory Mechanisms in India:

Self-regulation in the broadcast media is the best way forward in **achieving a balance between the media's duty to empower the participatory role of the people in governance and the reasonable restrictions that prevent the abuse of its immense strength.**

If it failed to exercise self-restraint and regulate its own conduct, then that would provide a justifiable reason for intervention from outside.

Therefore, **self-regulating is the best way so that there is no justification for any outside intervention to regulate.**

The existing bodies for regulation of media such as the **Press Council of India (PCI)** which is a statutory body and the **News Broadcasting Standards Authority**, a self-regulatory organization, issue standards which are more in the nature of guidelines.

One of the best examples is the **compliance of the media with**

the code of ethics framed by the National Broadcasters Association in the wake of the Mumbai terror attacks and the advisories issued from time to time.

Recently, the Chairman of the Press Council of India, former Justice of the Supreme Court, Mr. M. Katju, has argued that television and radio need to be brought within the scope of the PCI or a similar regulatory body.

Reforms in regulatory mechanisms:

The **Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2011** states that the social media platforms must inform their users not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, update or share any information that may affect public order and unlawful in any way.

The Supreme Court, in the **Whatsapp traceability case**, directed the Union Government to come up with guidelines to prevent misuse of social media while protecting users' privacy.

The Supreme Court of India, in **Alok Srivastava Vs. Union of India case** issued the following directions:

- Media (print, electronic or social) to maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing panic is not disseminated.
- A daily bulletin by the Government of India through all media avenues including social media and forums to clear the doubts of people would be made active.
- Media is directed to refer to and publish the official version about the developments.

Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, 1995 is the basic governing system for all TV channels related issues now. In 2006 the government had prepared a **Draft Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill, 2006**.

- The Bill made it mandatory to seek license for broadcasting any television or radio channel or program.
- It also provided standards for regulation of content.
- It called for the setting up of a separate **Broadcast Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI)**, covering **four major areas in its ambit**, which would call for major corporate restructuring by media companies, both foreign and domestic operating in India. These included **content, cross media ownership, subscriptions and live sports feeds**.

Along with the draft broadcasting Bill, the Ministry has also formulated a content code to regulate the programme “quality” being aired by broadcasters and to “protect the consumers interests”, national interests and right to privacy.

Mould your thought:

1. What do you understand by Television Rating Point (TRP)?
What are the issues that are plaguing news media in India?

Approach to the answer:

- Define TRP and its importance
- Write why it is news
- Write about the issues of media
- Write what reforms can be brought (SC directions and broadcasting bill provisions)