

# Improvements suggested making Indian Journalism Effective and Efficient

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**Abstract:** The author, a former journalist, has some suggestions to make to improve Indian journalism, making it efficient and effective. The author finds that lot of print is unnecessarily wasted in Indian journalism and all newspapers can reduce number of pages and increase profits. There is very little International coverage. Coverage of silly things can be reduced. Television journalism is full of cacophony and can be made serious. Print Journalism can offer gradation of news and perhaps summary after headline.

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## I. Introduction

Journalism occupies a great attention of every person in any nation. Every person at least devotes 10 to 20 minutes a day to some journalistic content - especially Newspaper or TV News Channel. Hence it is important that product of journalism has to be efficient and effective.

The author has been a journalist with Bennett and Coleman, the publishers of Times of India, when he worked with Economic Times Intelligence Group between 2003 and 2006. The author brings his engineering aptitude and out of the box thinking approach to make some suggestions to make Indian Journalism efficient and effective.

### Reduce Waste, Increase Profits

An average English Indian Newspaper, after removing spaces for advertisements has at least 20 pages. Now each page has at least 3000 words. Average reading speed of humans is around 250 words per minute. Hence it would take 12 minutes to read one page of a newspaper. And to read 20 pages would take 240 minutes or 4 hours at least.

Now the average reader would spend around 15-25 minutes with a newspaper. So even at the extreme, an average reader can read at the most 10% of newspaper. Clearly 90% of newspaper is being wasted. And it cost expensive print paper to publish this 90% of newspaper which is wasted.

Surely there is scope for at least 50% of newspaper print to be saved without reducing the amount of information and entertainment communicated to the reader. And that means a significant increase in profits. Of course for this all newspapers must cooperate, else newspapers not reducing number of pages might get more readers without necessarily getting more profits. Thus if all newspapers reduce number of pages cooperatively all of newspapers can increase profits by saving on newsprint costs.

### International Coverage

Indians as a nation are very insular. They think their nation is the best. Hence Al Beruni, an Arab Scholar is said to have remarked – “Al Hindu, MushkilPasand” – It is very difficult to like an Indian. They think that theirs is the best culture, best nation, best religion.

But that was 1000 years ago. The world has changed a lot since then. Well Indian pride should have been demolished since then with Mughal rule and Afghan rule and British rule following it. And also India is among the most poor of nations should crush vanity.

Surely India can learn something from other nations. But Indians still are not open to other cultures and have very little curiosity about other nations. Case in point being history text books for school students have very little coverage of history of other nations, though the first Prime Minister of India has written a book titled – ‘Glimpses of World History’.

This insularity reflects itself in International Coverage of Indian newspapers. As discussed earlier, an average newspaper contains 20 pages on average, after removing advertisement space. However on an average the international coverage is just 1 page. Imagine that only 5% of coverage is to the part of the world that has 80% of population and 95% of newspaper coverage is to that part of the world that has 20% of population.

It is granted that Indian newspapers will have more Indian content just as American newspapers have more American content. But can Indian newspapers devote say 20% of their space to 80% of population even if such population is outside of India.

So it is advised in view of the growing globalisation, that at least 4 pages out of 20 pages be devoted to International News. This is only fair considering that India imports form 20% of India's GDP.

### **Page 3**

Journalism is supposed to be the fourth pillar of democracy. Journalism is expected to be watch dog of democracy. However over the past 20 odd years there is steady creeping in of silly content in journalism.

This is what one calls Page 3 or similar things. The coverage of entertainment and parties almost takes a third of newspaper. One understands that there is place for entertainment. But that can take at the most 5% of space, which is how much space is now given to International News.

Presently the silly news content in Indian Newspaper - and we will call that Page 3 – is at least 25-35%. This should be reduced to no more than 5% of the newspaper.

### **Cacophony of Television**

If there is any space that presents caricature of journalism then that is Television. Of course TV journalists are in pressure to increase TRPs. But that does not mean that Television has to replace seriousness with sensationalism.

Television news should be serious 30 minute episode presenting all the news in the nation and the world. What it instead has reduced itself is to pandering of polemics and ritualization of rhetoric. Surely the audience is intelligent enough to separate the trash from truth.

Audience wants information, not entertainment. If audience wanted entertainment, audience has a choice to switch channels to entertainment channels. Media is not place for entertainment, especially when democracy imposes on it the onerous responsibility of being its watchdog in the form of its fourth pillar.

### **User Friendly**

Now every mobile app or website is trying to become more user friendly. Newspapers need to also become more user friendly. The idea behind becoming user friendly is to ease the process of the user.

Now consider a news article in a newspaper. On an average it has 500 words and a headline of 5 words. But what if the reader does not have time or the inclination to read 500 words? Can a newspaper also add a 50 word summary to the 500 word article so that the reader can get a gist and only if interested further bother to read 500 words. This has never been tried before. But, would it hurt?

Again there are almost 100 articles in a newspaper. Can there be some sort of gradation of news, just as there is gradation of hotels – 5 star, 3 star and 1 star hotels. How about grading important news on any page as 5 star, the not so important as 3 star and absolutely silly as 1 star. That way the reader does not even need to read the 50 word summary or for that matter the 5 word headline, let alone the entire 500 word article.

## **II. Conclusion**

Just because something has been done in a particular way is no reason for something to be continued to be done in that way forever. At least in corporate world there is an effort at continuous improvement. Shouldn't journalism adopt continuous improvement too? And if the rest of the world puts customer on pedestal and tries to change to serve the need, shouldn't newspaper make their reader equally important and try to become more User friendly. After all the most important duty of watch dog of democracy is to watch the fourth pillar of democracy – Itself.

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