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Social media's impact on journalism: A study of media's coverage of anti-corruption protests in India

Dr Usha M. Rodrigues
Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

The year 2011 was memorable for many in India – for those who participated in numerous anti-corruption protests, and for those who witnessed these protests via all pervasive mainstream news media. This paper will use inter-media agenda-setting discourse to explain the Indian media's coverage of the so-called 'Anna movement'. It will outline how the use of mobile and social media platforms by the 'India Against Corruption' organisers and the educated middle class influenced the mainstream media's coverage of the protests. The paper will consider the implication of this coverage, in the light of the unique position of power the Indian news media has in this *transitioning* society.

Introduction

The year 2011 was a year of revolutions, protests and social movements including the Arab uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. It was a year when civil society wanted and demanded change. How far it succeeded depended on the local context, resources and mobilisation capacity of the organisers, and their strategies to sustain and capitalise the power of the protesters. The year 2011 was also a memorable year for many in India who either participated in, supported from afar, or merely witnessed large street protests in India. Following the news of the Arab uprising, Indian activists and commentators had a spring in their step, so to speak. Something was changing in India; there was a significant level of unrest about a need to bring about a revolution, to clean up the polity and to get rid of corruption in India. Whether the Arab Spring was contagious for Indian activists to demand a change is a moot question [1].

This paper is not about the anti-corruption movement in India in 2011, although it is difficult to avoid talking about the merit, efficacy, success and failure of the movement. This paper is about how India's all omnipresent media, (800+ television channels, thousands of news publications, and hundreds of radio stations), covered the movement and why they did so. What does this coverage of the 'India Against Corruption' (IAC) movement, also referred to as the 'Anna movement', say about the state of the contemporary news media in India? Did the use of mobile and social media platforms used by the Indian educated middle class influence the mainstream media's wall-to-wall coverage of these civil society protests? Or, was it the race to attract audiences, which made the media cover the movement the way they did? The paper will use inter-media agenda-setting theory discourse to explain how and why the media was infatuated with this movement in India. It will demonstrate the unique position of power the Indian news media has in this *transitioning* society. Based on qualitative interviews and discourse analysis of the Anna movement's coverage by traditional news media, the paper will first outline the then (2010-2011) prevalent general atmosphere in the country and provide background about the call for enacting a strong Lokpal (ombudsman) bill to eradicate corruption from high places in India.

The ambience

Some journalists claim that the media had created an ambience in the country before the 'India Against Corruption' movement took off in 2011. Tensions had been building in 2010, when scams and scandals repeatedly made news in prominent newspapers and on numerous 24-hour television news channels, discrediting the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA government led by the Congress Party) in particular, and politicians in general. Some of the scams worth billions of dollars were made public by official watchdog bodies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and the Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) during this time. It was alleged that the Central government twisted rules and allocated 2-G spectrum licenses worth $5-6 billion (Rs 30,984 crore) to mobile phone companies at a cheaper rate in return for huge kickbacks (CAG, 2010).

Indians, living both in the country and overseas, particularly the middle class, were embarrassed by the scandals surrounding the 2010 Commonwealth Games held in New Delhi which featured huge irregularities in awarding of contracts. Following a number of investigations, some of which are still in progress, the CBI filed a charge sheet in a special CBI court against Suresh Kalmadi, the chair of the Organising Committee (Kumar, 2011a). In Mumbai, the Adarsh Housing society scam hit the headlines, where apartments in a high-rise building on defense land, earmarked for Kargil war heroes and their widows, were allocated to top politicians, government officials and military officers for hugely deflated prices. Another scandal – known as Coalgate – engulfed the ruling party. A CAG performance audit draft report, focusing on the allocation of coal blocks and the performance of Coal India in 2005-2009, was leaked to the press. The CAG draft report made explosive allegations about illegal and corrupt mining of ore in several states, defrauding the state of huge mining revenues worth several hundred billion dollars through ministerial and official collusion, encroachment of forest land, and trampling tribal communities' rights in the process (N. Ram, 2012: 12).

These scandals added to the general atmosphere of frustration amongst the Indian population. The issues pertaining to a growing population, high inflation, and uneven distribution of wealth following the past two decades of rapid economic growth continued to plague the country. The administrative system was, and continues to be, unable to keep up with the strains of growth, resulting in an uneven demand and supply situation in meeting official guidelines and regulations, where the easiest way to 'get the job done' is by accepting and giving bribes. In India, politics has become a dirty word. Horse-trading among national and regional parties to form a government of alliance at central and state levels in the past two decades has created a sense of instability and uncertainty in the country. Stories of corruption and a lack of transparency and accountability among politicians and bureaucrats have taken their toll on the Indian population's perception of politics in the country. Ashutosh, Managing Director, *IBN7* – a prominent Hindi news channel, explains why the anti-corruption movement and its leader Anna Hazare became popular in 2011:

People were fed up, society was waiting, media had given them a reason, media had created an issue, created an ambience and an atmosphere, and in that charged atmosphere, people were waiting for a leader and suddenly Anna Hazare came in. He took the initiative. He did only one thing, he raised his voice. He was not attacking only the Congress (ruling party). He was attacking the political establishment as such… (Personal communication, June 19, 2012)

Civil society demands a strong Lokpal Act

Since the early 1960s, many in civil society have been demanding that an office of Lokpal (Ombudsman) should be set up to curb the mounting corruption in India. Earlier, this campaign was restricted to reducing corruption in the public administration in the country, but in recent years it is the political establishment that has become the focus of this demand to set up such an independent accountability body. In 1966, the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) recommended that an institution of 'Lokpal' at the Centre, and 'Lokayuktas' in the states, should be set up to remove a sense of injustice from the minds of adversely affected citizens, and instill confidence in the efficiency of administrative machinery in India (Baisakh, 2005: 1). The first Lokpal bill was presented during the fourth Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) in 1968 and passed in 1969. However, the bill remained 'pending' in the Rajya Sabha (upper house of parliament). Subsequently, a version of the Lokpal bill has been presented in the Indian parliament houses in 1971, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2008. Each time, it was referred to a committee for improvement.

The institution of Lokpal, in its current version, is expected to strengthen the role of the existing crime investigative authorities such as the CBI and CVC, and to give increased level of authority to the new institution of 'ombudsmen' to inquire and deal with allegations of corruption against public functionaries including ministers. Meanwhile, the institution of Lokayukta has been constituted in 17 of the 28 states and seven union territories in India so far. Usually, a former High Court Chief Justice or former Supreme Court Judge is appointed at a Lokayukta at state level. Members of the public can directly approach the Lokayukta with complaints of corruption, nepotism or any other mal-administration against a government official (What is Lokayukta?, 2010). However, not all Lokayuktas have the power to investigate and prosecute elected representatives in their

respective states. These Lokayuktas have also not been provided with independent investigative mechanisms, making them dependent on the government agencies, thereby allowing bureaucrats and politicians to interfere with the processes of investigation (Baisakh, 2005: 3). In the past four decades, almost every political party has promised to set up the institution of Lokpal, but it has yet to become law.

Following continuous coverage of scandals and scams in the media and an exploitation of the same by the opposition parties led by the Bharatiya Janata Party in parliament, a sense of panic and outrage seemed to grip the country. In the 2nd half of 2010, several activists who had been involved in a number of civil campaigns in the past including Right to Information (RTI) which became an act in 2005, came together to find a solution to the deep-rooted corruption in the Indian polity and the corporate world. Arvind Kejriwal, Prasant Bhushan, Shekhar Sing, Santosh Hegde, Nikhil Dey, and Aruna Roy drafted the first version of the Jan Lokpal Bill (people's ombudsman bill) (Ashutosh, 2012: 17). Later Arvind Kejriwal with his team launched their 'India Against Corruption' (IAC) web site in November 2010 to mobilise the population (IAC spokesperson, personal communication, November 9, 2012).

The IAC website, their Facebook page, and later their Twitter account, started gaining 'likes' and comments supporting their fight against corruption, spurring the movement leaders to launch a number of campaigns including 'SMS' or text-messaging drives and petitions at local levels across the country. Volunteers were recruited to join the campaign in numerous cities and towns in India. A number of local and regional level rallies, including the January 30 rally in Delhi, generated further momentum for the campaign to mobilise people against corruption. A number of parallel initiatives, including an 'Ipaidabribe' website, attempted to bust local level corruption by naming and shaming the people who asked for bribes.

Anna Hazare, who had been a campaigner against corruption and mal-administration in Maharashtra (a state in the West of India with Mumbai as its business capital), was approached by Arvind Kejriwal to join the movement. The team, later referred to as Team Anna by the media, demanded that the ruling party consult with the members of 'civil society' to draft a strong Lokpal Bill. Following a dissatisfactory meeting with the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Team Anna decided to sit on a *dharna (sit-in protest)* and launch their hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on 5 April 2011.

During the mass protest, the nation's youth and professionals showed their support for the movement via social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The IAC organisers used their mobile phones to communicate and pick up people, who were dropped off by the police after being picked up from various protest sites. They used mobile phones to spread their messages and warned each other of police action via SMS. They used the social media sites to garner support and spread their messages of upcoming events and protests. The co-founder of the Public Cause Research Foundation and one of the media strategists for the IAC movement, Abhinandan Sekhri (personal communication, June 19, 2012) claims that "the (IAC) movement was not an organised movement", and although social media was part of the movement's communication strategy, the fact that "it would be this effective or the movement would become so big was not expected. It surpassed all our expectations as to how effective it was".

The movement was supported by a large number of working class citizens such as taxi drivers, farmers, the underemployed, and religious leaders (*babas* and *saints*) (Anna Hazare's crusade stings government, 2011). They all joined the chorus against politicians and a general call to end corruption. And, as some say (Sekhri, Ashutosh, Thapar, Mudgal), the movement was cheered by India's enviably large number of 24-hour news channels and newspapers, because of its surprising popularity among the middle classes. In fact Sekhri, a writer and television producer, was surprised by the media's role as the 'cheerleader' for the movement. On April 3 and 4, Sekhri said, "we weren't even sure if we would be able to pay the bills" for the equipment rented for the Ramlila Maidan tents. "When people came, the media came. The media was a cheerleader and that was great, then more people came. As part of team Anna that was fantastic but as a media professional I am not so sure" (Sekhri, June 19, 2012).

Ashutosh says, in his book *Anna – 13 days that awakened India,* the arrival of Anna Hazare in Delhi coincided with the arrival of the victorious World Cup Cricket team at Delhi airport. Ashutosh argues that the initial skepticism about the Anna team's tactic of blackmailing the government into action by going on indefinite hunger strike, gave way to a coverage reserved for exceptional events such as Mumbai terrorism attack.

> " The electronic media found an opportunity in this agitation and backed Anna with a vengeance… By evening, all news channels had changed their agenda and Anna, only Anna, was the news (Ashutosh, 2012: 32). "

People were attracted by the anti-politician stand of the movement. A number of smaller political parties from the left of the spectrum showed their support for the movement as well, but political leaders who visited the protest sites, were booed off the stage by the people. The protest spread to hundreds of cities and regional centers in India. (For a visual feel of the movement please go to one of a number of videos uploaded on YouTube

http://youtu.be/TkncncdPynw). Finally, after four days of the hunger strike, on April 9, the government capitulated and agreed to a joint committee to redraft the bill with the help of the members of the movement.

As members of Team Anna began negotiating the redrafting of the bill with government representatives, one of the spiritual leaders Ramdev held his protest (highlighting the need for strong legislation to repatriate hundreds of billions of dollars worth of Indian 'black money' deposited in foreign bank accounts) at the historic Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi on June 4, 2011. On June 5 midnight, police raided the protest site and detained Ramdev at the site where he was fasting, and used tear-gas and lathi-charged (used batons) his supporters to break his indefinite hunger strike. Hazare wrote to the Prime Minister about his decision to go on an indefinite fast from 16 August at Jantar Mantar, because it was the right of Indian citizens to protest and the government could not crush their movement, as was the case with the Ramlila ground protests ("Will go on fast from Aug 16: Hazare writes to PM", 2011).

On the morning of the 16th August, Hazare was remanded to judicial custody for seven days. He began his hunger strike while in police custody, setting off a groundswell of protests across the country and in and outside the parliament. This was perhaps the greatest mistake by the ruling UPA, making Anna a household name. The mainstream media, particularly the 24-hour news channels could not find a better story – *full of drama, conflict, visuals and popular support*. There was wall-to-wall coverage of *Anna's movement*. In a message, Anna said this was the beginning of the 'second freedom struggle' and called on people to participate in a 'jail bharo' (fill up the prisons) agitation. As protests spread all over the country, the Congress government decided to release Hazare and his supporters to stop the disruption of law and order in the country. Finally after 12 days of the fast, the government agreed to three basic principles – a citizen's charter, lower bureaucracy for the functioning of the Lokpal and establishment of Lokayuktas (ombudsman institution) in all states.

On December 27, 2011, Anna again began his protest fast demanding a stronger version of the Bill be implemented, but this time in Mumbai the protest did not attract as many people. He ended his fast due to ill health and a low turn out. As a result, the media's coverage of the protest too fizzled out, raising questions about the media's motives in covering Anna's movement. Meanwhile, on December 27 and 28, a version of the Lokpal Bill was hotly debated in the parliament and was passed by the Lok Sabha, but it was not placed for a vote in time in the Rajya Sabha before it adjourned for the winter break (Kumar, 2011b; Prasad, 2011). On May 21, 2012, the bill was once again referred to a Select Committee of the Rajya Sabha for consideration (Lokpal Bill tabled in Rajya Sabha, referred to select committee, 2012). The bill has not been passed into law as yet.

Media's role in Anna's Movement

In 2012, the movement did not reach the same heights as it did in 2011. Many commentators have dissected this shift in the media's coverage from blind support of the movement to a skeptical view of the movement leaders. The fervor pitch gave away to murmurs of discontent. One of the IAC organisers, Sekhri (personal communication, June 19, 2012) says the Jan Lokpal bill (people's version of Lokpal bill drafted by the Anna team) was the most dissected bill in current times, unlike most other legislations, whose details journalists would not be able to recall. 'The media learnt a lot during this period, they evolved a lot, but they also demonstrated how class and language determine how they cover a news story' (Sekhri, 2012).

The fever pitch coverage of the movement by 24-hour news channels has become something of a phenomenon for history books. Ashutosh (personal communication, June 19, 2012b) says, 'Anna Hazare is incidental, the country was ready for a movement. They were just waiting for a leader.' He also believes that the media has played a significant role in raising people's awareness about the political corruption, making it an important issue.

> " TV channels have been aggressive, whereas print media have tried to be objective and neutral. TV openly took sides – this is wrong, this gentleman is corrupt – it has to be hammered, it has to reach its logical conclusions... (Ashutosh, 2012). "

On the other hand, CNN-IBN 'Devil's Advocate' show host Karan Thapar (personal communication, June 20, 2012) says that the mainstream media was partisan in its coverage of the Anna movement, at least in the early stages.

> " Television more so than the newspapers. But at the end of the day, both newspapers and television believed that in Anna Hazare they saw a mass movement that they thought reflected a change in India, and a new moral call for politics. And, both in their different ways were initially swept off their feet. As a result they failed to question the contradictions within the movements. "

According to Manu Joseph, the executive editor of *Open Magazine*, the media's coverage of the Anna Hazare's

movement was 'pathetic'. 'Some of the television anchors, who were already under pressure after the Radia Tapes [2] – thought if they reported on a seeming revolution, they will come out as ethical journalists' (Joseph, personal communication, June 20, 2012). He argues that the media caters to the middle class because advertisers like the middle class, that is why team Anna's story was so important for the media. He questions the authenticity of the movement itself because of its support being rooted in the 'middle class' in India.

However, a social scientist and former journalist, Vipul Mudgal, defends the middle class nature of the movement, particularly noting the fact that the Indian middle class can be anywhere between 265 to 650 million people, earning $2 (Rs 100) to $500 (Rs 10,000) a day [3] . He acknowledges that the movement could have had deeper roots and been more savvy in its understanding of corruption at policy level.

> " It was not an uprising, but it was definitively a bona fide movement. It was a movement of the middle class. It articulated their anxiety and their aspirations. And above all, a frustration with the political system … it is not to say that people who have mineral water bottles and have mobile phones have every right to protest is wrong…
>
> But, at the same time, if they had taken along the Dalits (the lower caste poor population in India) with them, if they had looked at corruption actually beyond the customary taking and giving of bribes. And, looked at policy landscape, at the mining policy – the way things are done, the way national resources are allocated and shared and things like that, and brought them into the ambit of corruption, then I think the complexion would have been different. (Mudgal, personal communication, June 18, 2012). "

There were also those who criticized the structure of the Jan Lokpal Bill, raising nuanced questions about its efficacy and 'magic wand' like expectations from the Lokpal for eradicating corruption. They asked questions such as – who will control the Lokpal if it becomes an unwieldy mighty structure? What about the role of other accountability institutions Lokpal will trample over? Why not resurrect other democratic institutions of governance and accountability in the light of Lokpal? Aruna Roy of NCPRI, who was initially part of the team that wrote the first draft of the Jan Lokpal bill, raised questions about the Team Anna's tactics of using the media to gain support for the movement.

> " We have now clearly understood how television can be a force multiplier that can beam a sense of urgency into every home and be a perfect advertising space for instant remedies. We are beginning to understand how it can also define 'flop shows' and 'failures', almost dismantling a movement in the course of an afternoon. Can one say that if you 'live' by the media, you must be prepared to 'die' by it as well? (Roy & Day, 2012) "

In the latter part of 2011, the media also started reporting allegations of misuse and mis-appropriation of funds by some of the members of Team Anna and Anna himself, further undermining Team Anna's credibility. Some media experts felt that the Anna movement had been diluted by the presence of holy men and politicians who joined the movement for a free ride. Although social media platforms helped the movement organisers to gather support in the initial stages, social media as marketing tool requires constant effort and Team Anna struggled to keep up with it. ('Brand Anna: Why Anna Hazare failed to attract crowds this time', 2012). There were pointers and accusations about Anna's partisan support for right-wing parties, as opposed to their claim of neutral stand against the government and all political parties. The breaking of the Team Anna, and Arvind Kejriwal and Prasant Bhushan's efforts at launching a political party, too undermined the movement's support because of its earlier stance of remaining a non-political movement.

Impact of social media: a case for inter-media agenda setting

Considering the impact and potential of social media platforms in engaging and organising the younger and educated middle class in India, also the target for many advertisers, it is not surprising that mainstream Indian news media and journalists have tapped into this rich tapestry to get a sense of what matters to this group of audiences. Almost every newspaper and news television channel, and their editors and prominent journalists, have a Twitter account. For that matter, a number of prominent Indian film personalities and sports stars too are on social media platforms – engaging with their fans and audiences. Notwithstanding the fact that only about 11 per cent of the Indian population has access to the internet, much lower than the global average, it is still around 137 million Indian users, including 75 per cent under 35-year-olds, who are connected to the world wide web, according to ComScore 2011 data. Social networking sites reach as many as 84 per cent of these internet users, one of the highest in the world. News consumption online among Indian internet users is as popular (58 per cent) as it is for web users elsewhere in the world (ComScore, 2011). Some of the popular news sites Indian online viewers visit include the *Times of India*, Yahoo! News Network, *The Economics Times*, NDTV network,

OneIndia, CNN Network and the *Hindustan Times*.

In the light of the above, it is important to examine if this changing media ecology (traditional and online media) intercepted with journalists' two-way interaction with their audiences on social media had an impact on the media's coverage of Anna's movement. Within this context, one of the traditional theories of agenda setting –– particularly who and what sets news media's agenda that is 'inter-media agenda setting' is used to explain Anna's movement's coverage by the media. At its simplest level, the media agenda setting hypothesis states (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) that media coverage, by providing the public with cues about the significance of various political issues, exerts a strong influence on the relative importance the public attaches to these issues. A number of studies since 1972 have found a strong relationship between the media and public agendas. In his review of the literature on the media and agenda setting hypothesis, McCombs (2005: 544) says: "this often-documented transfer of salience from the news media to the public is a key early step in the formation of public opinion".

Since its first appearance in 1972, the agenda setting theory has grown to a theory to include: A second-level agenda setting component (attribute agenda setting); a psychological component to explain individual level agenda setting effects (need for orientation); an emphasis on how the media's agenda is shaped; and an explanation for the sharing of news agenda among different media (inter-media agenda setting) (Meraz, 2011: 177). In the past, this line of research has focused on relationships between national news agencies and daily newspapers (McCombs and Shaw, 1976). A significant and high correlation was found in topic agendas between newspapers in their coverage of state legislature (Atwater, Fico & Pizante, 1987). Another research study identified significant influence of the *New York Times* as an agenda-setter for the international news agenda of three leading American evening newscasts (Golan, 2006).

Similarly, in recent years, Lee, Lancendorfer and Lee (2005) provided additional evidence for the inter-media agenda setting phenomenon in their examination of the influence of Internet bulletin board conversations on newspaper coverage of the 2000 South Korean elections. They found that newspapers and bulletin boards had a reciprocal inter-media agenda setting effect in the shaping of their agendas of issues and attributes. In another quantitative study of inter-media agenda setting between traditional news media and blogs, Messner and Garrison (2011: 122) show that traditional news media heavily influence the agenda of blogs by being their dominant sources. On the other hand, blogs are also gaining a growing influence on the agenda of traditional news media.

It is hard to establish when the media decided to cover Anna's movement in a big way. But, as indicated by Sekhri (personal communication, June 19, 2012) from Anna's movement, the response to their social media strategy of launching the 'India Against Corruption' web site, creating Facebook pages, and launching online campaigns and petitions surpassed all expectations. The day after the protest at Jantar Mantar on April the 5th, as 24-hour news television channels began playing up the protest, social media came abuzz with chatter. By April 11, over 617,000 people had registered their support for the campaign on platform the *Avaaz* platform. Hashtags such as #janlokpal; #annahazare and #meranetachorhain began to trend on Twitter. YouTube had more than 2,000 video shots uploaded by participants. Anna Hazare's Facebook profile page had over 130,000 likes (Kurup, 2011).

By August 16-17, when Anna and his team went on their second fast-onto-death, over 150 Facebook pages relating to Anna and 'India Against Corruption' had been set up by enthusiasts. The official IAC site had more than 320,000 'likes', which later increased to 500,000 likes, more than many leading brands. #supportannahazare remained the most discussed topic on August 17 with over 8000 tweets; over 9000 conversations related to #Janlokpal (Ohri, 2011). Over 100,000 people on YouTube watched Anna's interview recorded inside Tihar Jail. There were over 80,000 supporters at Ramlila Maidan on August 27 when Anna ended his 12 day-long fast (Rawat, 2011). As described earlier, when leading news channels such as NDTV, Star News, Times Now, CNN-IBN, and Aaj Tak started covering the movement, other media followed suit.

Indian citizens from across the class divide, particularly those referred to as the 'middle class' were on the streets, marching in a number of towns and cities. So were the advertisers on television news channels vying to benefit from consumers' attention on the small screen. In the period between 16 and 24 August, Anna's movement against corruption hogged the limelight, occupying 88.5 per cent of primetime content on news channels, according to data from the Centre For Media Studies' ('Anna obsession boosts TV news channels', 2011). The data consists of total per day news average of four channels – NDTV 24X7, CNN-IBN, Star News and Aaj Tak. Among these channels, Star News gave maximum footage to Anna's fast – 97.1 per cent of the prime time news hole was devoted to the movement or 1,310 minutes in the week; its focus on other news was just 2.9 per cent. On Aaj Tak, news coverage of Anna was as high as 92.2 per cent, while 7.8 per cent was other news. NDTV 24X7 and CNN-IBN gave 85 and 81 per cent of their primetime to Anna's cause. Interestingly, on August the 24th all the four channels aired news related to Anna only and no other news was covered (Anna obsession boosts TV news channels, 2011).

The news genre, which was under tremendous revenue stress in preceding years following the global financial crisis, saw a dramatic rise in viewership. As per the Television Audience Measurement (TAM) data for the week ended August 20, the genre share of Hindi news channels saw an 87 per cent jump in the viewership, while the English news genre saw a boost of 74 per cent. TAM data also suggests that not only did more people viewed the news channels but they watched it longer ('Anna obsession boosts TV news channels', 2011). The Lokpal bill at its peak was the second most watched news in 11 years, second only to the Mumbai Terror Attacks. Over 1.5 million people were glued to news channels, overall share of news channel genre jumped from 9.6 per cent to 13.8 per cent (Rawat, 2011). Kurup (2011) says social and traditional media appeared to supplement each other, making a case for inter-media agenda setting. Although there was a genuine desire on the part of the common man to see the system change, the tightening of the media's political economy and severe competition following 'glocalisation' [4] of Indian news media (N. Ram, 2012; Rodrigues, 2010) seem to make traditional media follow the middle class' lead – as expressed by joining the protest marches and showing support on social media platforms.

Conclusion

Although in the past two decades the Indian television industry has grown from one public service broadcaster to 800+ channels, some would argue that there is a paucity of diversity in content. A number of these channels – despite being 24-hour news channels – cover the same stories, even in the same style and format.

> " When we had seven channels, we had more variety in programming. Now, we have 800 channels and we have less variety. Everybody is reporting the same thing. We are told competition works in capitalism – I agree, it worked in capitalism, but in neo-liberalism, it doesn't work (Mudgal, personal communication, June 18, 2012). "

This is supported by evidence from other countries where 24-hour news channels have the time and the space to cover stories in-depth, but the race to provide up-to-date news to consumers any time they switch on their televisions has made them go after the newest chunk of news available (Lewis, 2010).

According to Lewis (2010, p. 86), there are three principal reasons for this. First, 24-hour news has been packaged as a commodity form – into disposable news chunks, a series of rolling news bulletins that can be sold to audiences looking for an up-to-date news bulletin on tap. Second, news channels negate their assets of time and space by stressing short-term immediacy, namely their ability to cover 'breaking news'. Third, in an effort to cover the newest information news channels adopt a strategy of going 'live', thereby favoring the instantaneous over the analytical on the mistaken assumption that the 'live world' is self-explanatory. In case of India, Ashutosh (personal communication, 19 June 2012b) explains,

> " …television channels have an hour of news – every hour you've to produce the front page of the paper… Our job is to cover basic headlines of the day, we have 10 stories in one hour, we want to be urgent, immediate, so there is only so much room to cover various stories. "

As far as quality of news is concerned, the Head of the Press Council of India, former Supreme Court Justice Markandey Katju, has criticised Indian journalists for being "ill-considered, sweeping and uninformed" (Porkharel, 2011). On the other hand, N. Ram, former Executive Editor of *The Hindu* (2012), says that the Indian news media has a good track record in building an agenda on the theme of corruption by investigating wrong doings, and building on investigations done by official watchdog bodies in recent times. However, "when it comes to economic issues and policies, the mainstream media's contribution turns out to be anything but democratic" (N. Ram, 2012: 13). He says Indian journalism is under increasing pressure from advertisers, marketing personnel and corporate managers to present feel-good stories.

Whether it is the political economy of the media or the need for 24-hour news channels – in 2011 the Indian news media experienced the power of being on the side of the 'middle class' in India, which the advertisers desire. The severe competition for ratings is making the traditional media take various steps to connect with these consumers. The Anna movement's case study points to what and how certain factors set the media's agenda. There were two levels of inter-media agenda setting in operation here: one, between news media – newspapers following the agenda set by 24-hour news channels, and television news in general following the leaders in the industry (Centre for Media Studies research); two, the popularity of the movement and their protest on social media platforms seems to have influenced the news media to jump on the bandwagon of this 'middle class' movement (see statistics above about popularity of the movement on social media platforms).

Although a general perception is that media created Anna (Thapar 2012; Roy & Day 2012; Joseph 2012), others believe that the media did not create the movement, which was already there on social media platforms, but amplified it by its coverage (Ashutosh 2012; Mudgal 2012). A survey by *Indiabiz* news and Research Services of

youth in major Indian cities showed that 76 per cent of youth believe that social media empowers them to bring change to the world they live in. They feel empowered by the ability to express themselves, to garner information and to make their own choices via social media networks and spaces (Social media is the space for change, says the youth of India, *Tech,* 2011). The survey also showed that anti-corruption is one of the most prominent social causes endorsed by 32 per cent of the youth surveyed. One may question the overboard coverage of Anna's movement by some of the news channels during specific days in April and August 2011 by blacking out all other news in the process, but this landmark event did highlight the power of the traditional news media in India when it showcased its capacity to make or break a 'cause' (a lack of media coverage of Anna's fast in December in Mumbai is partially blamed for the fizzling out of the movement). The interaction between the political economy of the media, and its need to attract audiences, kept it connected with the Anna movement for most of 2011, raising the issue of political corruption to a fever pitch level, realising their own power in mobilising people (Rajagopal, 2011: 3).

For the media, the popular mobilisation was a sign of their own success and not only that of Anna Hazare. From the reports following the campaign's conclusion, in fact, it is clear that the two were closely linked from the outset. It proved that the media could help move people onto the streets for a cause.

Although, Anna's movement fizzled out in 2012, some believe that the IAC movement and the subsequent corruption exposers has re-introduced forgotten ideas and lexicon in the Indian discourse, including 'corruption', 'conflict of interest', 'misuse of office', 'the political-corporate nexus', 'cross-party collusion', and that rules should apply to those who wield great power (Chaudhury, 2012). According to Chaudhury, the media received a clue about what matters to their consumers, that is the middle class, and how they need to change their discourse to make those in power accountable.

Notes

1 For more on spread of movement by contagion in a world networked by the wired internet see Manuel Castells' book *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age,* (2012). As well see a critique of Castells' book by Christian Fuchs (2012).

2 A controversy about media being close to business and politicians. The controversy relates to a political lobbyist Nira Radia, and her relationship with politicians, corporate houses and senior journalists. Her conversations with some of these elite in India were recorded by the income tax department in 2008-2009, leading to accusations of misconduct by many of these people.

3 Although there is an agreement that the Indian middle class has been growing rapidly in the past two decades, there is no consensus about the size of it. The Asian Development Bank (2002) estimated that there are about 650 million people who can be categorized as being in the middle class, whereas others put it at 300 million in 2004 (Sridharan, 2004). A recent report by Indian National Council for Applied Economic Research's (NCAER) Center for Macro Consumer Research said that by 2015-16, India would be a country of 53.3 million middle class households, translating into 267 million people (India's middle class population to touch 267 million in 5 years, 2011).

4 Details of the impact of globalisation Indian news media, particularly the Indian television industry can be found in Rodrigues (2010).

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About the author

Dr Rodrigues has worked as a journalist and journalism educator for more than 25 years. She has co-authored Indian Media in a Globalised World (2010) with Sage Publishers; and co-edited Youth, Media and Culture in the Asia Pacific Region (2008) with Cambridge Scholar's Press. A second co-authored book, Indian News Media: From Observer to Participant, is in press (2014 publication) with Sage.

Email: usha.rodrigues@deakin.edu.au