

Altering Indian Media Landscape During The Kargil War: An Analysis¹

Abstract

As two decades have passed since India won the Kargil War against Pakistan, it is imperative for the scholars of media and conflict studies and for the media military relationship practitioner to understand the transformation occurring in Indian media landscape in the backdrop of the war. The research paper attempt to discuss the altering Indian media landscape during the Kargil war (1999). The paper endeavors to understand and analyse the changing paradigm of Indian media landscape in the last decade of 20th century.

Keywords: Kargil, India Pakistan Conflict, Media-Military Relationship, New Economic reforms, Indian Television, Print Media.

Introduction

The Indo Pakistan war of 1999, also known as the Kargil war took place between May 8, 1999, when Pakistani forces and Kashmiri militants were detected atop the Kargil ridges and July 14, 1999, when both sides had essentially ceased their military operations. In the Indian context, it was the 'First televised war' which brought the realities happening on ground zero in the 'drawing rooms' of Indian families. The war changed the dynamics of Indian media- military and paved way for a renewed relationship, which matured from media management to media-military relationship. As two decades have passed since India have won this war, it is imperative for the scholars for media and conflict studies and for the media-military relationship practitioner to understand the transforming occurring in the Indian media landscape in the backdrop of the war.

Objective of Research

The main objective of the research paper is to discuss the altering Indian media landscape during the Kargil war (1999). The paper endeavours to understand and analyse the changing paradigm of the Indian media landscape in the last decade of the 20th century. The research paper is part of a bigger study, which is qualitative in nature and is based on the grounded theory method as advocated by Corbin and Strauss.

Literature Review²

Within the field of grounded theory research, the use of existing literature represents a polemical and divisive issue, which continues to spark debate. (Dunne, C. 2011).³ "Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis."⁴ Based on the data collected in from the primary data and by additional reading of the secondary sources, the sub heads of this paper were constructed, which are discussed subsequently. However, an additional literature review was also undertaken to understand the concepts like war and media, media and military relationship, Kargil War and so on.

In the preface titled "*Perspective on Changing Role of the Mass Media in Hostile Conflicts*", written by MatihiasKamasin, Gabriele Melischek, Josef Seethaler, RomyWöhlert, the paper observes how the two completely dissimilar but still related terms 'war and communication' are fundamentally ubiquitous trait of human condition, referred as 'conditiohumana'. (Kamasin, et al., 2013)⁵ In the Introduction titled, "*Delivering War to Public: Shaping the Public Sphere*", author PhilpSeib, elaborates on how the medium which carries the news pertaining to war is delivered to public, impacts the thinking of the people with regards to the war. He scrutinizes both news as well as non-news media like television, movies, etc.⁶ (Seib, 2013)

While throwing light on the issues related to the Indian Media-Military Relationship, in the paper titled, "*Military-Media Interface: Changing Paradigms New Challenges*", by Ajay K. Rai, the author discusses how the relationship between both the institutions are changing, including the

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replacement of term 'media management' to 'media relationship.' The paper emphasized that both the institutions are not 'are not mutually exclusive,' hence development of a 'positive relationship' will be beneficial for both of them.⁷(Rai 2000)

With regards to the issues covered by the media Kargil war coverage, in the paper titled, "*Media and Kargil: Information Blitz with Dummy Missiles*", by Geeta Seshunotes that from the perspective of the Indian news media, the Kargil war 'big news' and in terms of print media news coverage one can witness plethora of news coverage which was based on the main topics like, the details about the conflict, the role of government during the conflict, the issues pertaining to the national security and Pakistan's actions were extensively covered during the war.⁸ While elaborating the mediascape during which the war occurred, mentioned in the paper titled, "*Kargil Episode in Bengali Print Media*", by Dipankar Sinha, the war happened in the backdrop of era which was witnessing the 'explosion in information' phase, accompanied by the stiff competition between the print and electronic media.⁹ (Sinha 2002). This cut-throat competition the implication of the economic reforms which changed the face of Indian media and have been discussed subsequently.

Further more, in order to appreciate the economic reforms which became on elf the crucial factor for the changing dynamics in the Indian media landscape, Stephanie Thiel in the paper title, "*Global Anomie and India: A Conceptual Approach*," noted that the "Manmohaneconomics" profited the country and resulted into a steadfast economic growth rate of the country in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) , foreign direct investment (FDI) and so on. A change, which is accompanied by both, challenges as well the opportunities. In terms understanding how the new economic policies shaped the new media landscape in Indian context, it has been discussed subsequently.¹⁰(Thiel 2011)

Moreover, as the liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation brought private players in the foray, on one hand it brought prospects on other hand it brought lot of challenges. One of the major challenge of discussed in the paper titled "*Six Conditions of Capital: Global Media in Local Contexts*," by Michael Curtin noted prior to the globalisation, it was postulated that the 'sociological paradigm' of the communication is primarily a 'national systematic concern' and this also lead to 'transactional communication as media imperialism'.¹¹ (Curtin, 2015) On the similar lines in the paper, '*Murdochisation of the Indian media*', the challenges erupted by the new economic reforms implication on India is subsequently discussed in the paper.¹²

With the coming of private players, the Indian media also underwent its first brush with CNN effect, which is subsequently discussed in the paper. In the paper titled, "*Global Television News and Foreign Policy: Debating the CNN Effect*," Eytan Gilboa, while throwing light on the reasons behind the CNN success, noted that due to the innovation in communication-related technologies, expansion in cable network and enhanced satellite technology, the

CNN was able to establish itself 'Global television news' whose effect can be seen in the 'international relations' also.¹³(Gilboa,2005)This influence resulted into a 'new communication approach to international relations' called as CNN Effect.¹⁴(Gilboa,2005)In the paper titled, "*The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?*" by Piers Robinson, while throwing the light on the CNN effect pointed that the fundamental premise of the CNN effect is that news can make policy through the 'manufacture a consent'.¹⁵ (Robinson, 1999). However a contradictory as per the critics of the CNN effect, they discredit the CNN effect stating that it is the 'elite control' that plays a crucial role in foreign policymaking.¹⁶ (Robinson, 1999).

Data Collection

The research paper is based on primary and secondary data collection. For primary data, the research undertook in-depth interviews. The sample design for the interview was done under non-random sampling technique, under which purposive sampling was used. For in-depth interviews semi-structured questionnaire along with probing questions was used. The participant profile included veterans from Indian armed forces, a civilian officer acting as a bridge between the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and media, and journalists from defence journalism. Besides, the observation method, memo writing and field notes were used. For secondary sources government document, journals, newspapers, historical documents, books, autobiographies, biographies and so on were used.

Data Analysis and interpretation

The data analysis and interpretation were done by following the grounded theory method as advocated by Corbin and Strauss. Necessary steps of theoretical sampling¹⁷, constant comparative method¹⁸ were employed till theoretical saturation was achieved. The research study undertook the assistance of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, MAXQDA.

Altering paradigm of Indian media landscape during 1999 at the time of the Kargil war New Economic reforms and the Indian Media

The last decade of the 20th century witnessed India embracing new economic reforms, which impacted all the sectors and well as the sections of India and media isn't an exception. As India opened up to the liberal economic policies with private players with the intent to keep pace with the dramatic changes brought by the phenomenon of globalisation, the Indian media also witnessed the impact of liberalization, privatisation and globalization. The new economic policy opened the doors for the private players and foreign broadcasters to invest in the Indian media industry in limited areas. With regards to the content production in the news sector, it started producing content keeping in mind the global audience. This resulted in a dramatic transformation of Indian news media.¹⁹

The Prasar Bharati Act 1997

This phase was a critical juncture for the Indian media in general and news media in particular. The Government of India embraced privatisation and

liberalization in the 1990's. One of the critical developments, which happened during this era, was the PrasarBharati Act, which was notified in 1997. The act made PrasarBharati a statutory autonomous body and disconnected India's largest public broadcasting giant from the direct control of the government of India. Although, the autonomy was granted in 1990, but the implementation ensued on 15 September 1997. Thus, initiating an era of information flow with lesser scrutiny from the government.

Loosening grip of Indian Government on Indian Media

With more private players entering the uncharted territory of Indian Media with their 'new capital and new management strategies'²⁰ (Rodrigues et al 2006) one can witness the loosening grip of Indian Government in Indian media. The 'de facto deregulation of the television industry' was one of the necessities as well as the implication of the economic reforms occurring in India during that phase.²¹ (Rodrigues et al 2006) Later on with the turn of the century, where Indian media witnessed the boom which was never experienced before and the audience being outpoured with the never-ending content, it also witnessed the flip side of 'dumbing down' of content and the 'Murdochisation' of the Indian media and brought troubles of concentration of media ownership, news as a commodity, depleted quality of content, paid news. As Daya Kishan Thussu, professor of international communication points that "*Murdochisation*" of the Indian media as a "process which involves the shift of media power from the public to privately owned, transnational, multimedia corporations controlling both delivery systems and the content of global information networks".²²

Initial impact of STAR and boom in 24x7 news channel

The era in which the Kargil happened also saw a parallel ongoing development, which was happening in terms of boom in news channels due to the arrival of private players in the media industry. From one giant news channel government-owned Doordarshan in 1990's the number of private channels started to swell with the arrival of Rupert Murdoch-controlled STAR (Satellite Television Asia Region) group in 1991²³, the Indian media saw a surge in TV channels, to which news channels were not an exception. While highlighting the importance of the 24x7 news rolling out, respondent 2B²⁴ a veteran from Indian armed forces said, "...when news became a 24x7 news kind of a, you know, phenomenon. And that helped bring about this realization and actually help build up the whole concept of information as a as a strength of the nation." As the number of the news channel swell, so the thirst to have more details about any event and conflict reporting provided different news product for the audience to consume. And the Kargilwar fulfilled this need of news-hungry media and impatient audience. While highlighting this boom in news channels, respondent 2B²⁵ pointed, "*And you found new media houses coming up. Times Now came up I think at that time after that. The 24/7 news concept*

multiplied many times more. Print media you found in Kashmir the print media multiplied manifold." As noted by veteran defence correspondent respondent 9I²⁶, "...the kind of upsurge that the media was going through that time because News television had just come in and so it became a very popular war in a way in the Indian household Indian society."

Indian news media first brush with the CNN Effect

As the half an hour news bulletins were displaced by the 24 hours news rolling for the audience, the Indian media also experienced its very own first brush with the CNN effect. In the 1980's the work world experienced a new phenomenon, which was the 24 hours news TV channel Cable News Network (CNN) being launched in the USA. The new terminology was extensively investigated by the scholars of political science and mass media, which postulated that the news media can have an impact on the foreign policies of a country, which may otherwise be ignored by the government especially during a crisis. The real-time coverage of an event, especially a crisis event, on the television can influence the government policy response as the government is aware that presently their own response and action to the event will be subject to scrutiny by the domestic as well as international audience due to the real-time coverage of the news.²⁷ (Rodrigues, 2006) While pointing at the CNN role during the Gulf War, respondent 2B²⁸ noted, "*It is only in 1990 or so. When the Gulf War First Gulf War broke out till then foreign media had hardly entered into India. We just saw the example of CNN and how it CNN carried out the embedded journalism and how CNN carried out war reporting a report into the drawing room etc.*"

Expansion of the Print News Media

The impact of the liberalisation was also felt in the last decade of the 20th century. As per an estimate by *the Economic and Political Weekly* the everyday newspaper circulation in 13 major languages during the year 1990 doubled, whereas the penetration of newspapers increased by 35% between 1996-2001.²⁹ (Jeffrey, 2009) During the year of the Kargil war, the most circulated newspaper was DanikBhaskar (Kanpur edition) with 8,20,000 copies sold per day on an average.³⁰ (Jeffrey, 2009) As per an estimate by the Office of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, the Hindi language newspaper increased three times from the 78 million copies a day in 1990 to 25.6 million copies a day in 2000 respectively.³¹ (Jeffrey, 2009) It is to be noted that the increase in Indian newspaper readership was increasing despite the arrival of satellite television. However, the newspapers were also facing competition from the televisions due to race is getting advertisement revenue and also in the backdrop of growing Indian Capitalism, foreign players.³² (Jeffrey, 2009) The situation was more challenging as the need to modernize the newspaper industry became indispensable which also had a cost to the company. With the foreign players coming in the Indian newspaper industry, there was a difference of opinion within the Indian media with regards to the inflow of foreign investments in the Indian newspapers. Where

on one hand it was seen as 'imperialism on the horizon', the threat of control of policies and content by the foreign investors, endangering of the national interest, on the other hand, the new idea was seen as a boost to expand newspapers, the inflow of technology and capital and survival. (Jeffrey, 2009)³³ Nevertheless, while sharing an individual experience regarding the print media from defence point of view, respondent 2B³⁴ recollected and stated, "*We already had some very fine print magazines already who had come into being like India today, which had already there, Outlook has already there.*"

Indian Radio face off with satellite television

The 1990s is considered as a 'watershed era' in the memoir of Indian Radio despite of growing strength of television industry. The radio was able to make a 'specular return' as affordable 'youth' medium for illiterate and semi-literate with the objective of delivering content loaded with 'development and entertainment' suitable for the developing nation like India.³⁵ (Ranganathan, 2010). Post 1995 after the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court to declare airwaves as public property and ending the 'monopoly over broadcasting - either by the government, by an individual or by an organisation', the All India Radio (AIR) initiated its maiden attempt to distribute the spectrum and bidding the radio airwaves to private FM channels. Subsequently after October 1999 around 108 private FM channels got permission to function in India.³⁶ (Gopalakrishnan, 2003) The phase saw boom in Frequency Modulation (FM) radio stations.³⁷ (Ranganathan, 2010) Although while the research was about defence reportage based by the television and print news media was mostly quoted by the respondents, because the primary focus was on that kind of reportage only. However, respondent 2B³⁸ while throwing light on that time media said, "*We had radio. Radio was a very important as aspect of media at that time.*"

Demanding growth of Internet and steadfast increase in Internet users

The Indian media-scape like any other media-scape is also dominated by the Internet. In India, although the first usage of the Internet was opened to the masses on 15 August 1995 through the Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL), although India's journey to begin the usage of the Internet began with roughly a decade before with the unveiling of the Educational Research Network (ERNET) in 1986. However, during the last decade of the 20th century, the Internet technology withstood a plethora of challenges like narrow-band connections, need to design broadband policy, resources challenges and so on.

Boost in digital communication technology

This period also witnessed a boost in digital technologies with regards to communication. Under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Ordinance, 1995, section 9, the Ministry of Broadcasting in order to make digitalisation mandatory, make Digital Addressable System compulsory. The main objective of this set was to boost the number of TV channels and provide the

viewers with a high-quality viewing experience.³⁹ (Khanna, 2013)

Growth in Wireless Communication

The 1990s also saw changes in the wire communication setup in India. From the usage of electric telegraph initiated in 1850s to formal telephone service in 1882, and in early 20th century India witnessing the technology changes is a form of radio telephones, radio and wireless telegraphy to trunk dialling calls. Later in the second half of the century, the country witnessed the growth in satellite technology, optics wires and gradually proceeding towards the digital technology in the concluding phase of 20th century with services of paper communication being introduced in 1995 with a boom in paging industry in 1998 which however couldn't stand the competition from another communication technology discussed subsequently in 2002.⁴⁰ The wireless communication also began to impact the news media as it was sought as the quickest means to gather and communicate information for the media houses.

Knock of the mobile communication technology

The knock of mobile communication was first experienced by India in 1995 when the maiden cellular call through GSM network from Kolkata to New Delhi.⁴¹ After four years of the first mobile call, the country witnessed the Kargil war in 1999, however, the influence of mobile technology was yet to be felt. While discussing the mobile technology advancement and its impact respondent 2B⁴² replied, "*Mobile was already there, smart technology had not come about. So the mobile phone was only still then or right till 2007/8 the mobile telephone was still used as a means of communication and nothing else not as a means of information.*" However, the usage of mobile communication technology in form of satellite phone had a negative memory attached to the Kargil War, where it was alleged that one journalist usage of Iridium satellite phone gave away Indian soldier location.⁴³

Conflict seen as area of potential investment for news hungry media

While throwing light on the media milieu of that time, the respondent 2B⁴⁴ noted, "*You see from I think it was the Kargil conflict, which also gave a spurt to a lot of Indian business houses to look at media as a potential area for investment.*" As noted by respondent 6F⁴⁵, a civilian officer who have served term as longest defence spokesperson for Ministry of Defence (MoD), "*Kargil Review Committee Report that came during that time in history it was the television which was at its peak and it was actually a great huge event when the war was being beamed to life from those border areas.*"

Conclusion

To conclude, out of many other challenges, which Indian armed forces were facing in 1999, one of the challenges which caught them as well as the Indian media with surprise was the boom in the Indian media landscape. Nevertheless, both the institutions were able to yield a positive result through synergy by chance and were able to set a foundation for a revived relationship, which dared to see the interface

between media and military beyond the management and towards a relationship.

Endnote

1. The research paper is part of a bigger study, which is qualitative in nature and is based on the grounded theory.
2. It is to be noted that the subsequent explanations of the factors responsible for the altering dynamics of the Indian media landscape have component of both secondary data and primary data.
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12. Ibid (n-3)
13. Gilboa, E. (2005). *Global Television News and Foreign Policy: Debating the CNN Effect. International Studies Perspectives*, 6(3), 325-341. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.library.britishcouncil.org.in:2048/stable/44218417>
14. Ibid (n-11)
15. Robinson, P. (1999). *The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy? Review of International Studies*, 25(2), 301-309. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.library.britishcouncil.org.in:2048/stable/20097596>
16. Ibid (n-13)
17. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to collect data from places, people and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of theory properties and dimension, uncover variations and identify the relationship between the concepts.¹ (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)
18. At the stage of coding process, a constant comparative method was adopted by the research study in which the latest generated data was compared with the existing data or previously generated data or previous research studies.
19. 'Murdochisation' of the Indian media . (2019). *Frontline.thehindu.com*. Retrieved 21 May 2019, from <https://frontline.thehindu.com/static/html/fl2816/stories/20110812281601900.htm>
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22. Ibid (n-3)
23. Ibid (n-3)
24. The respondent was a retired Indian Army General
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30. Ibid (n-13) p-xii
31. Ibid (n-13) p-xvi
32. Ibid (n-13) p-xvi
33. Ibid (n-13) p-xx
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38. *The respondent was a retired Indian Army General*
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41. *Ibid (n-38)*
42. *The respondent was a retired Indian Army General*
43. *However, the research could not locate confirmed stance on this accusation. The journalist concerned in a book refuted the charges in the book written by the individual in 2015.*
44. *The respondent was a retired Indian Army General*
45. *The respondent was a civilian officer who have served term as the longest defence spokesperson for Ministry of Defence (MoD). The respondent was a deviant case as the individual was neither from armed forces nor from defence journalism but acted as bridge between both the institutions.*