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## Changing the media landscape in India under the Modi government: a case study based on the Narrative Policy Framework

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### Abstract

After the emergence of “new media,” propaganda and so-called “alternative facts” are some of the main tools that have been used by governments, individuals, or interest groups to recalibrate the narration of certain information. By using the basic storytelling methods, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) allows policymakers to use the media to spread the newer dynamics of narration. Since 2014, after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power, the government has constantly been using narration through the state-funded media that have changed the overall media landscape in the country. Thus, using the NPF, this research aims to perform a media content analysis of India and discuss the changing media landscape of the nation. To prove the argument, the article provides various empirical examples and facts (from India) which are changing the narrative among the public and the ruling party’s pursuit of its political aims by radical change in public policy.

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## Zmiana przestrzeni medialnej w Indiach pod rządami premiera Modiego. Studium przypadku oparte na Narrative Policy Framework

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### Streszczenie

Propaganda i tzw. fakty alternatywne stały się – szczególnie po pojawieniu się nowych mediów – jednymi z głównych narzędzi, które są wykorzystywane przez rządy, jednostki lub grupy interesu do zmiany narracji dotyczącej wybranych informacji. Wykorzystując podstawowe metody opowiadania historii, Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) pozwala decydom politycznym wykorzystywać media do rozpowszechniania narracji o nowej dynamice. Od 2014 r., po dojściu do władzy partii Bharatiya Janata Party, indyjski rząd nieustannie używa państwowych mediów w sposób, który zmienił przestrzeń medialną kraju. W niniejszym artykule na podstawie NPF przeanalizowano treści medialne przekazywane w Indiach i omówiono zmiany, które zaszły w tym obszarze. W tym celu wskazano różne empiryczne przykłady i fakty (dotyczące Indii), które zmieniły narrację w społeczeństwie masowym i dzięki którym partia rządząca realizuje swoje cele polityczne poprzez radykalną zmianę polityki publicznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Narrative Policy Framework, ramy polityki narracyjnej, indyjskie media, krajobraz medialny, rząd premiera Modiego, prawicowe media

**Kody klasyfikacji JEL:** D72, H59, L82

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The role of the press as the “fourth power” and as a forum for public debate has been recognized since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In a liberal democratic society, the media play a vital role in engaging the public with government affairs by flowing information transparently. However, the current media scenario and the concept of “free press” has become a subjective issue to discuss. In changing our political structure, the media are often cited as a dominant force, and, for the worse, by turning a system of parties into a contest of personalities, shifting a concern with ideas and policies to a concern with images and styles. Likewise, in the modern history of the media, picking or taking biased sides has become a new normal.

Concerns regarding the impact on viewers of the media and the nature and degree of media bias date back to the 1920s. Reporter and columnist Walter Lippmann (1997)

acknowledged that people have little personal contact with the government and the environment and argued that the media put ideas in the minds of citizens through their reports. The consensus among analysts is that the media, even if the effect is subtle, have some effect. This raises the problem of how people can be influenced by the media, including general newscasts. One of the ways is by framing: establishing a framework for a news article or meaning. News also uses frames to position a story in a context so that the reader knows its meaning or importance. The second way is correlated with priming: when media coverage predisposes the viewer or reader to a certain point of view on a topic or issue. The reader will have a pessimistic opinion about the economy when a newspaper article reports on unemployment, failing businesses, and jobs going overseas. The reader is prepared to say no when asked if he or she approves of the president/leader's job results.

According to Crow and Lawlor (2016), the media engage with and influence the policy process in two key ways: (1) by choosing topics of interest to be highlighted by the public and policymakers (agenda-setting) and (2) by problematising policy in a way that attaches meaning to it in an understandable way (framing and constructing narratives). On the other hand, the narrative line is at once the key and the crowbar for governments. Essential, since it can unlock public opposition chains against a specific policy or initiative and can also help to create majority support among voters. And the crowbar, since it can also be used to overthrow the opposition, to make critics stupid, stubborn, self-interested, and even unpatriotic (*Power to Persuade*, 2019). Likewise, Golding and Murdock (2000) argue that the lapdog model of journalism, intended as a play on the self-proclaimed "watchdog" duty of journalists, indicates that the news media are a platform for the agenda of the leaders of society, promoting and perpetuating the exploitation and social inequality they benefit from. Franklin et al. (2005) developed three key assumptions about lap media. The first one is, for news and information, that the news media is overly dependent on the government, corporations, and power elites. Secondly, lapdog journalists do not understand or show any desire to try to understand the point of view of people who do not belong to the establishment. The third assumption is that the news media are more argumentative than reporting and have an underlying political agenda that favors the political and corporate elite for whom they are prepared to behave as a professional tail.

For example, in the government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the last five years, the correlations between the government and the media have reciprocated most of the arguments made above, where the media has self-initiated (for the Television Rating Point; TRP) or played a greater role in the government's attempt to change or suppress the narrative of certain policies. According to the *New York Times*

(Goel & Gettleman, 2020), since Modi came to power in 2014, his government, like no other prime minister in decades, has attempted to dominate the country's news media, especially the airwaves. Mr. Modi has cultivated the media shrewdly to create a personality cult that presents him as the selfless savior of the country. Connecting with the emerging concept of the role in shaping the audience mind on "what to think," Abhishek (2020) argues that the Modi government has successfully operationalized the public opinion manufacturing mechanism with the help of mainstream and social media. Despite being the biggest democracy in the world, India's press freedom is shrinking due to the government's control over most mainstream media, which publicly denied any kind of influence on the media by both the ruling party and mainstream media. In this regard, we also explored the behavioral analysis of the Indian media to validate our study. The BJP is the largest right-wing party in India, after the 2014 election victory, and consequently, it has established a government with a landslide victory in the 2019 election. This is also the time when the BJP has a majority in the Upper House called "Rajya Sabha." Therefore, these scenarios have also helped and influenced numerous right-wing media across the country.

Thus, this paper argues that the government of India actively uses the mainstream media to change or suppress narratives that directly impact the way that the public reacts. On changing the behavior of the Indian media and its impact on people's opinion and policymaking, this case study aims to answer some questions like: Are there any roles of the Indian media in changing narratives and political opinion? What role does the ruling party play in changing the narrative of the media? To answer these questions, our study analyzes some selected English and Hindi language media.

The paper is structured as follows. It begins with a general overview of the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). Then, the paper discusses the current state of the media landscape in India and later presents some empirical evidence on how government-made narratives are disseminated through the media to the public.

## Literature review: the concept of the Narrative Policy Framework through the media

In the social/public policy sphere, most policy theories begin concerning bounded rationality (Selten, 1990). Only a small proportion of all policy-relevant information can be accessed by politicians and influencers. They need to find ways to narrow their focus, under political and time constraints, to make choices. They mix cognition and emotion, or shortcuts that are logical and irrational. Actors often exercise authority to frame situations, to concentrate their audience's focus on relevant facts and

ways of interpreting problems. To that end, storytelling may be an effective medium, but the stories we tell individuals contrast with the stories they tell themselves. If it chimes with their convictions or pulls their heartstrings, the same tale will inspire some viewers but backfire in others, if it grates with their view of the world.

The NPF describes the narrative techniques of actors attempting to manipulate the cognitive prejudices of other actors in that context. In other words, the NPF is called “the science of the story.” There are four components of a narrative: setting, characters, plot, and moral. Firstly, setting refers to a situation that is related to a certain policy problem or context. Secondly, according to Ney (2006), it requires at least one character whether it is a victim who has been harmed, a villain who does them harm, or heroes who promise/provide relief. Thirdly, the plot establishes the arc of action in which events interfere with the characters’ actions and environments, often structured in the beginning, middle, and end sequences (Abell, 2004). Fourthly, morality gives the reason to the acts and intentions of the characters. As such, the morality of the story in the NPF is always equal to a political solution (Stone, 2002).

According to Shanahan et al. (2018), the Narrative Policy Framework has five basic assumptions:

- a) *Social construction matters in public policy*: Although there is indeed a reality populated by the objects and the processes independent of human perceptions, it is also true that what those objects and processes mean varies in terms of how humans perceive them.
- b) *Bounded relativity*: Social constructions of policy-related objects and processes vary to create different policy realities; however, this variation is bounded (e.g., by belief systems, ideologies, norms, normative axioms) and thus is not random.
- c) *Policy narratives have generalizable structural elements*: The NPF takes a structuralist stance on narrative, where narratives are defined as having specific generalisable structures such as plots and characters that can be identified in multiple narrative contexts.
- d) *Policy narratives operate simultaneously on three levels*: For purposes of analyses, the NPF divides policy narratives into three interacting categories: the micro-level (individual level), meso-level (group and coalitional level), and macro-level (cultural and institutional level). Policy narratives are assumed to operate simultaneously at all three levels.
- e) *Homo narrans model of individuals*: Narratives are assumed to play a central role in how individuals process information, communicate, and reason.

Considering the media, Kingdon (1995: 60, 65–67) addresses public opinion. He connects the agenda-setting role of the media with public opinion, thereby forcing elected officials to pay attention to media coverage concerns, as problem salience

would increase with citizen exposure to media issues. He continues to identify the effects of public opinion on the policy agenda of the government, be it adding a policy or restricting one. Having said that in the era of new media, the practice of fact-based or investigative journalism has been vastly replaced by “alternative facts or fabrications.” Ralph Keyes (2004), an American author, notes that society has entered an era of post-truth. The idea of the press as a political watchdog portrays the press as a defender of the public good. The watchdog press acts as a check on government abuses by providing citizens with information and forcing government openness. Countering flagrant lies by public leaders has nearly become a futile activity in modern times, even as fact-checking has become its own genre of journalism (Owen 2018). The “Fact Checker” of the *Washington Post* (2022) identified nearly 1,500 false claims made in just over 250 days in office by President Trump.

To use the media as a tool to derive the narrative government, politicians or an interest group use various tactics. According to the Narrative Policy Framework, there are three main narrative strategies:

- a) *Scope of Conflict*: In terms of the scope of conflict, two dynamics can take place. Firstly, when authors/actors portray themselves as losing on an issue, they engage in narrative strategies aimed at widening the spectrum of conflicts (e.g., diffusing costs and concentrating benefits). Secondly, when authors/actors depict themselves as winning, they engage in narrative techniques that involve a status quo problem (e.g., cost concentration and profit diffusion).
- b) *Causal Mechanism*: Strategically, the causal mechanism organizes narrative components to assign responsibility and blame for a policy issue. These ascriptions of accountability and blame may be examples of why and how one or more concrete variables in public policy (e.g., economic inequality and lack of education) contribute to another (e.g., political unrest).
- c) *The Devil-Angel Shift*: The devil shift predicts that sinister intentions, actions, and power of enemies will be exaggerated by actors. The angel change happens when organizations or political figures stress their potential to fix an issue and de-emphasize villains.

The Narrative Policy Framework, as a theoretical framework for this study, fits the trends that the government of India follows behaving under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Since 2014, the Modi government has used the media as a strategic tool, where the narrative of various incidents has completely changed for the benefit of the government. When particularly discussing the three main narratives strategies, the Modi government has functioned based on all those three strategies, and the evidence regarding those are presented below.

## Methodology

The qualitative case study is a research methodology that encourages the investigation of a phenomenon using a variety of data sources within its context. This means that the problem is not explored through one lens, but rather through several lenses that make it possible to expose and appreciate various dimensions of the phenomenon. Within the qualitative framework, this research aims to use the case study as the major methodological approach. According to Yin (2003), the design of a case study should be taken into account when: (a) the study aims to address the “how” and “why” questions; (b) the actions of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you think they are important to the phenomenon under study; and (d) the boundaries between given phenomena and meaning are not explicit. Qualitative content analysis is also applied here to allow for subjective interpretation of the content of the data by digital media and print media. Likewise, it helps to analyze the manifest and descriptive content of the various media houses (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1277–1279).

## A case study of the Indian media

Although there are various dynamics to consider if we want to construct a study on the interaction of the Indian media with the government from the public standpoint, the NPF simply provides us with the approach that can explain the ongoing media polarization in the country. Over the last eight years, the narrative of the Indian media has changed from policy-based news and critical analysis to the government-led (party-benefitting) propaganda. Additionally, there is also a thin line between the government policy and the political ideology of the party that makes the audience perceive information in the name of national solidarity. Similarly, Indian right-wing scholars are also promoting or protecting the government and the party manifesto for individual benefits that also result in changing the political philosophy among the circle of scholars as well.

Ruhee Neog (2018) identified three major phases of the “Indian media-policy communication and the flow of interaction”: 1) top-down, 2) bottom-up, and 3) media-policy agency. In her research, she has found that the Indian media do not play a direct role in influencing policymaking and they have played a major role in “communicating crisis narratives.” Next, she argues that so called nationalist media strongly pointed to clear policy action, and they framed information

to support government policy and a course of action. If we observe Indian electronic and print media, there are always debates on government-supported and figurative buttresses. It is not only happening in newspapers, on television, radio, and the web, but also can be seen in social media via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, by forwarding party-based propaganda via WhatsApp and other digital platforms. The editors and reporters have their social media accounts and they also use those accounts on buttering government-led agenda. On the other hand, there are few media outlets that present any critique and loopholes of the governmental policy that would consider anti-national and leftist agenda sponsored by China.

## Overview of the Indian media landscape

India is one of the top countries that have the largest media broadcasters and they are highly competitive among them. The Indian media landscape comprises television, radio, newspaper, and social media platforms. According to BBC (2019), there are “nearly 500 private satellite TV stations dedicated to news broadcasting and almost 17,000 are under newspaper titles.” Freedom House, based in the U.S., says that privately owned media are “vigorous and diverse,” which means they are very influential and impactful in India. According to the Register of Newspapers in India (RNI) (2020), there are 143,423 publications included with newspapers and other periodicals registered until 31 March 2020 in India that show constant growth and strength of the print media. If we see reports, there are Hindi and English language media that are more dominant than other local languages.

According to the Media Ownership Monitor (MOM), 58 leading media outlets have the largest audience shares in India (RSF, 2019). The MOM research also reveals that print media have a high impact on the Hindi belt, which includes four main outlets, those are *Dainik Jagran*, *Hindustan*, *Amar Ujala*, and *Dainik Bhaskar*. These Hindi-language media houses have 76.45% of readership shares. Zee Media groups control both broadcast media and distribution networks that include *Dish TV* and *Siti cable* through a network of companies. The MOM research also found that almost all media companies have “political affiliations” and are associated with corporate houses. According to the MOM, most of the owners of Indian media companies are associated or are members of the currently ruling party in India.

The Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (2019) report says that there is interdependence between the media, business, and politics that indicates a high risk of bias and media freedom as well as pluralism in India. In the 2020 World Press Freedom Index, India keeps losing its ranking and is now 142<sup>nd</sup> out of 180 countries

with a global score of 45.33. According to the RSF, the current ruling party won a landslide victory across the nation in the 2019 general election, when the major national media helped to boost the *Hindutva*-based ideology of nationalism among citizens. Due to violence against journalists, including political activists and intellectuals, India loses its position in a global ranking of press freedom. In 2020, four journalists were killed in India. Generally speaking, the media is called the fourth pillar of democracy. Despite being the largest democracy in the world, a scenario in India's media landscape is downgrading in terms of press freedom and responsible journalism. According to a report published in *The News Minute*, a study "Getting Away with Murder" has been discussed, which stated that almost 198 serious attacks were recorded on reporters between 2014 and 2019, and 36 occurred only in 2019. Between these periods, 40 journalists were killed (Geetika, 2019). According to a report published in Free Speech Collective, there were 154 journalists arrested and interrogated in India in the last decade and 67 cases happened alone in 2020 (Free Speech Collective, 2020).

## Framing the narrative policy in the Indian media

The narrative in the Indian media has been changing mainly since the election in 2014, and the media landscape has faced challenges and witnessed an increase in fake news. This also confronted the available diversity of viewpoints. Social media has become the backbone of fake news and deepening polarisation through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter. Due to public concern, criticism, and an appeal from the Indian government, WhatsApp has launched an awareness campaign through advertisements on digital media, print, radio, and TV. They have also taken some necessary actions, such as limiting the forwarded messages (only to five at a time) in India to limit sharing of false rumours. According to a Microsoft report, fake news has increased drastically in 22 countries, and India has topped that list of countries. In a report published in November 2018, a BBC study also indicated that there has been a rise of the fake news phenomenon of nearly 200% in the Indian media reportage during the last three years. This study also reveals that the rise in ultra "nationalism" is the main factor and other contents become less important to the ordinary citizen. It says that "facts were less important to some than the emotional desire to strengthen national identity" (Gujarati, 2019).

In the last seven years, there has been "the rise of hard-line nationalism" that has become a popular influential factor among the Indian media. According to the BBC image, a news anchor is seen on Telugu Channel TV9 in a military uniform, and he

was presenting a show under the name of “War Room.” The “SBS Gujarati” report (2019) also says that there are many news outlets included in regional news channels whose coverage “regularly leans to the right” and it appears clearly in “the support of the government.” After the incident of the JNU slogan (Jawaharlal Nehru University), two words become very popular, “nationalist” and “anti-nationalist.” (Tripathi, 2019). After that, these two words have never stopped being used by digital media and have been widely used in prime-time debates and shows regularly. People (activists and the opposition) who have a different or liberal or leftist opinion different from the one of the ruling party’s supporters were called by the right-wing media news anchor “anti-Indian,” “anti-national,” and “traitors” and they use phrases like, “you should go to Pakistan” (BBC, 2020; *The Hindustan Times*, 2021). Likewise, verbal abuse and threats have become very popular habits of news anchors and debate participants on news television stations. Similarly, social media has become the platform to wage the virtual war between the pro- and anti-government people. These kinds of behavior by news anchors have become regular activities, which are regarded under the term of the tradition of the “aggressive media or journalism” pattern in India.

On 18 April 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said during “*Bharat Ki Bat, Sabke Sath*” (that translates to “Talks about India with Everyone”), “I want this government to be criticized. Criticism makes democracy strong. Democracy cannot succeed without constructive criticism” (Livemint, 2018). Later he added that those acts of “criticism” should be based on research and proper facts. According to Aman Madan (2019), who wrote in *The Diplomat* about the speech, which never turns out to be true, that “his party moved to hijack the country’s historically free press.” Next, he added, “now circumstances have changed, and the government is facing the weakened economy and increased communal tension across the country and instead of an economic narrative, there is a communal debate on the media about the Hindu-Muslim.” Although India is officially a secular country, there is an attempt to hegemonise its communal narrative. There is a huge coverage of these debates in all political discourse that is cantered within this. The changing narrative in the Indian media has played a vital role in polarising the society and nurturing communal politics. The changing media pattern of India not only has an internal impact but also has an external impact on its South Asian neighborhood. For instance, the Nepali media have also started to follow a pattern similar to the Indian media that follows the Hindu nationalist content. As a result, once again people started a challenge to the federal republic status of the country and raised voice for the Hindu nation under the monarchy.

Social networks have transformed the way of transmitting information to the public. Excessive use of digital/social media has widened the flow of information among people in the last 5 years. The accelerated access of the public to the Internet

and digital media is due to the ambitious “Digital India” initiative of the Indian government that was announced in July 2015. After this, social media have become very popular even in rural India, and the use of Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp has increased dramatically. Due to this program, e.g., service provider Reliance Jio benefited and became the top mobile network and Internet data provider in India (First India, 2020). Therefore, social media along with digital and mainstream media play the main roles in spreading the government-sponsored narrative that helps to shape public agenda (Shanto, Mark, & Donald, 1982). The media provide substantial and subjective reality-based political opinions that not only subjectify information but also limit the choice of content that the public can have.

Neog (2018b) defines the function of public opinion and the influence of policymaking through the narrative of the media. There are six fundamental reporting ethics called “5W1H” such as who, what, when, where, why, and how. She explains that these are important tools for journalists and editors as they use this to produce the media content on a daily basis. Next, she also added evaluating received data and deciding how much weight to give it in programs and news coverage. Through three methods available to the media, such as agenda-setting, priming, and framing, this process helps form public opinion and influence policymaking. Therefore, the media have a full choice to describe and contextualise any issue according to their interest either of business nature (such as the television rating point-TRP game) or in terms of political influence. For instance, if we observe two Indian news broadcasters such as Republic TV and NDTV, both seem to have, respectively, right-wing and left-to-center influence contents of broadcasting on their news television.

Prannoy Roy (2013) says that there has been a rapid transformation in the Indian media due to new technologies and, on the other hand, it is also turning the media toward aggression-based journalism. Most media are running on their self-regulation, and government media are mostly controlled and scripted. But private media are working for business purposes, which leads to “paid news” and it raises questions about media transparency and fair news distribution. However, the manipulated and scripted narrative greatly affects public opinion regarding policymaking and government regulations.

## Changing role and narrative of the Indian media

Right after the “Pulwama attack” in 2019, the media landscape of India has shifted drastically (Malhotra 2020). Right-wing media become more aggressive towards the opposition and left-wing supporters and leaders. As we already discussed, if some

speakers and political analysts voiced their opinions against of the ruling party and government policies even news anchors started to say “go to Pakistan”, “traitors” and if you are nationalist, then they said “*Bharat Mata Ki Jai* (Motherland long-lived).” Goel and Gettleman (2020) pointed out that “sceptical journalists censor themselves, afraid to be branded antinational by the government that equates patriotism with support for Mr Modi” and the ruling party. Quoted by Shakuntala Banaji, a media professor at the London School of Economics, the *NY Times* wrote: “In the past six years, the Indian media have deteriorated. There is no resemblance of truth or responsibility left in most media reports.” Goel and Jeffrey also mentioned that right-wing TV anchors are anchoring like spokespersons or supporters of the current ruling party in India. Sharp criticism of governmental policies and the ruling party can lead to the end of journalist careers, and many journalists have lost their jobs already.

The famous Indian film industry, Bollywood, also considered the place associated with intimidation of Muslims and liberals by media. The political nexus of nationalism divided Bollywood into two blocks, that is nationalists and liberals. Vohra (2021) argued that recently numerous pro-Modi news networks have regarded Bollywood as a “nexus of drugs.” Minorities and liberals in Bollywood are influential segments of society. Presently, they are under pressure and are forced to accept silently party-based nationalist agendas. Today, Bollywood stars keep posting on social media ruling party-associated posts and news retweets which have been hardly seen before the Modi government in India.

On 15 September 2020, the Supreme Court of India added comments during a public interest litigation (PIL) on the suicide investigation of criticism of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput by a section of the private media, related to the Hindu-Muslim divide based on a regular debate that leads to the breach of communal harmony in the society by the Indian media. The Supreme Court judges warned and criticised electronic media and added 10 important remarks on electronic media, which are as follows (Vaidyanathan, 2020):

1. The problem with electronic media is that it is all about TRPs, which leads to an increase in sensationalism, which damages people’s reputations and masquerades as a type of right.
2. Electronic media has enormous power. By focusing on specific communities or groups, it can become a focal point.
3. How can such charges (Muslims infiltrating the civil service) be allowed? Is it possible to approve such programs in a free society?
4. Reputations can be harmed, and an individual’s image can be tarnished. What can be done to keep this under control? This is something that the government cannot do.

5. The coexistence of communities is the foundation of a stable democratic society and constitutional rights and duties. Any attempt to demonize a group should be regarded with suspicion.
6. We need to consider who owns the visual media. The company's whole shareholding pattern must be made public. The company's income model should also be displayed to see if the government is placing more adverts in one place and less in another.
7. The media cannot break the rules they set for themselves. The role of the anchor must be understood. In TV discussions, look at the proportion of time the anchor takes to speak. They ask questions while muting the speaker.
8. When we discuss journalistic freedom, we must keep in mind that it is not absolute. A journalist has the same rights as other citizens when it comes to freedom of expression. Journalists do not have the same level of freedom as they enjoy in the United States. Journalists that are fair in their debates are desperately needed.
9. Let the best in the country propose solutions to aid the discourse on our platform, and then we'll come up with standards. A single community is now being targeted by an anchor. To call ourselves a democracy, we must meet certain criteria.
10. It is forbidden to broadcast any program that causes communal discord. It is correct that India's peaceful coexistence has been disrupted.

The above remarks of the Supreme Court of India are very important in the context of the narrative policy form that is shaped by the Indian media. We may observe the peddling of hatred debate on the Hindu-Muslim divide by the electronic media in India and the intention behind it to avoid actual policy-related issues and public demand such as "farmer protests" (Varinder, 2020) and others. Most mainstream media in India spread fake news, misinformation, hate news, propaganda, paid news, incitement, communal and derogatory reportage (The Hindu, 2020). Recently, there has been a big farmer protest in Northern India especially by farmers from Punjab and Haryana. But this news was barely getting coverage in the right-wing media. If they had been covering, they would have portrayed this movement as propaganda of the Khalistan terror group to divide India just because the majority of protesters are from the Sikh community. Farmers are demanding to reform three important laws related to agriculture. After one year of the long protest, the government has recently revoked the three controversial farmer laws in the interest of farmers in order to regain the power in five State Legislative Assembly elections by February/March 2022.

## Conclusion

Concluding on the Indian media and its correlation with the changing media landscape, it reciprocates with most right-wing governments in the world who attempt to control the narratives associated with the mass media. Considering the rise of right-wing governments in many countries, the pattern can be followed that a government gets elected participating in a democratic election, where they advocate free press and open society. If a right-wing party wins an election with an absolute majority, they always try to bring about radical changes that also impact the overall functioning of the “free press” of a country. As a result, the government tries to regulate the press that disagrees to publish pro-government news, through bills or acts. After the landslide victory in the 2019 General Assembly election, the BJP government has tried to implement or change the major laws which are not friendly for a nationalist government to govern. Since then, the freedom of the press in India has been compromised as it must be pro-government, or it will automatically become antinationalist media. After the huge progress in digitalization in India, there has also been a rise of “new media” throughout the nation and it has helped change the narratives in favor of the government. Similarly, the culture of fake news has also been on the rise since the emergence of new media and the government’s intervention in the mainstream media.

The current state of the Indian media can be characterized by the following three points: 1) *aggressive media*; it is establishing a culture of anger reporting and anchoring; 2) *abusive media*; the right-wing media provided a platform for the use of the abusive word not only by journalists or anchors, but also by resource persons; and 3) *judiciary media*; News TV channel started a media trial and without waiting for the judgement of courts they started speaking about criminals or culprits. Furthermore, the paid news culture has drastically increased in the last five years and the news business has started on the mass level, and TV media especially have become bully media in India.

India has one of the largest competitive media industries and has a huge impact on Indian society. For example, Republic TV is India’s right-wing news channel that started operating in 2017. Since then, Republic TV has become the most popular and watched news channel in India according to TRP views. Recently, the case of Republic TV’s TRP scam in Maharashtra state shows that Republic TV was involved in TRP manipulations, where they only presented the content that had the possibility of bringing the highest TRP to their channel (The Hindu, 2021). The content liked by the audience is mostly related to hate harvesting that has ultimately torched

the communal discourse in Indian society again. During the nationwide lockdown in India (due to COVID-19), India's public broadcaster "Door Darshan" National aired a re-telecast of epic Hindu tale "*Ramayana*," which broke the record by getting 77 million views, previously held by American sitcom "*The Big Bang Theory*." This simply explains the delicacy of the Indian mindset in terms of religion, and media have tried to exploit both public sentiment and the agenda of the Hindu nationalist government. At the same time, the government's intention to initiate communal politics and the media's affection toward the TRPs can be a deadly combination for democracy and the society of India. India has a history of violence that was created by polarisation in the society, thus, the emerging attempt of the government to polarise the media and the society can have a long-term impact on India's fundamental ideology of democracy and secularism. It is not only in India that the media landscape has changed, but similar patterns can be also observed in other countries of the world, especially after the collapse of so-called liberal order.

## Author Contributions

Saroj Kumar Aryal designed the research tools. Simant Shankar Bharti developed the research results. Both authors prepared an analysis of the literature on the subject and conclusions from the research. Both authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version. Both authors listed have made an equally substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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