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Dilemma of course content and curriculum in Indian journalism education: Theory, practice and research



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Journalism and mass communication education in India has for a long time been stagnant and isolated from industrial needs and technological developments. One of the perceived deficiencies in journalism education is absence of a direct link between journalism schools and the industry. Another problem is universities—state, central and private institutions— have failed to formulate a common core curriculum to keep pace with the fast-changing media industry. Thus, media education continues to suffer from poorly designed courses, lack of rigorous contents in theory, practice and research. This paper examines the current state of journalism education in India based on an opinion survey of media educators and professionals. It concludes with suggestions on how the curriculum can be revised to remain relevant to the media sector.

Background

Journalism in India has undergone radical changes since economic reforms began in 1991. With the pronounced expansion of foreign and Indian electronic media into journalism, the landscape of journalism has expanded across all regions of India. In addition to the state-run All India Radio, there are nearly 450 television channels, 350 FM radio stations (with 10 service providers), 6,000 newspapers, 1,000 movies produced per year, 80 million pay-TV homes and 119 million television households (Thomas, 2010:71). Mobile telephones with 2G spectra, the Internet, cable television and direct-to-home television (DTHTV) have enabled electronic media to reach 80-90% of the population, of which about 50-60% is rural, a phenomenon which both Sainath (2001) and Sonwalkar (2002) have referred to as the 'Murdochization of Indian media'. The number of regional channels in all recognized Indian languages is also steadily increasing each year. In Andhra Pradesh alone, there are nearly 44 regional language television channels and 45 FM radio stations (by five major service providers) across the state. At the same time, there is an explosion of print media publications, with many newspapers being launched in regional languages, which Ninan (2007) described as a 'rural newspaper revolution' in *Headlines from the Heartland*.

Employment opportunities in professional journalism also increased significantly, where openings in media houses outnumber the available skilled personnel. All this has necessitated the introduction of journalism and mass communication colleges/institutes in the country. The rapid growth in journalism education providers has raised critical questions of the depth and quality of their curriculum and expertise of the educators. This paper attempts to trace the state of journalism education before India's economic reforms in the 90s, what inspired or guided the early curriculum and reasons for the current decline in quality. It concludes with a suggestion on an ideal course curriculum as a point of reference for journalism educators in India.

Literature review

Eapen, Thakur & Sanjay (1991) first traced the genesis and growth of journalism and mass communication in India and pointed out the need to produce media textbooks that are culturally relevant to India. Nearly a decade later, Karan (2001) found that early journalism education in India had (a) placed more emphasis on theories than practice (p.295), that (b) if there were any practical components they were mainly tailored to meet the needs of media conglomerates, and (c) there was a lack of broad spectrum education in journalism and mass communication (Karan, 2001:297). She noted:

The need now is to sensitize those aspiring to be journalists to the real socio-economic and political issues facing India. Teachers feel that some journalists lack the understanding and job skills necessary to conduct their professional practice in a dignified and decisive manner ... An otherwise neglected sector---social sciences, humanities, technology and science---should be taught thoroughly to connect the institution and masses in society. (p299).

Guru and Madhura (2005) in reviewing the state of journalism and mass communication education in India pointed to the following deficiencies: weak curriculum and inadequate faculty expertise; poor infrastructure; lack of locally relevant English-language media textbooks; lack of regional language journalism and poor student admission procedures.

Muppidi (2008) examined the problems encountered by the media educational institutions based on interviews with Indian media educators from different private and governmental institutes and universities. His findings generally reflect the previous studies. However, he did not trace the genesis of the problems historically confronted by journalism education in India to its historical development, thereby ignoring the early influences of journalism from the US and UK.

Hislop Christian College at Nagpur University was the first to start a full-fledged journalism department in 1952-53 (Eapen et al., 1991). A Fulbright scholar, Ronald E. Wolseley, an American, headed the department, followed by Floyd Baskette. Wolseley's *Journalism in Modern India* looks back at his Nagpur days. The *Indian Reporter's Guide* (written by Richard Critchfield, another American professor at Hislop) continues to be highly valued.

Eapen et al. (1991) pointed out that US media academics and their published texts had influenced early journalism education in India, and continue to do so despite the fact that Indian journalism had its beginnings during two centuries of British rule. It is plausible that India's journalism education today embodies the influence of both the British and American media traditions, the implications of which have been variously addressed.

Banerjee (2009) alludes to the implication of the dominance of Western media schools on the contents and standing of media education in Asia, and local research in media studies. In stressing the need to 'de-westernise' media studies in Asia, he wrote:

Interestingly, this has both positive and negative consequences on the future of Asian media studies (p168)...This situation encouraged students to study overseas because they found that the standard of teaching, research and scholarship in their own countries is too weak to give them sufficient credibility in their academic and professional pursuits (p170).

On the influence of American media traditions and studies on Indian journalism and mass communication, Eapen et al. (1991) wrote:

The US thrust has continued into the 1990s. The Indian educational level has risen to graduate programs, and Indian scholars settled in the US also now came under the Fulbright umbrella with no radical departures from the Singh and Wolseley days. Even the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi established in 1965, was conceptualized by Wilbur Schramm team of American experts. Despite its 25 years, the Institute has not been able to enrich indigenous scholarship very much (p1).

Eapen et al. (ibid) added that although India was a strident advocate for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) during the 1970s, it had not taken any follow-up action on education in journalism and communication in India (1991:1). As a result, neither the course content nor the textbooks used in undergraduate and graduate courses had changed significantly. Books used for teaching did not reflect national realities. The American-based textbooks were simply not relevant to the Indian situation (1991:1). Eapen et al.'s call has been repeated by several scholars (Banerjee, 2009; Thussu, 2009).

After the initial establishment of journalism departments in Nagpur and Punjab, few new programs were established until the 1960s. State universities like Benares and Osmania started a year-long journalism diploma courses during the 1960s. Krishnatray (as cited in Muppidi, 2008:68), however, noted that the second-generation development in the history of journalism education began post-1960s. Krishnatray (ibid:68) said the earlier certificate/diploma courses in journalism and mass communication were replaced by the university-based journalism courses that offered a one or two-year degree in journalism and mainly consisted of students from the urban middle class. He added that these departments contributed to the growing economy of the country by offering programs that included subjects like reporting and editing alongside the history of journalism. It was during this time that the departments changed their nomenclature from 'journalism' to 'journalism and mass communication'. Other subjects, like communications, advertising and public relations, were also added.

There were six university departments before 1961. The number increased to 25 by 1981 (Muppidi, 2008). Economic reforms after 1991 sparked the growth of private journalism education providers. These were mainly autonomous schools or recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC). They included private universities established under state laws (e.g., Amity University of Uttar Pradesh, 2002) and institutes such as the Mudra Institute of Communication (MICA, Ahmadabad), the Mudra Institute of Communication Research (MICORE, Ahmedabad), the Manipal Institute of Communication (Manipal University, Manipal) and the Symbiosis Institute of Communication (Symbiosis University, Pune). Some have established contacts with foreign institutions in UK or US or Europe; they have also developed exchange programs by adopting ISO standards 9000 and 1400. According to Krishnatray (ibid), these are the fourth generation and latest educational establishments in journalism and mass communication. However, the course content that these institutions can claim as their own contribution is small. Almost all of these institutions follow the books and course contents offered by the established journalism schools in the UK and US.

Ray (2007) says:

The parallelism between the two media worlds [the US and India] has been noted more recently [March 2006] and in even clearer terms by Price Waterhouse Coopers 'The correspondence in the pattern of the behavior of media industry in India and the US is very striking and a matter of intrigue to both Indian and the US educators and journalists.' 'It is not surprising, then that the media industry often seeks to promote an emphasis on skills in the US journalism education in preference over liberal education, on practice over theory'

Ray quotes Kunkel (2002):

For four decades, it has been debated whether journalism programs should focus almost entirely on professional skills, or should superimpose these skills over a broad liberal arts education. Although it is thought that the latter view has been widely accepted even today some in the journalism industry pressure j-schools to put more emphasis on skills and mechanics, especially as the profession becomes more dependent on technology (Kunkel, 2002).

Current programs in India generally span a wide range of topics - from basic skills such as writing and editing to film, television and radio production (and in one or two instances, online journalism) to journalism history, law and communication theory. Ray (2007) says that one possible solution is to streamline Indian journalism education to ensure that the Master's program becomes more intensive, subject specific and critically oriented.

The influence of British journalism practices on Indian journalism education

As there is no adequate literature available on this aspect and as it is necessary to balance the present work with the equal and pioneering influence that British journalism left on early journalism education and training in India, I consider it important to document it here. For this, I chose to interview senior journalists-turned-academics, aged 55-65 years. Trikha (Navbharat Times, Lucknow), Ray (Frontline of The Hindu), and Thakur (United News of India, Indian Post, Sakal and vernacular press in Pune, Maharashtra) began the early part of their professional careers with reputable media houses in India. Senior academics interviewed were Nagraj, Sanjay and Kumar who were journalists at various points of their career. Their opinions offer an insight into the manner in which journalism education has been steered from the British to the US system over the course of their career.

Trikha (personal communication, 2010) asserted that early journalism practices in India, although not backed by any British journalism schools, were heavily influenced by British journalism in its reporting, editing and style. Trikha alluded to the freedom fighters such as Nehru, Gandhi, Patel, who returned from London to run their own media houses to support the cause of freedom struggle. If one examined the headings, vocabulary and angles of the stories published in those papers in India during that time, one could clearly discern the level of imitation these stalwarts adopted those days. In a way, it was felt necessary to attract the attention of independent thinkers in Britain to draw their support for the freedom struggle. Contributions by British media and journalism institutions to Indian media educational institutions in the post-independence era are, however, minimal although a few journalists were regularly selected and sent to the UK on British Council scholarships (e.g., Thomson Foundation Fellowships). A few attended the Cardiff School of Journalism. On returning from the UK, they went back to the same media institutions. As such, Trikha points out, their newly

acquired knowledge and skills were hardly shared with other media professionals or academics elsewhere in India.

However, many media professionals working with All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (the Indian government's television station) admit that, during the formative years at AIR and Doordarshan (DD), they benefited from their training at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). A few academic experts (Kumar's personal communication, 2010) who received their master's and doctorates in journalism say that the UK-trained academic professionals could not contribute much to journalism education in India because Indian schools of journalism were more 'teaching-centric' than 'research-based'.

Kumar says, 'Several university departments of communication/journalism are no more than skills-training institutes; their teachers and students do not do any research nor do they publish in academic journals. University teachers who have done their doctoral degrees in the UK have not been able to make much difference to these skills-oriented institutes. In fact, many of them have been sidelined. The few teachers who have managed to make a difference succeeded only because of their own dogged efforts. They have succeeded in injecting a research culture into their university departments.' Karan (1991) explained that the early doctorates trained in the UK could only inculcate research and theory among the next generation of students in India.

In contrast, BP Sanjay, a senior academic and member of several panels set up by various institutions such as UGC (personal communication, 2010), says, 'While there is no dispute about the British foundation of early journalistic practices in Indian journalism during-and-post-colonialism, the vigor and the aggressiveness with which the US media houses put out enormous news in different commercial formats, has become market wise an ideal to emulate and import to India from the US.'

KV Nagraj, a senior academic and member of several UGC panels (personal communication, 2010), says, 'The American model is a market-oriented one, and the British model is tilted a bit towards the public service model. It is where the US has taken a lead over the British journalistic traditions in India.'

Both Sanjay and Nagraj concur that the US offers more scholarships to Indian students than the British. Sanjay and Trikha also agree that most of the US-trained scholars who returned to India adopted the US system of journalism education in Indian journalism education. Even Banerjee (2009) and Thussu (2009) held the same view, although supporting a call for 'de-westernizing media studies'.

Books written on media studies and journalism practices by UK authors were costlier than books from the US. They are beyond the reach of Indian universities and private educational institutions. As such, books authored by eminent editors like Harold Evans (*Newsman's English*) are rarely prescribed in Indian universities.

Since the 1990s, however, texts by Indian authors have begun to replace the US and the UK textbooks. For instance, TJS George (Editing), Rangaswami

Parthasarathi (History of Indian Journalism), Usha Raman (English Language and Editing) and Sunil Saxena (Editing) are now preferred to foreign authored books.

Given the historical complexity of journalism education in India both before and after independence, Indian universities— State, Central and private educational institutions—by now should have evolved a common core curriculum relevant to the digital media realities with an emphasis along two axes: one in line with the industrial needs and the other to meet the broader needs of social sciences as an academic discipline (Muppidi, 2008; Guru, 2005:6). However, this has not yet happened. Consequently, journalism education in India suffers from a lack of standardization of content, and the courses offered in many institutes and universities only deal with the basics at the expense of critical research on the practice (Guru, 2005:6), and to an extent the critical functions of journalism in a democracy. Which harks back to the caution by Carey (2000) who said that 'journalism education is an education for democracy'. Garrett (2005), the Pulitzer Prize winner in journalism, said, 'When you see news as a product that has to compete with the other product lines...then I think it is impossible to really serve democracy' (2005).

Should the course content be 'industry focused', 'academic-centric' or both?

Nurturing the industry-academic link has become the crux of how to reform journalism education. Although practitioners from the industry delivered occasional lectures in classrooms, they did not participate significantly in the shaping of journalism education in India. Further, not all practitioners are capable of translating their input (skills) into theoretical application, which journalism, as an academic subject, often demands. In addition, journalism teachers lacked hands-on media experience although they may have a theoretical understanding of the discipline. As such, the whole education system for journalism and mass communication in India is grappling with which path is most appropriate: the industry line, the purely academic line or both.

Sainath (2001) and Sonwalkar (2002) felt that the 'corporatization of media industry' in India, on par with the 'Murdochization' of media in the West, had an impact on the course curriculum desired in journalism and mass communication education and tilted it in favor of imparting basic skills required for the industry.

According to Reese (1999), 'Journalism education faces mounting pressure to abandon its academic ethos to embrace its industry patrons in the US'. Reese holds that academics must stress on nurturing in their students the analytical abilities to comprehend growing social problems, rather than focusing on a set of skills that would only cater to the industry in a limited sense. However, few in India have stressed this crucial aspect of journalism education and training despite massive expansion in media in post globalization (Thomas, 2010).

Purpose of the present study

It is against this scenario that my study examines the following questions:

- i. What should be the acceptable curriculum—industry linked, academic oriented or both (functionalist)—for the current generation of media students, and how should the existing curriculum be revised—either by regrouping or formulating a new one altogether?
- ii. To what extent are the journalism undergraduate and graduate programs in India equipped with relevant infrastructure?
- iii. What should be done to consolidate the opinions of media experts regarding the infrastructure and manpower available for imparting theory, practice (a skill-oriented training) and research in journalism education?

Methodology

This study uses of hybrid of methodologies. University Grants Commission list of the universities in both the private sector (deemed universities) and public sector (State and Central Universities) offering journalism and mass communication courses in India from 2009-10 was collected from the UGC. Using the websites of those universities, the relevant departments offering Bachelor's, Master's and Postgraduate Diploma (PG Diploma) courses were identified. This procedure has two advantages:

- i. to collect the curriculum adopted by different universities for Bachelor's, Master's and PG diploma courses in journalism-education and
- ii. to obtain the e-mail addresses of the academics/professionals working in the relevant departments of each university.

Questionnaires were mailed to the entire department faculty of each university. The e-mail addresses of the academics/professionals were collected from their respective institutional websites. Approximately 200 e-mail addresses were collected from the websites, although some university websites did not provide the e-mail addresses of faculty members working in the departments of journalism and mass communication. Approximately 30 e-mails were returned by undelivered. The total e-mails sent are N=170.

Questionnaire for academics/professionals

Eminent media professionals and academics, some of whom had moved from industry into academia, having worked as heads/deans of top journalism schools in India in the past, consented to have their views quoted in the study. Therefore, their views were freely quoted both in the introduction and in subsequent sections as primary sources wherever there is a scarcity of literature (secondary sources) on the subject. Those who preferred anonymity were not quoted.

The questionnaire is in two parts. Part I contains open-ended essay questions asking the academics/professionals to respond to specifics related to the current problems of curriculum design and the influence of the West over Indian journalism education, was already quoted in earlier sections of the paper.

Part II consists of questions that address four broad categories, the answers to which are summed up in Results and Discussion. The four categories below were developed based on the questions created for the present study:

1. Exploration of an acceptable curriculum (Q.1);
2. Skill level of graduates at the end of the course (Q.2);
3. Competence levels of faculty and their recruitment (Q.2) and
4. Infrastructure of the departments and adequacy of research facilities. (Q.3)

Supply of curricular courses to the respondents: Common (Table 1), Uncommon (Table 2) and Proposed Acceptable Model Curriculum (Table 3)

To elicit relevant and focused answers to the present study, I have provided curricular tables delineating the common course curriculum (Table 1), uncommon course curriculum (Table 2) and a revised/regrouped acceptable model course curriculum (Table 3). It is expected that these tables will not only familiarize the respondents with all of the possible curricular data concerning journalism education in India but will also enable them to consider whether Table 3, drawn from Tables 1 and 2, would meet their expectations as an acceptable model curriculum for Indian journalism education, removing existing ambiguities in the nomenclature.

Issues with methodology

There are some issues with the chosen methodology. About N=55 (slightly more than 25%) academics/professionals out of total 200 e-mails sent (of which 30 returned as undeliverables) responded to the questionnaire (in effect only 170 e-mails were sent). Of these, 35 were educators and 20 were professionals (from television, online and print industries). The response rate was low, but according to Sriramesh and Hornman (2006:162), several similar studies had considered a response rate of 25% or more to be acceptable for this type of study. Callaghan and McManus (2010:15) study recognized the problem of using a small purposive sample (only 10 media professionals) in such studies, but they justified it on the grounds that their study only indicated the priorities of the major employers in West Australia. The present study attempted to provide some answers to the questions raised with respect to four categories on the basis of which questions were listed in the questionnaire. The present study may not be representative, but it is a step forward since the last study by Muppidi (2008).

The present study differed from earlier studies (Eapen et al., 1991; Karan, 2000; Guru and Madhura, 2005; Muppidi, 2008) by providing Indian academics and professionals with four specific categories for eliciting their opinion on a broader

range of topics. Also, after a careful examination of the journalism curriculum being taught across public and private Indian universities (Tables 1 & 2), I have provided a model curriculum which could be adopted as a national curriculum for PG Diploma, Bachelor's and Master's courses.

Acceptable common core curriculum: Regrouping present curriculum focussing on a specific course

Approximately 80% (N=44) of the respondents felt that appropriate regrouping of associated papers and/or basket paper options (Table 2) from the beginning of the semester would yield a better product outcome, as explained in Table 3's note. Many academics who responded to this question acknowledged that they were not aware of any UNESCO-recommended curriculum for journalism education. It was a surprise outcome from the survey.

However, Guru quoted the recommendation of Professor Dua as follows:

In fact eminent media persons should give constant advice on updating the course content. The courses in all languages could be split into two general areas—(i) core and (ii) general, or optional. The core courses should include – (a) subject orientation, (b) interdisciplinary background, (c) theoretical research and field survey (d) basic and applied skills in all spheres of media, print, film and broadcasting including television and video, public relations and advertising, (e) compulsory media internship and production of professional assignments to be judged by senior media executives. (Guru, B.P.M.C. 2005: 6).

In fact, Guru stated that Prof. Dua also called for the constitution of a regulatory body called the Indian Council of Journalism/Mass Communication, which has not yet crystallized. However, most of the respondents, both academics and industry professionals, did agree with the Table 3 regrouping of the core courses with the associated papers.

Most respondents generally agree that the common courses listed in Table 1 are being implemented in their institutions and that they were facing a number of odd situations due to the unpreparedness of the students to produce 20 theoretical papers, six practical papers and a dissertation in a three-year Bachelor's or two-year Master's course. They argue that a student who has a mental disposition toward advertisement-making, creative processes or television anchoring/reporting also has to study courses like print media reporting, editing, subbing, advanced reporting, and public relations, which do not interest them at all. Therefore, they argue that those students, who have specific course options, should be exempted from the compulsory study of all other papers and that the curriculum should be option-focused. They recommended the development of option-specific modules for that purpose and three years of study coupled with hands-on experience and internships.

Therefore, the respondents preferred a greater flexibility within the departments

in terms of offering various programs through combinations of courses rather than the present system of offering staid programs with an extensive curriculum requiring 20-35 papers. Most of the academics and professionals regretted that Indian journalism education only offers a single program. The majority stated that when there are more than two or three programs, one still finds a jumbo curriculum that is mostly drawn from existing program(s) without significant innovation in subject offerings.

To support their argument in favor of student-centric curricular requirements with more flexibility of options, the respondents cited the 'poor to mediocre' quality of students' being admitted into journalism education schools. Sunanda (2000) said that if someone was not qualified for any job, he became a journalist. Most of the students admitted into journalism education were rejected for admission into other courses at reputable colleges in Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata, or Hyderabad, a view consistently expressed by 80% of respondents (N=44). Many academics complained that very few were admitted with a meritorious background or an aptitude for journalism and mass communication. In spite of completing three-year Bachelor's courses in journalism, many could not speak or write English fluently and therefore were not fit for either print or electronic media despite doing regular internships. As a result, many undergraduates do not get a placement in media institutions. Many academics and professionals expressed that this situation makes it difficult to explain whether the fault lies with the curriculum, with the students' poor learning abilities and skill levels or with other factors, such as poor teaching or a lack of infrastructure.

As such, the question of offering 20 papers spread over six semesters for a three-year Bachelor's course or four semesters for a Master's course is a contention among academics and the professionals. Similarly, 80% (N=44) of academics expressed broadening the curriculum by adding components from Table 2, whereas 20% (N=11) disagree, saying that it would only increase the burden on the students and would lead the programs into a blind alley. The contention that broadening the curriculum would offer journalism students deeper insight into the complexities of social issues is not accepted by both academics and professionals. The argument is that, as students from varied backgrounds are admitted, and students learn while working as journalists, the broadening of the curriculum is not mandatory. To support of their argument, they cited a number of famous journalists of yesteryear who were basically science and engineering graduates without any background in arts and humanities (e.g., MV Kamat).

At the same time, both academics and professionals cautioned that if there was no accompanying improvement in the quality of admissions (Guru, 2005:9), the effort to develop a model curriculum as envisaged in Table 3 may still abort without giving any tangible results. Thus, approximately 60% of the academic respondents (N=33) and 25% of the professional respondents (N=13) warned that over-admission and low standards in the admission process is a common enemy for any sort of curricular reform.

Skill levels of graduates at the end of the course

Almost all senior academics and the industry professionals agreed that very few students after completing their Bachelor's or Master's program were highly refined in their written and spoken communication skills. Most of the students do not show any interest in improving their skills during the course of their study - this view was expressed by 50% (N= 27) of the academic respondents and 25% (N=13) from the professionals who alluded to reasons such as the lack of necessity to have a job or due to students' wealthy background. Further, 30% of the academics, especially the younger faculty who had recently joined the teaching profession, complained that given the pace of each semester and the full load of workload, they lack time and resources to address specific deficiencies with individual students.

Some respondents noted that students seemed to perform better in film and television production, learning professions such as cameraman, director, or ad-film maker than in print media reporting. Most of the academics/professionals who have supervised students' journalistic work found that students are generally less equipped in language than hands-on skills such as for operating a camera, lighting, online editing, using Final Cut Pro and multimedia production. About 20% (N=11) of professionals said that although there are no advertising laboratories dedicated to designing advertisements, ad-campaigns for corporate brands, or practicing other multimedia skills, students still show skills related to ad-campaigns, generate advertisements using graphics and animation and shoot films for commercial advertising. Some students have even excelled in small-scale marketing jobs by producing advertisements for institutional level programs (eg. Vistas—Tezpur University, Big Picture—Amity University).

Competence levels of faculty, recruitment and capacity building

There is consensus among academics and professionals (N=55) on the distressing scenario of the quality of teaching in journalism schools in India. 'The competence levels of the faculty in many institutes and universities are very low,' said Ranganathan (email communication). Respondents (N=13) from private institutions stated that their remuneration in the private educational sector is very pathetic; that the industry offers better remuneration than the academic institutions for the same work and the same hours.

Though the UGC-prescribed National Eligibility Test (NET) is a mandatory qualification, an inclusive policy (which sets 70 out of 200 as the passing mark for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) and the lack of a teaching skills test dilutes the standards of the NET. Schools appointing NET-qualified faculty without requiring a doctoral degree in media have further diluted the quality of teaching, notes Ang Peng Hwa (personal communication, 2011), who spent a year from mid-2008 as Visiting Dean to help start the doctoral programme at the Mudra Institute of Communication Research (MICORE) at Ahmedabad. Almost all of the private institutions and deemed universities, such as Amity, Symbiosis and Manipal

Universities, appoint faculty without these mandatory qualifications.

In fact, none of the heads of Manipal Institute of Communication, Symbiosis Journalism School and the Amity School of Communication holds a doctorate degree in journalism and communication from any prestigious university. The websites of many private and public educational institutions do not show the expertise and research publications of their faculty to the desirable level. Though the Right to Information Act (RTI Act) has come into force, many private and deemed universities have yet to implement this. If this is implemented the parents and the students would get to know whether the faculty who would teach them tomorrow are academically and professionally qualified.

Some state and central universities are appointing assistant professors in journalism and mass communication, even if they did not have any experience in the media industry, in teaching or research, according to some senior academics (N=10). Some academics recommended a minimum of five years industry experience before one could be appointed an assistant professor (Rao, 2010). About 90% of academics said that neither their universities or institutes nor the faculties take any interest in capacity-building exercises, either through interaction with other academic organizations or the industry.

About 80% of professionals said that they were never invited to interact with the students of other universities. Many (N=17) even pointed out the obsession for calling celebrities and renowned anchors for their departments' publicity rather than arranging a needed interface between the students and these professionals. No significant seminars, workshops or conferences were held to motivate faculty staff to improve their qualifications and update their knowledge, according to 70% (N=38) respondents. These institutions (with the exception of institutes like the Manipal Institute of Communication) also do not have any schemes to grant study leave to the faculty to improve their qualifications.

With the emphasis on teaching, the private and public sectors' educational institutions have virtually converted the faculties into teaching machines, said several academics. About 80% (N=44) reported that no research is being encouraged or funded by these institutes and that the faculty is not allowed to conduct surveys, workshops or interviews on the assumption that their teaching would be affected.

Many scholars said students' feedback at the end of each semester showed that classroom lectures are mostly dry, bookish, bereft of critical interpretations from a multidisciplinary perspective and lacking in practical demonstrations. According to Guru, the students' feedback also indicated that the faculty is not familiar with the latest techniques in areas such as desktop publishing, photography, video display terminals, facsimile editions, videography, cinematography and scriptwriting.

Infrastructure of the departments and research facilities

Except for a small portion of academics (5%=N=3) from University of Hyderabad, EFLU, Jamia Millia Islamia, IIMC and JNU, 70% of academics and professionals (N=38) admitted that there is a severe infrastructure problem despite their high tuition fees. Except for institutions like the Manipal Institute of Communication, Asian College of Journalism and Symbiosis, MICA and MICORE, most of the private institutions, deemed universities, autonomous colleges and State and Central universities do not have the desired level of infrastructure that would facilitate quality teaching and research.

For instance, there is a need for an 'advertising design laboratory', just as most of the journalism departments provide space for a 'print media lab' where they produce 'lab journals' to give the students the feel of reporting, sub-editing and laying out the pages, as pointed out by some of the academics. Besides the poor infrastructure, the status of libraries in Indian journalism and mass communication departments is another worrisome factor, according to 80% (N=44) of academics. There is a severe scarcity of literature, DVDs, books and journals and only routine magazines and a few newspapers are commonly found in any library. The younger generation of academics expressed frustration over their inability to carry out part-time doctoral research at their place of employment.

Approximately 80% (N=44) of the academics complained that there is no worthwhile research happening in journalism and mass communication in India despite the rich areas of inquiry into the plurality of the media and inclusiveness in a culturally diverse Indian society. For instance, institutes like Manipal Institute of Communication and Symbiosis had not published a single paper in any international journals in the area of communication, although one finds some paper presentations at national and international conferences, as observed by some academics, who also pointed out the lack of interest in promoting research among top players in the private sector. Similarly, several State and Central universities have a large number of faculty members, but one would hardly find papers being published in international journals, pointed out many academics from these universities, reflecting the low motivation levels of the academics in these universities, despite getting fat salaries due to 6th pay commission scales. Approximately 60% of the academics said that they were not getting admitted into doctoral programs for research as there are only about 10-15 universities in India that currently offer doctoral programs in journalism and mass communication. Even 40% of the professionals evinced interest in improving their qualifications and enriching their knowledge but regretted that the present state of journalism and mass communication schools in India offered little hope in this regard.

Limitations and Suggestions

My study is indeed limited in its findings given its purposive sample of respondents. Certainly, further research on this subject using a mixed methodology, such as focused or in-depth discussions followed by interviews with target groups involving a larger number of respondents with a provision for age differences among faculty members and their level of teaching expertise (experience and research skills) may paint a different picture. Nevertheless, I hope my study will spark more critical discussions on the necessity of a common core curriculum and bring academics and professionals to a common platform to rationalize the modules to improve the quality of teaching and thus the intellectual capacity and professional skills of graduates who can become effective journalists in the diverse cultural and regional settings that are unique to India.

Table 1. Common modules in communication and journalism

S.No	Course Module	Bachelor's level	Master's level	PG Diploma level
1.	Reporting and Editing	✓	✓	✓
2.	Writing to Media	✓	✓	✓
3.	Advanced Reporting	✓	✓	✓
4.	Advertising	✓	✓	✓
5.	Public Relations	✓	✓	✓
6.	Television Production	✓	✓	✓
7.	Radio Production	✓	✓	✓
8.	Graphics and Animation	✓	✓	✓
9.	Internet and Web Journalism	✓	✓	✓
10.	Corporate Communication	✓	✓	✓
11.	Media Ethics and Law	✓	✓	✓
12.	Media Research	✓	✓	✓
13.	Development Communication	✓	✓	✓
14.	Documentary Production	✓	✓	✓
15.	Film Production/Studies	✓	✓	✓
16.	Media History	✓	✓	✓
17.	Communication Theory	✓	✓	✓
18.	Magazine Journalism	✓	✓	✓
19.	Photo Journalism	✓	✓	✓
20.	Media Management	✓	✓	✓

Note: The above common core papers have different titles at different Universities and Institutes that offered courses in Journalism and Mass Communication. For instance, the module 'Writing, Reporting and Editing' is also referred to as 'Print Media'. Similarly, radio and TV are together referred to as 'Electronic Media' or 'AV Production'. This is also the case with Public Relations, which is often referred to as 'Corporate Communication'. Strangely, some universities offer both PR and Corporate Communication. (Developed by C.S.H.N.Murthy, 2009)

Table 2. Uncommon modules combined with common core modules, complicating the framing of uniform curriculum

S.No	Course Module
1.	English Literature and Communication Skills
2.	History of India
3.	Environmental Science or Covering Ecology and Environment (Anna University)
4.	Political Communication (Tezpur Univ, Tezpur)
5.	Political Science
6.	Geopolitics (MIC, Manipal)
7.	Science Journalism (Meerut Univ, Meerut)
8.	Visual Communication (Tezpur Univ, Tezpur)
9.	Business Journalism/Financial Journalism (Meerut Univ, Meerut)
10.	Sports Journalism (Meerut University, Meerut)
11.	Information and Society
12.	Covering Gender
13.	Making Sense of Politics
14.	Leading Issues in Economics
15.	Identities in a Plural Society
16.	Covering Arts and Culture
17.	Cultural Studies or Cultural Communication (MIC, Manipal)
18.	Indian Economy and Agriculture (Meerut Univ, Meerut)
19.	Defense Journalism (MIC, Manipal)
20.	International Communication (Tezpur Univ)

Note: Indeed, these papers can be converted to basket courses for students to choose. Presently, they are also indiscriminately combined with essential course modules, making the course highly crammed and complicating the exercise of framing a uniform national curriculum. (MIC, Manipal, Tezpur Univ, Tezpur, Amity Univ, Noida, Symbiosis Univ, Pune, etc). (Developed by C.S.H.N.Murthy, 2009)

Table 3. Regrouping of course content (specialization-wise)

S.No	Course Module	Bachelor's level	Master's level	PG Diploma level
Category	Print Media	✓	✓	✓
1.	Reporting and Advanced Reporting	✓	✓	✓
2.	Editing	✓	✓	✓
3.	Photo Journalism	✓	✓	✓
4.	Magazine Journalism	✓	✓	✓
Category	Advertising & PR			
5.	Advertising (not to be mixed with PR)	✓	✓	✓
6.	Public Relations or Corporate Communication or Integrated Marketing Communications (only one is enough to prepare a common core)	✓	✓	✓
Category	Radio, TV and Film Production			
7.	Television Production (including reporting & editing)	✓	✓	✓
8.	Radio Production (including reporting and editing)	✓	✓	✓
09.	Graphics and Animation	✓	✓	✓
10.	Documentary Production	✓	✓	✓
11.	Film Production/Film studies	✓	✓	✓
Category	New Media			
12.	Internet and Web Journalism or Online Journalism (only one)	✓	✓	✓
Category	Associated Courses	✓	✓	✓
13.	Media Ethics and Law	✓	✓	✓
14.	Media Research	✓	✓	✓
15.	Development Communication	✓	✓	✓
16.	Media History	✓	✓	✓
17.	Communication Theory	✓	✓	✓
18.	Media Management	✓	✓	✓
19.	Cultural Studies	✓	✓	✓

Note: The papers indicated above as the course curriculum under each category make for a one-year PG Diploma, two-year Master's degree or three-year Bachelor's degree, using a semester curriculum. The categories include associated papers. In addition, to make up the course curriculum, the institute may require papers from different modules offered here. For example, a one-year PG Diploma in Print Media can offer courses 1 to 4 plus one associate course, such as 13 or 14. This is also the case with a PG Diploma in Advertising and Public Relations, which can be offered by combining 5 and 6 with associated papers 13, 14 and 18. (Developed by C.S.H.N.Murthy, 2009)

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