



## **MEDIA OWNERSHIP & DEMOCRACY: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper is an attempt to understand media ownership pattern with respect to the issue of new media. In this regard, the paper delves into the themes of democracy, participation and the internet. The main area of enquiry is to gather an understanding of media ownership pattern in India in the context of technological advancement. Has internet made the media more democratic, which has lead to a change in the ownership structure? Are consumers of media also turning into owners of media, blurring the difference between owners and consumers? The basic line of argument followed in this paper is that, internet has become a new delivery channel, which allows modest level of participation from upper middle class and upper class urban population in India. Internet as a medium in India, is still not owned by any 'one' person, corporate or agency, so new technology is changing the ownership pattern.

### **Keywords:**

technology, participation, new media, democracy, media ownership

### **INTRODUCTION:**

According to the 2010 Internet Usage and population statistics, there are about one hundred million internet users in India, and this constitutes a penetration percentage of 8.5% (Internet World Stats, 2010). This 8.5% may seem like a very dismal and small number, but what is interesting to note is the involvement of this hundred million users with the internet. This number does not dismiss the internet growth story and the rate at which the number of internet users are increasing every day. India has the third highest number of internet users, the world over (Internet World Stats, 2011). This paper will look at internet as a medium of communication and information sharing platform and will ignore its uses as a medium of e-commerce.





**MATERIAL AND METHOD:**

**PARTICIPATION:**

The involvement of individuals in the process of content generation in traditional media is limited. Letter to the editors, citizen journalism etc. are some of the ways in which viewers, readers or consumers get to play a role in the production of content. But according to 'Ess (1996), the net provides a forum for a truly free exchange of ideas and views, unconstrained by imbalances of power and resources' (Street, 2001). Individuals can engage, participate and discuss issues which are important to them. John Street quotes Staton who in 1994 said 'Modern communication technology can provide the means to broadly educate and enlighten citizens in their quest for self determination' (Street, 2001). While letters to the editor can be rejected and a media channel may or may not have citizen journalist, but internet as a medium is not under any such direct control. Individuals can express their personal opinions through blogs, social networking sites and can even promote their views by sending links through e-mails, chats etc. Internet overcomes 4 major problems which are a roadblock for individual participation. These problems are the issues of 'time, size, knowledge and access' (Street, 2001). Internet allows individuals to access multiple views. The issue of internet, participation and democracy has been captured in the following lines. 'The media have a double relation to democracy. On the one hand the emergence of a global information society is a powerful democratising force. Yet, television, and the other media, tends to destroy the very public space of dialogue they open up, through relentless trivializing, and personalizing of issues. (Giddens 1999: np)' (Meier)

**OWNERSHIP:**

Patterns of concentration of ownership in the traditional media are clearly visible in the English press, with the two newspaper chains, the





Times of India and the Indian express newspaper controlling about 20% of daily circulation in all languages in the

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION:**

While internet helps the so called 'consumers' to produce content, therefore no one owns the internet media. The consumers are becoming producers and ownership pattern is diluting. Individual's have access to the technology and can use it to discuss issues that concern them. They don't have to wait to get approval of editors and marketing heads of media production and content generation companies to express their views. This is major change in the media scape which requires further study.

### **CONCLUSION:**

In light of this discussion, internet has been responsible for opening up new ways of organizing discussions and providing a platform for exchange of ideas. This line of idea is the crux of this paper. The trend of having debates on the internet like the recent 'Anna movement' has given individuals freedom of writing and expressing themselves through blogs and social networking sites. The purpose of this paper is not to overestimate the role of internet and to ignore the low penetration rate of internet in India, but to understand the nature of this technology. The way few individuals have come to engage with this media and the way this media has provided them with a platform to participate. The idea that no one owns the internet and the control over the content is not concentrated in just a few hands is the area of discussion. Content generation and access have been used as two parameters to understand ownership. Private ownership of media by business houses and politicians had biased the content to suit the owners; also the technology of production of print and television cannot be accessed by everyone. So,

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ownership affected content and access. Now with the internet, access has travelled to more individuals and content production is more participative, hence the ownership pattern has also changed.

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**Reference**

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