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| **ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE-27** |
| **V SEMESTER EXAMINATION: DECEMBER 2022 JN 5118: ADVANCED JOURNALISM** |
| **Time: 2 ½ hrs Max. Marks- 70**  **Instruction:**   1. This paper is meant for V semester students of BA-EJP course. 2. You are allowed to use a Dictionary. 3. You will lose marks for exceeding the suggested word-limit. 4. This paper contains FOUR pages and THREE sections. |

# I. Read the following published in the Economist Asia, and answer the questions that follow.

One constant throughout the original nine seasons of “The X-Files”, a globally syndicated American television show about a pair of FBI special agents assigned to weird cases, is a poster in the background. Mounted on a wall in the agents’ dingy basement office, it shows a grainy picture of a flying saucer and is emblazoned with a slogan in large sans-serif letters: “I WANT TO BELIEVE”. This sentiment ultimately (two-decade-old spoiler alert!) helps the agents uncover a massive conspiracy involving the government and a technologically superior society capable of magical feats (in this case, space aliens).

A similar urge appears to have driven editors at the Wire, an independent Indian news website. Earlier this month, it published a story alleging a massive conspiracy involving the government and a technologically superior society capable of magical feats (in this case, Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp).

The short version of a very long saga goes something like this. On October 10th the Wire alleged that Meta had handed awesome powers to Amit Malviya, who oversees social media for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). So extensive were his privileges that his posts on Instagram were immune to review by content moderators, it said. What’s more, he had the ability to flag posts from other accounts as objectionable, which would be instantly removed without question. It published what it said were internal Instagram reports to support its claims.

It was earth-shattering stuff. Meta’s communications chief, Andy Stone, denied the claims on Twitter. But his employer has the rare distinction of being considered untrustworthy even when it denies something flat out, so few observers were willing to take him at his word. The Wire certainly did not: the next day it published what it claimed was a leaked email written by Mr Stone himself, thus proving its allegations as well as providing evidence of a botched cover-up. “How the hell [this internal report] got leaked?” it read. “Who is the reporter, not on our watch list, and why didn’t anyone of you bother to link me up?”

Ignore for a moment the ropey English in an email supposedly written by an American. Even with Meta’s reputation, it was hard to dismiss its next move as mere obfuscation. The company published a lengthy statement refuting the claims in the strongest possible terms. “There is no such report…There are no such emails.”

Still, the Wire soldiered on. On October 15th it published “proof” that the email was real, relying on cryptographic checks and verification of its methods from two independent analysts (both of whom later said they had not verified anything). After a barrage of criticism, the Wire retracted the stories on October 23rd. It also pulled an earlier investigation alleging that the BJP had created a super-app that automated the creation and deletion of social-media accounts to spew hate at scale. On October 27th its editors at last issued an apology, admitting they rushed publication without proper technical vetting or adequate editorial checks.

Three lessons flow from this miserable affair. First is the stupidity of choosing partisanship over process. Wanting to believe is a fine quality in a pilgrim but a lousy one for holding power to account. Indeed, the result is the exact opposite of what the Wire had intended. Meta has avoided fresh scrutiny over its relationship with the BJP or the special privileges it may grant powerful figures. The BJP, for its part, has remained silent, but no doubt rejoiced as one the country’s [few remaining outlets](https://www.economist.com/asia/2022/08/29/media-freedom-in-india-is-under-threat-again) for critical journalism shattered its own credibility. A willingness to listen to critics might have helped the Wire spot its mistakes earlier.

A second lesson is that technology in general and social media in particular, while powerful, are not capable of magic. This is a lesson liberals have refused to learn ever since Britain voted for Brexit and America for Donald Trump. So badly did they want to believe in the abilities of Cambridge Analytica, or of the Russian state, or the maleficence of their political foes, or in the conspiracies that joined these elements together, that they failed to accept reality.

Above all is the lesson that misinformation is generated by all sides—and that it is often done in good faith. Journalists are told, “If your mother says she loves you, check it out.” In an era when everything is political and anybody with a smartphone can broadcast news, scepticism is more important than ever. It is time to update the maxim. “If your enemy tells you he’s evil, check it out.”

**I.A. Answer ALL of the following questions in 100-150 words EACH: (3x10=30)**

1. Why did the Wire have to withdraw the ‘meta’ story? Do failures of this kind effect the credibility of the news organisation? Explain in your own words.

2. The writer says there are lessons to learn about covering investigative stories from this event. What are these lessons? Elaborate.

3. “In an era when everything is political and anybody with a smartphone can broadcast news, scepticism is more important than ever.” Why is ‘scepticism’ important for an investigative journalist? Is scepticism sustainable in a context where everyone wants to break news?

**II. Read the following column and answer the questions that follow.**

With the merger of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd with Sony Pictures Entertainment Ltd, about half of India’s television entertainment market goes under non-Indian control. Is it time to worry about cultural subversion, thought control and the decimation of Indian media houses? On the contrary: the rise of foreign media players in the Indian market will spell ever greater opportunity for Indian creativity and open a window to corners of the world where Indian culture has not made its presence felt till now. The biggest player in the entertainment media segment remains Disney/Star. It will be followed by the Sony-Zee combine, majority-owned by Sony. The third largest player would be Viacom, in which ViacomCBS holds 49%. A growing, overlapping segment with broadcast television for entertainment is that of streaming content on OTT platforms, which have both subscription and advertising revenue models.

Why do foreign media houses dominate this business? Are Indian companies in the space not good enough to compete? The simple fact is that Indian media companies have chosen to encash the value they have created and sell out to foreign conglomerates who offer them a good deal. So long as there are no entry barriers, this is perfectly fine. The media behemoths represent an opportunity for Indian entrepreneurs to monetize the value they generate. Those who are willing to play the long game, by creating quality programming, can stay put and compete. No foreign company can shut anyone out from distribution. Regulation sees to it. And 5G communications, with its great leap forward in data throughput, would disrupt traditional media distribution in any case, giving streaming media and OTT platforms a big leg-up.

Will foreign media conglomerates destroy India’s cultural integrity? The answer to this has three parts. The hierarchical and misogynistic elements of Indian culture need to change. A lot of change is inevitable in a globalizing world, in which Indians are enthusiastic participants. Some change is actively driven by cultural production, in which media houses search out and introduce successful western formats and formulae in their own programming. Indian-owned media houses do this as aggressively as western ones.

The third part is to appreciate the huge boost foreign media conglomerates are likely to give to Indian creative agents: scriptwriters, film producers, directors, musicians of all breeds, sound engineers, lighting experts, dancers and other artistes. It is not the case that global media houses simply dub foreign content into Indian languages and foist them on captive audiences. Viewers have choice, and so media houses commission new, innovative content.

To illustrate the point, look at *Squid Game*, the Korean drama that is Netflix’s top show in 94 markets. *Squid Game*’s Korean creator wrote the script in 2009 and failed to find a producer till Netflix took it up in 2019. Some could argue that Netflix is a streaming platform, not a television network. But look at what is happening to content in India, and the blurring of divisions between channels and their related OTT platforms. A movie such as *Churuli*, a Malayalam movie that is critically acclaimed but profusely profane and therefore beyond the pale for traditional distribution channels, was streamed on SonyLIV. Another Malayalam award-winning movie, the *Great Indian Kitchen*, a parable on the oppression women experience in a traditional home, was streamed on NeeStream, a niche streaming platform financed by a US-based fund.

Big media houses can take risks that cannot be afforded by smaller ones and even find audiences in large enough numbers. This would permit the discovery of talent that mainstream producers would ignore, and some of these could, like *Squid Game*, turn out to have a global audience. If media houses with a global footprint produce Indian-made content that could sell in other markets — and it is in their interest to identify and develop such content — the active presence of global media conglomerates would export Indian culture to the rest of the world.

May the Sony-Zee merger trigger yet more media experiments and investment across the board, to the benefit of consumers and Indian film-makers and artistes.

**II.A. Answer ANY TWO of the following questions in 200 words EACH (2x15=30)**

4. The writer poses the question, “Is it time to worry about cultural subversion, thought control and the decimation of Indian media houses?” and proceeds to argue against the same. What is your take on the question?

5. The comments made here are pertaining to entertainment content. Is this pattern of ownership beneficial for news media as well? Argue.

6. Media ownership is of interest to research on Journalism as the assumption is that patterns of ownership can have an impact on the freedom of the press. Is this a fair assumption? Argue and substantiate with examples.

**III. Write a pitch for an investigative story from your neighbourhood that you would like to cover. Explain why your scoop needs investigation. What are the sources that you can naturally draw on? (150-200 words) (1X10=10 Marks)**