

English Proficiency and Legal Knowledge in the 21st Century Indian Media

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the pivotal role played by English language proficiency and legal literacy in shaping the dynamics of the media industry in India. The study emphasises how a comprehensive comprehension of English, along with legal competence, greatly impacts journalistic practices, media ethics, and the capacity to handle regulatory problems.

Introduction

This research article talks about the importance of media laws and the English language in the media industry in the 21st century. Language is an integral part of today's world. Especially English, as it is considered a lingua franca known to all.

The world is currently referred to as a global village, implying that people with different backgrounds exist together, and this opens up new experiences of witnessing multiple cultures. It transcends geographical and cultural boundaries and bridges the gap for a wide audience. For the consumption of these resources, a common language needs to exist, and hence, English is regularly used.

According to statistics released by Ethnologue, English is the third most spoken language in the world after Chinese and Spanish. Language is the primary source of communication and is required to convey thoughts and ideas. Language is correlated with culture and identity. During daily exchanges, it is important to keep in mind the differences between cultures and how to communicate with each other without hurting another person's feelings. Right communication is important in all fields. Especially on different mediums, like television or networking sites, it is important to maintain the same decorum.

Analysis

David Crystal says, "Roughly 1 out of 4 users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language". In the 21st century, English has multiple different identities as a global language. Culture is often correlated with language and identity. English "is not a bunch of arbitrary linguistic forms applied to a cultural reality that can be found outside of language; it is the vehicle using which culture is manifested. Like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o said, "Language as culture, is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Due to globalisation, English is spoken in different regions of the world. It is also incorporated into many languages. For instance, the word 'Sushi' is a Japanese word, but it has been incorporated into the Oxford English Dictionary. Rather than using one's mother tongue, people have accustomed themselves to speaking in English more frequently.

Language, or English, is regarded highly in different fields of work. The knowledge of that particular language adds to one's skillset. "The language is increasingly growing in strength, pushing other world languages backward in the global space, opening new frontiers" (Egya, 2008/2009: 35). This is why

educating children in the English language at the school level is important. In a report published by the University Education Commission, set up under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, it was stated that English should be studied in schools and universities to keep ourselves in touch with the stream of ever-growing knowledge.

As students and parts of the public join the workforce, it is a prerequisite for each individual to be well-versed in English. Timothy J Scrase says, “English is not only important in getting a job, it is everywhere in social interaction. If you can’t speak it, then you are a nobody”. A person, whether a citizen or foreigner, must not only know the English language but also the laws of the country.

In an Indian context, especially because it is a democracy, the public must be aware of the rights that they can exercise and this is usually highlighted by media personnel. Journalists are the tools through which the public is aware of various incidents and happenings that take place. Hence, those in the media industry need to be well aware of media laws.

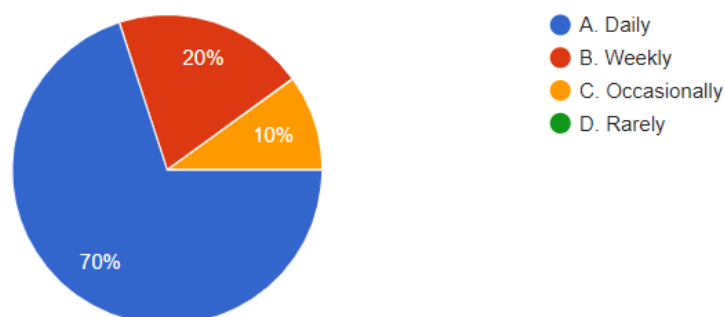
RTI or Right to Information Act 2005, under the Indian Constitution states that any citizen has the right to question or request information from any public authority. This act is very important for media professionals in India, as they do not have a media law in the constitution to protect them while carrying out their jobs, like other countries do. Not only RTI but other laws like defamation restrict and allow these personnel to effectively engage in their profession. Although media houses’ main aim is to increase their TRP, it is important to remember that media is the fourth pillar of democracy and works to act as a watchdog for the public.

Survey Analysis

A survey was created to analyse the media consumption of the public; their proficiency in the English Language and attitude towards the various laws in the media industry. Following are the questions that were used for the survey: -

1. How often do you consume news and information through media sources?

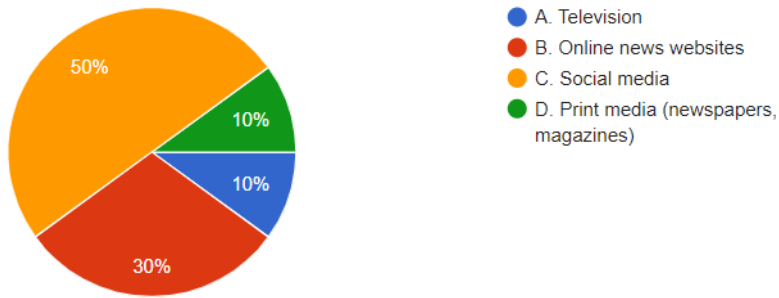
- A. Daily
- B. Weekly
- C. Occasionally
- D. Rarely



2. Which type of media do you rely on most for news and information?

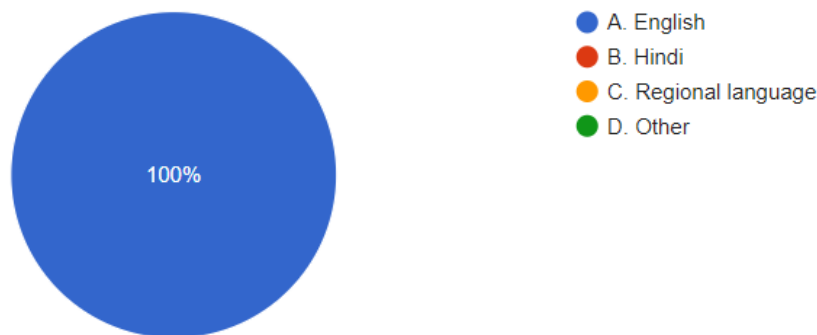
- A. Television
- B. Online news websites
- C. Social media

D. Print media (newspapers, magazines)



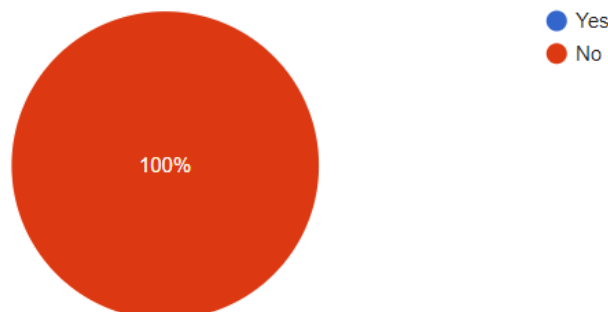
3. What is the primary language you use to consume media content?

- A. English
- B. Hindi
- C. Regional language
- D. Other



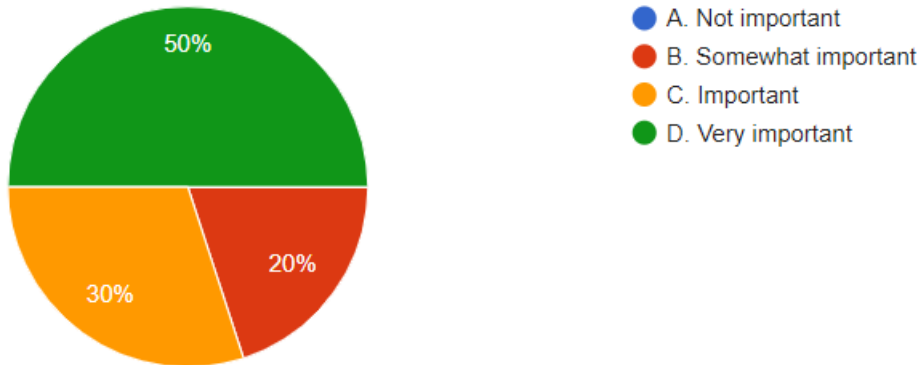
4. Do you ever find it difficult to understand news or information because it is presented in English?

- A. Yes
- B. No



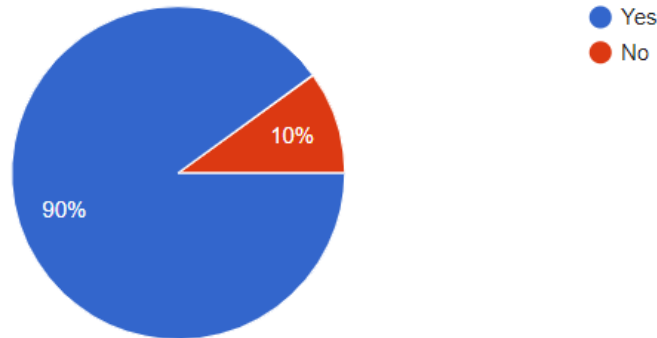
5. How important do you think it is for journalists and media personalities to be proficient in English?

- A. Not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Important
- D. Very important



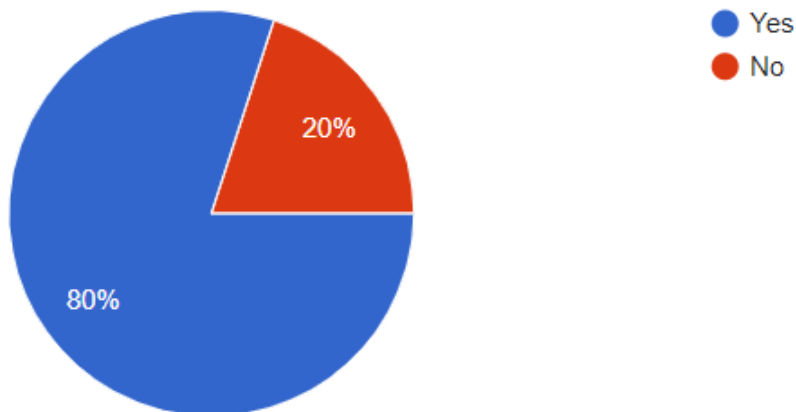
6. Have you ever come across news content that you felt might be misleading or untrue?

- A. Yes
- B. No



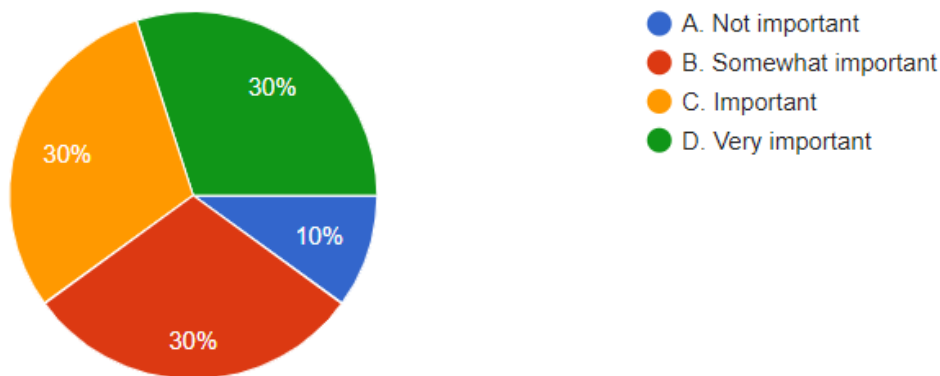
7. Are you aware of any laws in India that govern the content broadcasted or published by media outlets?

- A. Yes
- B. No



8. How important do you think it is for the general public to have a basic understanding of media laws?

- A. Not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Important
- D. Very important



Based on the responses received, 70% of the people consume NEWS daily, 20% weekly and 10% occasionally. Due to the rising digital technologies, the means in which they consume news has varied from the past. 80% of the responders consume news through social media (50%) and Online news websites (30%). The remaining 20% uses the traditional methods of Television or Print Media. The next question asked was regarding the primary language used while watching news. 100% of the participants chose English as their primary language and in addition to that, claimed that they do not face issues while understanding English content. This shows that language, especially the English Language, has a key role in shaping perspectives and relaying information promptly.

They were also asked if it was important for media professionals to be proficient in English, to which, 5 people said it is very important, 3 people said that it is important and 2 people said that it is somewhat important. 9 out of 10 people have come across fake stories and misleading articles while there time online. Although only a limited number of laws are present for the media industry, people are unaware of what the Indian Government has provided. Usage of these laws as consumers or as media professionals, can enable access to information. In India, even though there isn't a press freedom act, the freedom to speech and expression is present to protect journalists. According to Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Defamation is a punishable offense. Media personnel can be protected from fake controversies. There is also the process of censorship that plays a vital role in information release. Hence, it is important that citizens and tourists should be legally literate in this rapidly ever-changing world.

History of Media Laws

In 1962 India, the Defence of India Act came into force during the Emergency period. It restricted the freedom of press meaning that the central government had the power to remove any press release that they believed led to public unrest, amidst the rising tensions between India and China. The Government disconnected electricity to newspaper offices on the night of the June 25, 1975 when Emergency was imposed. "Though the General Manager, Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking was not authorised under the relevant law to disconnect power supply without notice and the due procedure was clearly laid out in the law, the disconnection was carried out on the basis of certain security reasons that were adduced without any formal orders. The illegal act, however, was the only way before the regime to prevent newspapers reporting the detention of almost all opposition leaders and the declaration of the Emergency". Although it was a havoc filled time, press freedom in India is considered a basic human right under Article (1) (a). But some media houses did fight against this. Both Minoos Masani and Chuni Bai Vaidya challenged the censorship laws before the Bombay and the Gujarat High Courts,

respectively, and won their cases. These judgments had relied on substantial points of law against the censorship guidelines of the regime.

The introduction of press censorship in India started in 1799 by Lord Wellesley who imposed on strict restrictions for Indian published newspaper. The newspapers instructed to print clearly the issue, the name of the printer, the editor and the proprietor. The material had to be submitted for pre-censorship to the secretary to the Government. Disobedience of these rules led to punishable offences. Through the Indian Press Act 1910, the British Government aimed at strengthening their control on vernacular newspapers. Pre-independence to post-independence, Indian has various levels of press freedom. India's current rank in the World's Press Freedom Index 2023 is 161 out of 180 countries. In 2022, India's rank was 172 out of 180 which is 11 times higher the rank. So why did that happen? This is because the press is being booked for cases because they or their company produces anything that goes against the ideals of the party.

Conclusion

Journalists and content writers must be careful while publishing certain NEWS that affects the public. There have been many cases in the past, especially in the advertising field, that have led to mishaps and huge monetary losses.

For example, the most infamous case of an ill translation that caused serious consequences. On the verge of victory in World War II, the so-called Allies issued a diverse number of terms for Japan's surrender. When the press asked Kantarō Suzuki, Former Prime Minister of Japan, about such terms, he responded with the word "Mokusatsu". "Mokusatsu" can mean either "no comments" or "a treat with silent contempt". The majority of Japanese translators opted for the first translation, which differed from the interpretation selected by foreign news outlets. This was interpreted as a threat to the nation's surrender. Therefore, it could have had an impact on the US decision to attack Hiroshima with an atomic weapon. This was only a story that was released and may not have influenced the bombing. However, this is one of the many cases that took place.

Hence, both the English language and knowledge of Media laws are vital in the media industry to avoid any controversial events or major issues regarding international relations. A piece of incorrect NEWS can affect the nation in multiple ways which can be disadvantageous. Additionally, in this era of new ideologies, People get defensive for every minute statement and tend to lionise the statement. Professionals must make sure that the content released should be error and bias-free.

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