



**Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper**  
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**BREAKING NEWS, MISSING VIEWS**

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This essay is inspired by the path-breaking work of Franks and Howell on the topic. Since the last half-decade, their previous and ongoing research has shed new light on the disproportionately low presence of women experts in news and current affairs broadcasting in the UK. Their academic revelations have impacted the government and the news industry, and compelled certain news channels to introspect and experiment with ways to represent more women's views in the news. I hope this essay may help to inspire journalism departments and broadcast organisations in India to study the missing views of women at prime time and to engage with people in the UK who are at the forefront of initiatives to bring invisible women experts into the mainstream.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. What do women think?  
*Women report and anchor news, men dominate the debates*
3. What do journalists think?  
*Anecdotal evidence on the missing women on news debates*
4. The UK Model  
*Can India replicate it?*
5. References

## Introduction

In 2015, a 114-nation, five-yearly Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) reported that in Europe, women's views in the news are 'mostly sought as members of the public or in their domestic role as mothers, daughters and wives: they are much less likely to contribute to stories as experts, as professionals, as politicians or as business people. The news is still dominated by men's voices talking about things in which they have the starring role, voices of authority!'

It could just as easily be a description of the state of women's commentary in the mainstream press in India, Asia's fast-emerging economic powerhouse.

In India, gender-based studies of the depiction of women --- from the movie industry to the news industry --- have found comparable qualitative trends with the portrayal of women in the news media in Europe. News debate shows have largely replaced prime time news stories/reports on Indian news channels. The under-representation of women's views on national television may arguably project a regressive impression to millions of Indian audiences, who include the world's largest under-20 population, that women in the world's largest democracy have little or no say on issues of national interest.

The tendency of television news channels to project all-male opinions on issues that impact everyone, day after day, also raises the question whether the media may enable the side-lining of women's expert opinions from conferences and agenda-setting public platforms off-screens as well.

"It is almost certainly the case that there is a persistent connection between the absence of a recognised and respected history of women's international thought and their relative absence in contemporary discussions of international politics today," Professor Patricia Owens, who chairs the department of international relations at the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex, said on email. "It's as if women before the late twentieth-century did not think very seriously about international politics," Owens argued, "which, of course, we know to be untrue."

The under-representation of women in the news as expert commentators and news subjects is a global trend. What's happening in India? Reuters Institute analysed two primetime news debates on two national English news channels, for one month each, and found indications of a consistent under-representation, and occasionally a complete absence, of women commentators on several episodes. For the purposes of a study compressed into a three-month fellowship in the University of Oxford, the author chose a small sample of one English news debate each presented by a senior male and female broadcast journalist respectively. The number of male and female panellists counted on the shows is approximate, based on a head-count of panellists in the first half of the shows.

In the episodes analysed for this paper, male panellists outnumbered women on news debates on diverse topics including politics, geopolitics and the economy. Male experts dominated news debates on the economy and geopolitics, while women tend to be represented in higher numbers only on debates on gender and social issues.

Some women broadcast journalists say they are personally trying to get more women on-screen. The news industry can do more. There are 'straightforward ways' to change the status quo, argued Suzanne Franks in her book *'Women and Journalism,'* to 'diversify the news agenda and make it more appealing to audiences by widening the range of voices<sup>ii</sup>.'

In the UK and in India, women have been streaming into journalism in large numbers since the last three-four decades and battling gender stereotypes and glass ceilings as they take on more varied and challenging editorial positions. In the UK, there is now an evolving resource of academic analysis and public awareness on the missing voices of women experts in the news. This is an unexplored topic in India, where the media have not begun to explore the likely reasons for the trend and discuss ways to increase the numbers of women commentators on television. India's journalism institutes and the news industry would benefit from perusing the insight already available in the UK to plan their own quantitative and qualitative studies and launch awareness campaigns to talk about why women don't get called upon to talk about the news as much as men.

The essay concludes with recommendations to better represent the missing voices of Indian women on air. These are inspired by initiatives in the UK, where women comprise 48% of employees in the television industry<sup>iii</sup>, that led to improvements in the number of women experts on television and radio. According to ongoing research of flagship news shows at City, University of London, the overall ratio of male to female experts has reduced from 4-1 in 2014 to 2.9-1 in 2016, with an 'overall improvement in five of the six shows' that they monitored. "This is all moving in the right direction but BBC News at Ten and ITV News at Ten – the big beasts in the news jungle – still fail to represent women fairly," City's director of broadcasting Lis Howell said in 2016 while releasing the findings<sup>iv</sup>.

Campaigns in the UK, based on City's research, are noteworthy for helping to disprove perceptions about women professionals, such as a belief in sections of the broadcast news industry that a shortage of women experts may explain their absence on television. In 2013 alone, the BBC, the UK's largest broadcaster, identified 164 women commentators after conducting four training days for women experts in four centres. The project continues. At the time of writing in 2017, 48 new women commentators were included in the BBC expert women database.

Imagine the potential results if a news channel decided to replicate the exercise, even on a small-scale, in a nation the size of India where women constitute roughly half the population, like in the UK.

## What do women think?

### *Women in India report and present news, men dominate the debates*

The media in India can influence public opinions in its fast-emerging economy on a scale comparable to no other nation except China, in terms of domestic audience.

India's 780 million television viewers (up from 674 million in 2015) are comparable in size to twelve times the population of the UK and the population of Europe<sup>v</sup>. India's over 450 million internet users outnumber the population of the United States. Indian smartphone users will in 2018 increase to 530 million, second to China, and surpass the 229 million smartphone users in the US<sup>vi</sup>. India and China combined comprise 320 million people equivalent to 39 per cent of the world's young internet population, according to United Nations data<sup>vii</sup>. India's newspaper industry sells the largest number of paid newspapers in the world<sup>viii</sup>, and India and China together accounted for 62% of the global average daily print unit circulation in 2015<sup>ix</sup>. Over 800 channels (up from 2 in 1991, 130 in 2004) and over 400 television news channels in multiple languages compete for attention in 183 million Indian homes<sup>x</sup>. The Broadcast Audience Research Council which measures viewership in India reckons that there are now more Indian homes with television sets than gas stoves, and general entertainment channels dominate over half of this diverse viewership<sup>xi</sup>.

The viewer of English-language news, which is the subject of this report, is mainly urban. News channels held 8-10% share of Indian television viewership in 2016, with 'regional channels accounting for the majority share.' India has about 220 million viewers of English content, with 60% of them concentrated in a handful of metros<sup>xii</sup>.

Nine in ten people in the UK each watch live television every week<sup>xiii</sup> and the number is similar for households with television access in India. In both nations, people like to watch television as a family. The Indian television industry has 64% nationwide penetration compared to the television industry in the UK, where 91% people watch live TV at least once a week. The broadcast news industry in the UK is a niche sector comprising five prominent broadcasters: the BBC, Channel 4, ITV, Sky and Viacom, compared to about a dozen English news channels in India.

In the hyper-competitive, non-stop race to command millions of television remote controls in India, a brazen new English-language channel named Republic TV was launched in Mumbai in May 2017 by the Times Now channel's ex-editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami. The new company reportedly hired 300 staff in its first year and has plans to expand the channel's viewership to the UK, US and West Asia. "There is a want/desire for this kind of news," Goswami was quoted saying about his pugnacious brand of broadcast journalism<sup>xiv</sup>. It reportedly became India's 'most-watched news channel' in its first week, according to official audience measurement data that competing channels immediately challenged as skewed<sup>xv</sup>. The channel is controversial for its tabloid-style scoops and shouty studio debates with nationalist undertones. Goswami raises his voice at his own panellists, points fingers and provokes heated discussions on celebrity scandals to elections, cow politics to boycotts of Chinese fire-crackers. A newspaper columnist described the channel as a 'reflection of what India has become --- a noisy, chaotic place where coherent debate without shouting, screaming

and name-calling is impossible.<sup>xvi</sup> Its Twitter handle claims 'Republic is your movement.' But a glaring gap on its prime-time shows goes unnoticed in the media. In show after show, male panellists dominate its punchy debates.

For the purposes of a time-bound study doable in a three-month fellowship in Oxford, the sample size of this analysis was limited to two evening news debate shows with a male and female anchor respectively: *The Debate* with Arnab Goswami on Republic TV (samples of September 2017) and *Left, Right & Centre* on NDTV 24x7 (samples of October 2017) which is anchored by senior journalists Nidhi Razdan and Natasha Jog. The analysis is indicative of a consistent under-representation, and occasionally a complete absence, of women panellists. The head-count of male and female panellists in the first half of each episode also revealed certain qualitative patterns:

- Male panellists outnumber women on nearly all the news debates
- Male experts dominate news debates on the economy and foreign affairs
- Women experts tend to be represented in higher numbers on debates on gender issues

The samples were chosen from the available online videos of daily episodes of *The Debate* with Arnab Goswami, co-founder of the Republic TV channel, from September 1-29, 2017, to compare the presence of male and female panellists on the show<sup>xvii</sup>. Each episode hosted a range of five to nine male panellists each. Over five times more men than women were on screen as panellists in the September videos sampled, not including female anchors and reporters who made an occasional appearance. About 20 of the debates had zero women panellists. Some examples: 'Pak revenge attack fails,' 'Problems in economy: real or hype?' and 'Al Qaeda plot to train Rohingyas?' Occasionally, women outnumbered men on news debates on gender issues.

The trend of all-male and male-dominated news debates in India is evident on any evening while surfing national English news channels though senior women journalists are seen holding forth as anchors and reporters on nearly all topics across news channels. The 2015 survey of the GMMP recorded 46% female news reporters and 54% male news reporters in India<sup>xviii</sup>. Internationally, the GMMP has found that women reporters produce more news stories with women as subjects, compared to male reporters, and this trend is arguably reflected on debates hosted by a female anchor on NDTV 24x7, which had over twice as many men as women in the sampled debates of *Left Right & Centre*<sup>xix</sup>. One or two women panellists each appeared in most of the shows from October 2017 videos that were available online. The prominent exceptions were debates on the economy and geopolitics.

All-male panellists aired their views on the following topics, for example: 'Is the economy on a downward spiral?' 'Not so festive Diwali: has the economy dampened the mood?' 'Is the economy really ready for take-off?' 'India no longer the fastest-growing economy. Can PM's advisory council help?' 'Xi Jinping consolidates power: Will this spell trouble for India?' 'US sounds warning on terror groups: but will they act against Pak?' In an exception, four women outnumbered the only male panellist on a debate on inter-country custody battles and The Hague convention.

Both the samples studied, though small and short-term, are indicative of a need for a large-scale and long-term study of the ratio of men and women on news debates, and the need for

broadcast organisations to maintain their own records of gender-based data of panellists to analyse how they represent the country's views on the news.

Research that has begun to trickle in barely scratches the surface of the issue, but it shows that gender roles are generally stereotyped on Indian television debates. A media study<sup>xx</sup> of 16 newspapers, 14 television channels and six advertising agencies in India's financial capital, Mumbai, reported in 2017 that when it came to the selection of panellists on television shows, only two organisations --- the BBC and IBN Lokmat, a Marathi-language news channel --- responded that 'at least' one female voice makes for a 'right mix' of panellists. More than half the respondents in the study, which was conducted with the backing of the United Nations Population Fund, felt that gender is not a decisive factor in selecting panellists. But 15.78% of the respondents said that 'appearance' played a role; 23.68% had no opinion, probably because it's an issue that is barely discussed in Indian newsrooms.

In August 2016, the India-based websites SheThePeople and Safecity publicised the results of a survey<sup>xxi</sup> of over 100 conferences, events and television shows and their ratio of male and female speakers and panellists. On an average of over 100 data points, they found a minor presence of 18% of television news panellists and 12% of conference panellists who were women. The percentage of women panellists on news channels was at best a quarter: 26% on CNN-News18, 25% on NDTV, 18% on Times Now and 12% on others. The highest number of women panellists, by subject, were invited to discuss sexual violence: 39%, followed by 26% on panels on crime and social issues. The lowest number of women's voices were heard on topics related to technology (14%) and industry (12%).

The under-representation of women in the news as subjects or experts in the news industry is a global trend. While subjects are news makers, the choice of experts who comment on the news is a more subjective decision made by journalists and producers. The 2015 GMMP, which first began in 1995 as a five-yearly exercise, surveyed 114 nations to find that women were the subject of news on radio, television and in print only 24% of the time. North American news reaches out to the highest percentage of women experts. "Only one in 10 experts in Asian news is a woman ... One in 50 women 65 years and older appears as an expert in contrast to six in 50 men of a similar age appearing in the news. These patterns suggest women's ordinariness when they appear in the news, at the same time as men's currency as interviewees increases as they grow older," the report stated<sup>xxii</sup>. In India, the Project found that men comprise 85% of the news subjects on television and 75% in print<sup>xxiii</sup>.

Women in India comprise nearly half the population. As the watchdog of the world's largest democracy, the media are expected to strive to report a variety of views and information and to avoid withholding or ignoring a section of expert opinions from the public, policy-makers and intellectuals.

Academic studies on gender representation in the news media and in the workforce in general suggest there are entrenched socio-economic factors that limit the role of working women. Political reportage continues to be largely male-dominated. The presence of women reporters and presenters in the Indian media is significant, but a 2015 media and gender survey<sup>xxiv</sup> of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in India found that 'women (journalists) seem to be represented in all the subject areas defined, but their numbers are mostly found (starting from the highest) in gender issues, health and human rights (equal), child rights, arts/culture,



politics, urban/civic issues and rural development. They are barely represented in sports and marginally more in agriculture and international relations ... Men were most represented (from the highest) politics, rural development, economics/business, agriculture, health, human rights and education."

Asked their opinion on the depiction of women in news content, only 6.34% of the respondents in the IFJ study said women were shown as experts/leaders; victims (21.73%) and sexual objects (17.21%) were the top answers.

Gender barriers are the news industry's worst-kept trade secret. A 2017 study has found that gender stereotypes influence not only gender roles for employees but also the selection of experts as panellists. "Culturally prevalent ideas and ideologies about appropriate gender roles are strongly entrenched within media organisations and very subtly influence the assignment of beats, interpersonal relationships within the office premises, selection of panellists on television and so on and so forth," stated the 2017 study<sup>xxv</sup> by Population First and KC College in Mumbai.

The low-profile of women compared to men is also visible on theatre screens of India's movie industry, Bollywood, and it raises the question whether theatre screens are a metaphor for women typecast on the small-screen news as well. Women are 'teachers and secretaries'; men are 'lawyers and doctors'. Men are 'rich', women are 'attractive.' These qualities represent typical men and women in India according to a study of the plots, posters and trailers of Hindi-language movies released in India from 1970-2017. "The results show that females are always associated with a successful male and are not portrayed as independent," the authors noted<sup>xxvi</sup>, "while males are portrayed to be successful." Men dominated the movie plots and time on screen, but women had over half the share of movie posters.

In the World Economic Forum's ranking<sup>xxvii</sup> of gender-equal nations in 2017, India ranked 108 among 144 nations, down from 98 in 2006, partly due to 'a widening of its gender gaps in political empowerment, healthy life expectancy and literacy' and a 'gender gap in women's share among legislators, senior officials and managers, as well as professional and technical workers'.

The deficiency of women, in general, in the Indian workforce is well-documented. "Over the past decade, South Asia has experienced the largest widening of (gender) gap of all regions," according to the International Labour Organisation's World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2017 report<sup>xxviii</sup>.

The World Bank in 2017 recorded a decline of 19.16 million women and girls in India's workforce from 2004-05 to 2011-12<sup>xxix</sup> due to a range of socio-economic factors, notably an improvement in the stability in family income in rural areas. The report said that the decline was predominant in rural areas among 15 to 24-year-olds, though from 2004-05 to 2011-12, India's female labour force participation rate 'declined across all age groups, in both rural and urban areas.' It also declined 'across all levels of education, from illiterates to college graduates,' during 1993-94 to 2011-12. The report emphasised that women's access to higher education and skills alone, without changes to social norms towards work, would not help to improve their workforce participation rate.

Girls comprised almost half (48%) of India's student population in 2015-16 but 'there is a bizarre mismatch between the educational attainments of women and their participation and status in all other aspects of the country's life,' as *The Times of India* reported<sup>xxx</sup> in 2017. The article emphasised: In India, women's participation in work is 27%, representation in Parliament and state legislatures is 11% and 8.8% respectively and 17 of the CEOs of the 500 largest listed companies are women.

The television news industry may therefore argue, with some justification based on the data on women in India's workforce, that they find a shortage of available women commentators to appear on panels at short-notice. Anecdotal evidence from journalists suggests there are more varied and nuanced explanations for the trend of women anchors posing questions on breaking news mainly to men who provide the answers.

## What do journalists think?

### *Anecdotal evidence on the missing women on news debates*

The dominance of male opinions on news television is not often discussed in the media. The author asked two leading television news personalities, one male and one female, the general qualities that they seek in the news panellists they invite on their shows. Both responded to the question with similar answers. They said that they look for the best experts on the topic irrespective of their gender. Their comments are reproduced in detail, below, as anecdotal evidence to better understand the issue from the viewpoints of broadcast journalists.

“I look for expertise, different points of view, also people who are articulate and comfortable on TV, which not everyone is,” said Nidhi Razdan, executive editor at New Delhi Television (NDTV) and anchor of its show *Left, Right & Centre* on the English news channel NDTV 24x7. The channel describes the show as ‘one hour of the day’s biggest news, discussed threadbare by the day’s newsmakers.’ Women anchor five of the channel’s six prime-time shows and women hold some of the key editorial positions in the company: managing editor, editorial director and political editor.

“To be honest, I’ve never thought of panels from a gender perspective,” Razdan wrote on email. “There are many times we have had all women panels as well. I don’t consciously look for gender balance, but maybe I should! I don’t have data for this, but I do know that (on) issues ranging from foreign policy to Indian politics we have lots of women panellists such as Arti Jerath, Jyoti Malhotra, Meeta Shankar, Kiran Shaw, Naina Lal Kidwai, Neerja Chaudhary, Farah Naqvi, Indira Jaising and so many more who featured regularly on my show.”

On the economy, Razdan noted that ‘it’s easier to find a male guest,’ with exceptions for frequently seen panellists among female industry leaders such as industrialist Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, banker Naina Lal Kidwai or economist Ila Patnaik.

“Again, I’ve never looked at this through a gender prism,” she emphasised. “Please understand that I work in an organisation which is driven by women. Since I joined 18 years ago, it is women who have run NDTV, who hold top positions and anchor prime time shows. So, I’ve grown up in an environment that hasn’t really differentiated between men and women and we have been very lucky that way. So perhaps that’s why I’m also not as conscious of it. I look at inviting panels based on who I believe is the best person to speak on an issue not their gender.”

Television personality and columnist Karan Thapar, former host of *To The Point* on India Today, pointed out in a brief telephone interview that the disparity in the number of men and women on news debates is ‘not deliberate ... for example, some of the best and most knowledgeable speakers on foreign affairs are women.’

Thapar said that he looked for the following factors while selecting panellists: were they ‘knowledgeable’ of the topic, ‘relevant’ to the news debate, ‘interesting,’ had an ‘important

viewpoint' to present and were able to speak 'intelligently.' Spokespersons of the government or political parties were 'critical factors'. Sometimes, Thapar noted, the desired panellists were either unavailable or were based in cities where the channel did not always have the manpower/resources to film them on live television.

"I have to tell you, my priority is not to create balance," Thapar emphasised. "Gender representation is important but not the priority. Getting good people who speak well and are articulate is important."

More anecdotal evidence indicates that the minority presence of women's views on television news debates that seek to shape the national discourse deserves to be studied through a larger prism compared to arguments that limit the discussion to gender balance vs. expertise of the panellists.

Political editor Marya Shakil at CNN-News18, one of the channel's two prime time female news anchors, linked the shortage of women commentators to the shortage of women leading print and television newsrooms. "Invariably, newsrooms don't believe in feminism. Most editors are men, newsrooms are very, very male-centric, so they overlook the contributions of women," Shakil said. "Senior women too don't invest in women colleagues as allies." In her individual capacity as an anchor of an evening show, Shakil said she attempts to find fresh voices for news television and deliberately seeks women panellists, even as spokespersons of political parties, and 'doesn't mind' going live with all-women panels.

Senior journalist Sagarika Ghose said that in her previous experience as an anchor she would make a 'deliberate attempt to reach out to women speakers' but she 'did notice that women speakers tend to shy away from overly confrontational debates and contentious subjects ... However, this is not a golden rule as the spokespersons of India's current ruling party are far more aggressive and confrontational than the male speakers."

Ghose has observed a 'shortage of women experts in industry, finance, science and very few women industry leaders', compared to many more women analysts on politics and political commentary who are often called on shows. On television news channels in Indian languages, political panels tend to be 'invariably all-male,' she pointed out, suggesting that 'women political experts are an English media phenomenon.'

India's society is male-dominated and patriarchal, she pointed out, and 'men, particularly upper caste men from the majority community, tend to occupy most positions of power and influence from politics to government to industry to the finance sector. Most commentators and thought influencers are also men, and mostly on issues of politics or governance, it's elderly men who are called to panels. There's also a discrimination against younger men, as TV and media platforms prefer elderly established male commentators rather than go out and look for newer younger male voices.'

Ghose added that 'a handful of strong women columnists and authors' in India are called on panels as well, but that they are mostly 'slotted as liberal feminists to provide a perspective on social and gender justice issues'.

“It’s interesting that women TV anchors are highly worshipful of male commentators and tend to gush over their writings on social media and call them on their shows, almost to bolster their own stature,” she said. “Male TV anchors form a boys’ club with male commentators and naturally gravitate towards them on most issues. There is also the belief among TV news managers in India that news TV audiences are mostly male who prefer to get opinions from men rather than from women.”

Senior journalist Kalpana Sharma, in an interview in 2016 to *Scroll.in*,<sup>xxxii</sup> was quoted saying that she had raised the issue of the under-representation of women on expert panels at meetings she attended for several years, but she continues to be called upon as a moderator on otherwise male panels to discuss topics that she knows well enough to speak on.

In an email interview, Sharma said that ‘not all that much’ has changed in recent years. She attributed it to the industry’s lack of effort to seek diversity and gender balance while selecting panellists on television. In the last five years, one sees more and more women in India covering politics, and women spokespersons of political parties on television, she noted, but only ‘a very small number’ of women are invited on political discussions.

“It is easier to get the ‘usual suspects’, almost always male, to come on panels than rather than make effort at balance and diversity,” she said. “The problem with many TV channels is not just that they find it easier to get men, but even if they get a token woman, they want her to be a film star, or a prominent socialite rather than someone with scholarship who will address the subject seriously. These news debates are not really debates; they are entertainment. Hence, they need individuals who can perform, take up extreme positions, be rude, interrupt others, and basically be deaf to what anyone else is saying. As a result, even men with sensible views are excluded because they will not perform. Of course, there are women who do; and predictably, they are the only ones called repeatedly.”

Shakil said she tries to give female panellists the last word on news debates, and more chances to speak, because ‘men tend to dominate the conversations’ while women in her observation are ‘less assertive and aggressive’.

The *Scroll* article on ‘man-els,’ or all-male panels as they are referred to, also focussed on the compartmentalisation of women speakers into panels on gender issues. “The panels I get invited to speak on are almost always about rape, domestic violence or other women’s issues, particularly when it comes to TV talk shows,” feminist lawyer Flavia Agnes, founder of the non-profit organisation *Majlis*, was quoted saying. “I keep asking organisers why they don’t call me to speak about other issues that I am vocal about – like minority rights or communal violence – but they almost never do.”

The above observations indicate that there is indeed a perception in the media of a shortage of women experts available as commentators on Indian news channels, especially on economic news. Women are invited to debate political and geopolitical news, but as regular television viewers in India may notice, they comprise a small number of familiar faces who frequent the studios of nearly all channels, as Sharma and Ghose pointed out.

A few women journalists are trying to better represent women's views. But it's also arguable that there is no clear policy and diverse database that English news channels consider while deciding who they think is the 'best' speaker on the topic when they constitute panels. Often, it might be left to the choice of the news presenter and guest coordinator and the availability of the persons invited.

As Ghose pointed out, television news managers tend to believe that news audiences are 'mostly male' and prefer to get their opinions from men. This argument is reflected in data from the organisation that measures Indian television viewership.

India's average daily television viewership<sup>xxxii</sup> is 3 hours and 16 minutes, comparable to 3 hours and 54 minutes in Europe and a global average of 3 hours and 14 minutes. India's Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) estimates<sup>xxxiii</sup> that Indian male audiences (comprising 50% of the total television viewership) watch news either at the start of or at the end of the day. In contrast, women in India are said to prefer to watch news during the early morning part of the day. From 1900-2200 hours, according to BARC<sup>xxxiv</sup>, the share of women's viewership of news 'across urban, rural and megacities' drops visibly' across India.

None of the journalists quoted in this report mentioned that women experts are unavailable because they cite a lack of time or inconvenience to be on air at prime time. In the UK, in contrast, research surveys<sup>xxxv</sup> at City University in London found that producers complained that convincing women experts to appear on news panels was a 'time-consuming' exercise.

"It's not true in India," said Thapar. "You don't need more time to convince women. They are as likely to agree to appear on debates as men."

"In my experiences, women experts did not cite inconvenient times," said Ghose, "but that's because I worked in English news and used to invite English-speaking women who tend to be well placed enough to be able to spare time for TV."

### **The UK Model** *Can India replicate it?*

No other nation has as much publicly available data and commentary on women in news and current affairs broadcasting as the UK. From the government to the media, the broadcast news industry has experimented with several ways to end the under-representation of women's views on breaking news on television and radio.

Three major initiatives highlight the achievements of 'expert women' campaigns in the UK. Ongoing research<sup>xxxvi</sup> at the journalism department of City University of London has recorded that the overall gender gap between male and female experts on flagship shows in news and current affairs broadcasting in the UK narrowed from 4:1 in 2014 to 2.9:1 in 2016; a 30% improvement since certain key projects were launched. These projects include gender monitoring of flagship shows in the UK from the early 2010s to today, expert women campaigns in *Broadcast* magazine and *The Women's Room*, the launch of annual expert women training days and a regularly updated expert women database at the BBC. A House of Lords inquiry also put on record evidence from broadcasters and academic experts on the issue. The House of Lords endorsement for better representation of expert women in the media gave the issue credibility and further publicity.

In the early 2010s, research at City's journalism department recorded that male experts (interviewees called upon for their 'knowledge, expertise or achievement' according to the researchers) outnumbered their female counterparts by four to one. In India, there is no corresponding empirical data available, except what's evident to viewers on air day after day across news channels.

In the UK, where women comprise 51% of the population, public debates have also helped to draw the media's attention to consequences of the gender bias on news. In 2015, a House of Lords panel, known as a Select Committee on Communications inquiry into Women in News and Current Affairs Broadcasting, released its report<sup>xxxvii</sup> stating that it received 'a considerable amount of evidence about the negative consequences of an unequal gender representation in news and current affairs. Several respondents pointed to the role news and current affairs plays in providing role models for society'.

The committee's report cited a written response<sup>xxxviii</sup> from the government endorsing initiatives to get more women's views on air. "... Making progress on this agenda will not only support women to fully utilise their skills and increase women's contribution to the UK economy but can also have a lasting impact on future generations of women and help to tackle outdated gender stereotypes," the government's response noted. "It is clear, that this is not just about fairness." The argument is relevant to India as well.

The build-up to the launch of expert women initiatives in the UK began in 2012. Two episodes of The Today Programme made the news for controversially ignoring women's views after its male presenter interviewed all-male experts to discuss breast cancer and teenage pregnancy. Such examples of 'mansplaining' --- in this context, when all-male commentators discuss

women's issues in the media --- continue to occur, even in print journalism. Indian journalist Barkha Dutt used the term when she wrote in a commentary<sup>xxxix</sup> in *The Washington Post*, that a controversial 2017 piece in *The New York Times* 'on women-centric clothing was written by a man; all but one quoted interviewee is a man. In the worst example of mansplaining, the New York Times articles patronises both Hindu and Muslim women by presuming to speak on their behalf. There is not a single interview with Indian women on what we feel.'

In 2012, at the journalism department at City, director of broadcasting Lis Howell trained her students to survey and quantify the number of experts on five flagship shows in the UK - BBC News at Ten, C4 News, BBC Radio 4's Today, ITV News at Ten, Sky News evening shows - on a weekly basis. Their finding<sup>xl</sup> indicated that the number of women appearing as experts on flagship shows was 'disproportionate to the presence in British society of female authority figures in various occupations'.

The research inspired an 'expert women initiative' in *Broadcast*<sup>xli</sup> magazine from 2012-13. *Broadcast* called on the television and radio industry to sign a pledge to increase the number of women experts they invited on air 'to reflect the growing number of women in significant roles in business and the professions'. Channel 4 and Sky News were among those who signed up. At the end of the campaign in 2013, men still outnumbered women experts by 4.1-one compared to 4.4-one in 2012, according to City's journalism department's research.

The next year, spurred to action by the embarrassing academic data, the BBC Academy invited applications for its first training day for women experts interested in speaking as commentators on television and radio. There were 24 seats. Two thousand women applied. In 2013 alone, at the end of four training days in London, Salford, Glasgow and Cardiff, the BBC Academy identified and trained 164 women and added them to a BBC Expert Women Database<sup>xlii</sup>. Of these women, 73 made hundreds of appearances on radio and television shortly after the training. The BBC made its database open to the public, which meant that rival news organisations could tap it as well.

A separate database was launched by an organisation known as *The Women's Room*<sup>xliii</sup>, which argued that 'three-quarters of the media's experts are men'. Over 2,500 women signed up on it as experts. The database is accessible only to accredited journalists. The website states that it aims to 'destabilise the complacent attitude held by too many in the media, that they are doing all they can to represent the public. They are not.'

The momentum continued in 2014-15, as the House of Lords inquiry into the representation of women in the media was underway with Howell was a special advisor. City University's research output contributed a significant portion of the evidence. For example, 'the male to female ratio of experts on BBC News at Ten was almost 5:1 and on the Today programme, almost 4:1,' the committee noted. And 'ten times more men experts than women experts are interviewed about politics, but only twice as many men experts are interviewed about health, in 38 programmes sampled.'

A 2017 study<sup>xliv</sup> of Howell and J B Singer at City has focused on the lesser-known problems of perceptions and attitudes among broadcast journalists and women experts that may hinder



women's representation on television and radio. In 2013-14, they sent questionnaires to 320 broadcast journalists; only 40 responded. Some of the notable findings are as follows:

"Over a third, 15 out of 40 journalists said women take longer to agree to appear than men do and exhibit much more insecurity about their performance even when they are sure of their subject." In India, anecdotal evidence from the author's small sample of interviews did not indicate a similar trend. India's television news channels represent a niche group of women panellists who appear frequently on their debates, so the question of convincing them to make appearances may not arise as frequently as it did in the UK.

City's journalism department also sent questionnaires to 164 women experts. Many women revealed that they were uncomfortable being on-screen for a variety of reasons, which indicate that initiatives like the annual training day at the BBC can help alleviate concerns regarding women's confidence and ease on camera. Here are a few of those concerns according to the survey: Nearly four in five reported a lack of confidence and 13 indicated that they were concerned about being harshly judged, disliked and/or seen as self-promoting."

"Four of the experts used the words without being prompted, 'pushy,' 'uppity' or 'arrogant' to describe how they feared being viewed."

"A dozen experts expressed concern about appearance." Only one woman cited childcare as a reason for declining to appear on a news panel, compared to ten journalists who said childcare was a reason for rejections from women panellists.

### **Counting and other challenges**

"The absolutely crucial thing about this research," said Suzanne Franks, head of the journalism department at City, "is that there's absolutely no doubt that we've had an impact on the real world just by doing research and publicity."

Howell acknowledged that it took almost five years to begin to see positive results on-screen and on radio. In an interview at a café outside City, Howell identified the following challenges to replicating the project in India:

**Paid student monitoring:** Any journalism department in India that might attempt to replicate the methodology to record gender-based data on women in the media would have to raise a budget to pay students to quantify and code the data per show day after day. The accuracy of results would depend on the reliability of the daily monitors.

**Defensive broadcasters:** Television journalists, said Howell, will 'always question' the methodology and be defensive. The House of Lords select committee recorded similar evidence that questioned the monitoring methodology. "...The use of different reporting periods, which rendered meaningful analysis and comparisons difficult. Channel 4 stated that for the months of June, July and August 2014 its news programme had an expert contributor ratio of 2:1. However the academic data from City University for January and February of the same year found the ratio was 5:1."

Expert who? It's debatable who is an expert to be considered as a candidate for a media commentator. The definition may vary from broadcaster to broadcaster, and may depend on the news presenter's own views.

Limited data: City's researchers recorded gender-wise data of panellists on mainly flagship shows in the UK. There is a need for large studies covering more shows.

### **Expert women at the BBC**

The BBC Academy is responsible for the BBC's internal training programmes and executes strategic projects to develop future skills, sometimes in partnerships with universities and external collaborators. In 2013, when City University published data on the low ratio of women experts across organisations, the BBC considered it 'a big strategic issue,' said Gurdip Bhangoo, head of Future Skills and Events at the BBC Academy, in an interview at New Broadcasting House in London.

The BBC decided to launch its first-ever training day in 2013 to identify new expert voices of women across fields. They let every university in the UK know about it and invited applications in the form of short videos. A small core team from the BBC Academy and news programmers short-listed over 2,000 applications for 24 seats to 500 and then 100. About 20-24 of the 100 were selected for a day-long training session to give them an opportunity to participate in a mock studio debate and interact with senior editorial staff to discuss broadcast news operations and the requirements of expert commentators. The women received feedback from editorial staff on their mock debates, including voice coaching tips.

"We aim to find 100 new expert women to appear in factual news programmes every year," said Bhangoo. In 2017, they had identified 48 new expert women after conducting two courses in London.

The experts' contact details and short bios are uploaded on the database with their consent. It is updated every 18 months. "Anecdotally, we found that more than half of the women we trained have been heard on air," said Bhangoo. "We've got a format that works."

The BBC Academy acts as a catalyst to identify and train women experts, noted Bhangoo, adding that it is up to the women to decide how to promote their own brand, and whether to accept or decline invitations to appear on-air. The BBC also invites expert women who are not part of the training initiatives as commentators. At the time of writing, the BBC Academy was considering expanding the expert women initiative to search for new voices from ethnically diverse groups as well.

The training programme "helped encourage me to 'pitch' for airtime and to approach media groups directly rather than rely on them coming to me," said Katherine Brown, head of theology and religion at the University of Birmingham, on email. Brown was experienced in doing talk shows, interviews and documentaries before the training day, but said that the training day helped her to feel 'less stressful, more confident, and more convincing' on television now than she was before. Overall, she said her experience was positive and helped her to make new connections. But experienced women commentators like Brown continue to

feel there are unresolved problems regarding their portrayal in the media mainly because 'women are not seen as experts in their field beyond the specifics of their research, whereas men are more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt to talk more broadly.'

"I usually only get asked to speak about 'women's' issues in radicalisation as that's my field – but insights from women/children do feed into our broader understanding of the phenomena. But it's always seen as niche," Brown said. "So, if the news event doesn't include a woman/child they don't think to include me because they don't see how learning from women/children's radicalisation can be applied to men." In contrast, Brown observed that men who specialise in men's radicalisation are presumed to know about women/children's radicalisation and that men's experiences are generalisable.

In the UK, the media and academic initiatives aim to further narrow gender gaps in the news in future. India's broadcast organisations and journalism departments have not yet made a concerted beginning in this direction, and they could look at work done in the UK as a demonstration model.

### **Best practices from expert women initiatives in the UK**

The GMMP 2015 proposed recommendations to improve 'women's inclusion in the media's news agenda,' including calling upon managers to be sensitised to gender biases and stereotypical thinking.

There are several more tools to tackle the gender bias. First, seriously acknowledge the gender gap. In India, the phenomenon of missing voices of women on news debates itself needs to make the news to generate public interest. What are the attitudes, perceptions and commercial reasons in the media and society that endorse and enable the trend of 'man-els'? There is no comprehensive study on this.

The research methodology at City's journalism department to quantify media commentators by gender and news subject, and to survey the attitudes of both journalists and women experts, is replicable in any journalism department or data journalism newsroom anywhere in India. The resulting empirical evidence can be disseminated on a weekly or monthly basis on social media to raise awareness and spark debates among journalists and the public. A potential research and training collaboration between a journalism institute in India and City's journalism department could help to launch expert women initiatives in India and have the added benefit of producing comparative international data on the topic that would be useful to scholars and the media in both nations.

There is scope for further academic studies in India to explore whether there is a shortage of women experts, as perceived in sections of the media, to comment on certain news subjects. Are broadcast organisations influencing public perceptions of the role of women by ignoring women's views? Can better representing women's views on television news improve women's viewership and channel ratings?

Journalism institutes seeking funds for such a project could make a beginning by putting the issue on the table at academic and media conferences. It's important that influential editors

and writers help initiate panel discussions on the topic at prominent events such as literature festivals and on popular social media posts to get decision-makers in the ratings-driven television news industry to take note. For this essay, attempts made to interview some experienced broadcast journalists who are either currently/formerly employed at five English news channels got mixed success ranging from their silence to prompt responses. Research at City's journalism department has shown that several journalists in the UK were not too accessible to discuss the representation of women experts and spokespersons in the news. In 2013-14, only 40 out of 320 journalists responded to Howell and team's research questionnaires on the topic.

The BBC's expert women initiative to identify and train new commentators can be replicated on a low-cost and city-specific pilot basis in any news channel's studio. It would be useful if the BBC Academy shared its best practices from the expert women initiative with editorial leaders from news channels in India. As Bhangoo recommended, the success of the expert women initiative if it was implemented in India or anywhere else, would depend on 'the people at the top of the editorial leadership driving it.' Three journalists quoted in this report gave positive responses to the concept of adapting a similar initiative in Indian newsrooms. NDTV's Razdan said she thought it was a 'great' idea. The example of just one reputed news channel may help demonstrate to the news industry that it's possible to change skewed gender ratios on news panels for the benefit of both broadcast journalists and audiences. It may also inspire competitors in the industry to follow suit.

"This is an excellent initiative and it would be great if media houses implemented a women panel policy across media," said Ghose. "The real need I believe is in language media, where women are reporters and anchors but very rarely called upon to give their opinions as experts. Training women to speak out confidently is a need of the hour, as some women who make an effort to speak boldly sometimes over compensate and tend to sound hysterical which only reinforces stereotypes about them. So, there is a need to train women to speak reasonably as well as assertively. There is also a need to change mindsets of TV news managers who still relegate women TV journalists to the "pretty face" category."

Sharma too endorsed the concept, noting that there is a need for a 'proactive effort by media houses to break this stereotype of only men being able to participate when there are women in every discipline today who can be called upon.'

The House of Lords' inquiry on the issue cited data from news channels of the ratio of male and female experts invited on their shows. In India, the television news industry would have to be motivated to start maintaining its own databases of expert women and their representation on panels. Shakil pointed out that private Indian news channels would be reluctant to share their databases of expert commentators especially of high-profile election pundits who are booked on exclusive contracts.

Lastly, the research models of City University of London and the BBC's Expert Women initiatives are potential soft power exports from the UK to India, where the UK is India's largest G-20 investor. Awareness of these programmes can be disseminated to influential media and industry leaders in India on official visits to the UK, through scholarships and fellowships which take place year-long. India and the UK maintain a steady stream of people-

to-people exchanges, from tourists to academic, political and business connections and Indians are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the UK.

“All channels are always striving to get more women experts,” said Thapar. “It’s a conscious attempt. Eventually TV will find them. They don’t like repeating old ones. You are always looking for new faces.”

Ends

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