ABSTRACT

From time immemorial, the Indian society had been a ‘duty-based’ society. Whether it was Sanskrit or Tamil, two of the oldest languages in this part of the world, both have, through their classics, extolled the virtues of being dutiful. During the Vedic age, and the subsequent Biblical Age, the importance of information has been very well recognized. Right to Information was part and parcel of human life, whether it was oriental or occidental philosophy. But when human evolved into a ‘social animal’, this right needed to be codified, especially when it came to governance and government.

The importance of access to information has been recognized globally. In Sweden, Freedom of Information laws have existed from 1766. Sweden passed its Freedom of the Press Act in 1766, granting public access to government documents.

With the passing of the Right to Information Act in 2005, India has evolved from the largest democracy in the world to an accountable, interactive and participatory democracy. The Right to Information Act is an essential milestone for Indian democracy. Because of this Act, citizens of India have been empowered like never before. Anyone can now question, audit, review, examine, and assess government acts and decisions to ensure that these are true to the principles of public interests, good governance and justice. The “Right to Information Act” has become fully operational from 12th October, 2005. This new law provides an important weapon in the hands of Indian citizens, empowering them to seek any accessible information from a public authority and making the government and its functionaries more accountable and responsible.
The purpose of this research is to understand and investigate the effectiveness and impact of Right to Information Act through mass media to address the issues that are challenging media to communicate this Act. The intense objective of the research is to examine the influence of different media in communicating the Right to Information Act among the masses. When awareness on this Act is created through media, people tend to know more about it and start using it to overcome the day to day problems faced by them, thus making the objective of enacting this Act a success.

This research study has made use of the survey method and content analysis to investigate the effective usage of Right to Information Act by the people and the role of media in taking the Right to Information Act to the masses. Through the survey the effectiveness of media in taking this Act to the masses is evaluated and through content analysis the actual coverage of information on RTI is evaluated and discussed.

From the data obtained through survey method, the statistical analyses (chi-square, one sample t test, Friedman test and ANOVA) were done to derive the results. The findings include:

- There is a significant association between frequency of watching television and observation on RTI related content. 50.5% of the respondents watch television daily.

- There is a significant association between frequency of reading newspapers and observation on RTI related content. 53.7% of the respondents read newspapers daily.

- There is significant difference between mean ranks towards maximum source of information on RTI.
There is a significant difference between educational qualification groups with respect to awareness on RTI by media. Applying Duncan Multiple Range test, it was found that the respondents with post graduation have significantly higher level of awareness on RTI through media.

There is a significant difference between age groups with respect to awareness on RTI related content by media. Through Duncan Multiple Range test, it was proved that the respondents of age group below 20 years have significantly higher level of awareness on RTI through media than the respondents from other age groups.

There is a significant difference between exposure to mass media and awareness creation on people.

Among the English news channels taken for study, ‘NDTV 24x7’ carried more content on RTI, compared to other English news channels. Among the regional news channels taken for study, ‘Pudhiya Thalaimurai’ carried more content compared to the other regional news channels. Among the English newspapers taken for study, ‘Times of India’ was found to have more coverage on RTI. Among the regional newspaper, ‘Dhinamani’ was found to have more coverage on RTI related content.

Among the English news channels taken for study, the duration of coverage of RTI was more for ‘NDTV 24x7’. Among the regional news channels taken for study, ‘Pudhiya Thalaimurai’ carried the RTI related news for more duration. Among the English newspapers taken for study, space devoted to RTI related content is more in ‘Times of India’. Among the regional newspapers, space devoted for RTI related content is more in ‘Dhinathanthi’.
Among the English news channels taken for study, ‘NDTV 24x7’ carried more RTI related news in the headlines. In the regional news channels, ‘Pudhiya Thalaimurai’ carried more percentage of RTI related news in the headlines. Among the newspapers, ‘The Hindu’ gave special importance to RTI by covering more RTI related news in the first page.