Chapter V
Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Credibility of media is of immense importance today. We need information to take all our decisions. News media is the source of much of our news, opinions and interpretations of the world around us. Youth, more than any other group in the society, consumes news on a large scale and the important decisions they make are dependent on it. Therefore, it is important to know how they judge the news media, news channels in particular. As the saying goes: the youth of today are the citizens of tomorrow.

The results of the survey coupled with interviews with media experts bring out various aspects associated with the media, how the media works, what ethical rules are followed in the collection and dissemination of news, the preferences and views on the various media that carry news to the general public. Since the survey was restricted to students, here we get the opinions of the student community. Majority of the students have access to newspapers and read newspapers. The student community in the city of Bangalore, constitute more from other states, this is clear with less than 19 percent having their mother tongue as Kannada. Almost all the students have access to internet either at their homes, cyber cafes or through their smartphones. Internet is the preferred medium for news and entertainment for majority of the students. Along with news and entertainment internet is widely used by students for their education and research purpose. Majority of the students keenly follow news and news based programs on television. The preferred source of news for students is Internet, Television and Newspapers. Students also watch exclusive news channels on television, NDTV 24x7 being the preferred news channel followed by Times Now and CNN-IBN for the national news. BBC World is the leading news channel for International News. Even though large numbers of students watch news on television, very few of them regularly watch News Channels. The time spent on TV News channels is very less compared to the time spent on Internet media. This may be mainly because of easy access to the internet to students on their mobile phones and PC at home or college. The majority of the students watch News Channels for Current affairs, Interviews and Debates. Students watch News
Channels because they are habituated watching it, along with their parents and some watch the News Channels because of the anchors and presenters of the news program.

When it comes to trusting the news, students still rely and trust Newspapers compared to other Mediums. They opine that news is clearly presented with accurate information. At the same time students feel newspapers and television are most influenced by external pressures compared to Internet. Internet tops the list in terms of no external pressure. Students like to discuss about the current affairs and other happenings with their parents and friends. They are influenced by friends to watch certain news programs and news channels. When it comes to conflicting reports emanating in various media, students fall back on newspapers, and they strongly believe newspaper provides accurate and vetted information compared to other medium of news.

Survey involved checking the various parameters contributing to the credibility of the medium, factors like fearlessness, no political pressure, and fairness in handling the news, objective analysis, responsible to society, independent, proactive, balanced, trustworthy and accurate in representing the facts of the news under consideration.

The results of the study indicate that gender was significantly associated with assessments of news media credibility (regarding particular news outlets). Consistent with previous scholarship on gender and media credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 1998), the results of our study indicate that women reported higher media credibility scores than male survey participants. While the research cannot account for these gender differences, they add one more empirical account of a wider phenomenon regarding gender and media credibility.

Majority of the respondents feel television news is objective, and do not have political leaning. They feel television channels are trustworthy. But they also feel that there is a negative influence of the ownership on the objectivity of news channels. Business houses exert undue influence and this has a negative impact on the credibility of news channels.

When we dissect this, the conclusions one can draw are many. To start with, college students of Bangalore having a feeling that television channels are objective and unbiased when it comes to providing news about our society. This may mean that, due to
the large number of television news channels in India, it is not possible for anyone to get away with giving one sided and biased news. There is always interpretation of news where the news channels take a view and many appear biased. Objective news and subjective view is the mantra for India’s English national news channels. It is not possible to create a distinct identity and differentiation on the basis of what news is provided as all channels have access to all major stories. It is only when it comes to their analysis that they try and be distinct. Some take a centrist approach, some a nationalistic one and the others a left of the centre approach.

The fact that students feel that news channels don’t have a political leaning difficult to comprehend as an astute student of news channels and their programming will tell the subtle political stance of all the national English news channels. NDTV is pro-Congress, Times Now and CNN-IBN tend to be pro-BJP and India Today is anti-establishment; News X tries to copy the Times Now method. Since the last two years, there is more pronounced polarization among the news channels, also news media in general. For the first time, like in the United Kingdom, we are witnessing a two party system in politics and this has led the news media to take sides. Is this good or bad is not the issue here, but the viewers have a right to know whether a news channel supports the government or the opposition. Everyone has a right to choose their party affiliation, even media organisations, but they also much make it public. This will be healthy trend in a democracy.

Again, due to intense competition at the moment, we tend to see a phenomenon where all news channels are trying to outdo the others. This is good for the viewers in many ways. They have a wide choice of channels and programmes to choose from. It also ensures all the channels give all the important stories- if one channel tries to kill a story of importance other channels will surely carry it and score over the former. So, no story worth the salt is missed as far as the coverage is concerned.

Ownership of news channels is an important consideration when it comes to accepting the authenticity of news and views. Many channels have been started by political outfits to give voice to their ideology. As privatization of news channels took off in the country in the aftermath of the 1991 budget, the investments for new channels came from big media houses initially. But, in the recent years, big business houses have moved
in and started taking control of the media houses, including news channels. Business houses are the only source of investment for both bailing out sick news organisations and relaunching faltering ones. The investments come with their own problems— one has to only take into consideration the Network 18 case to understand the negative impact on editorial freedom. Due to the reluctance of Reliance to allow the then Editor-in-Chief Rajdeep Sardesai to have a free hand in covering the run up to the general election of 2014, many senior journalists including Sardesai left CNN-IBN. The impact of that exodus from the channel that they helped establish and run successfully for almost eight years was felt on the credibility of the channel in the coming months.

This negative impact has somewhat eased in the recent past as CNN-IBN tries to take a balanced view on important political happenings. But the damage caused is very difficult to manage and bring the channel back to credible days. The positive impact of senior journalist on the credibility of news channels is there for all to see. Times Now is surviving and thriving only due to the charismatic presence of Arnab Goswami. CNN-IBN has not found a credible alternative and at the same time a crowd puller like Rajdeep Sardesai to recreate the magic of the past.

Television news channels face multiple problems. The problem of credibility is one of the most important feature of Indian news channels. The fact that private news channels have to compete for a diminishing proportion of the advertising pie has pushed many of them to become populist in their programming and content. This has a cyclic effect on their credibility. The lack of serious news and debate, more importance to entertainment and soft news, using graphics and animation to make the content more sensational and most of all resorting to cheap promotional tactics have all added to the woes of the broadcast news industry.

Getting an ombudsman will be the first step towards gaining credibility. In the case of The Hindu, the creation of a Reader’s Editor (similar to the ombudsman), may be symbolic but has led to the feeling that the newspaper cares for its readers and their views. Television channels have to immediately devise a strategy, which though symbolic, will send a positive signal out to the viewing public. The seriousness of the news channels to rectify their shortcomings will have to start with an acknowledgment of the same. As the old saying goes, “it is a rough road that leads to heights of greatness’.
In addition to a Reader Editor or Ombudsman, news channels should have a mechanism for self-restraint. This could be in the form of a code of ethics evolved through consensus and voluntarily adopted. It sends out a strong signal to the government on one hand that news channels are serious about their commitment to self-regulate and not need a government regulated mechanism. On the other hand, it will create a positive perception in the minds of the viewers about the credibility factors like accountability and socially responsible news media.

Then again, television news channels will have to move away from thinking of television as a purely entertainment medium to a more serious and education one. As thousands of Indians rely on television for news of daily occurrences, it is the responsibility of the news channels to provide them in a comprehensible and complete manner. Democracy is not just about voting once in five years; the decision to vote for this party or that should be based on a thorough understanding of the political system. This responsibility cannot be and should not be taken so lightly as it seems to be the case today where sensationalism is the answer to any complex issue.

Television is the most powerful medium known to man. It has the power to bring virtually any news or information from any part of the world into the living room. As the world around is diverse and the people and their priorities differ, there is a need for news channels to be heterogeneous and provide differentiated programming. What is news for the urban middle class may not be of interest to the small town viewers. As the country undergoes change, news channel should also evolve into a medium that caters to this changing needs of the society.

Finally, news channels should move away from over reliance on the present business model- sponsorship brings in the major share of the revenue for the news channels. People will demand value if they have to pay for the channel, and the channel in turn will be forced to provide serious and important news. Instead of the advertisers influencing the content and presentation of the programmes on the news channels, the viewers get to have a bigger say. This will automatically change the editorial policy and make it news centric instead of the now TRP centric.
5.2 Conclusion

As far as the findings go, it did not support the proposition of the Media Dependency theory which stated that more people depend on the media to meet their needs more important media becomes in their lives and therefore the effect of media also increases. However, the findings support this contention of the theory that the influence of media on the audience should be studied in the context of the audience relationship with the media. In the present study the relationship of the audience media relationship, trust in the media and the dependency on TV news for information was taken as a predictor of influence. The findings showed that the audience were influenced by the television views provided they trusted the media as a credible source of information. The more they found the news from news channels to be credible the more they believed the news on the channel.

When we see the findings in the context of Uses and Gratification theory, we can conclude that news channels that gratify or satisfy the needs of the viewers are most likely to be viewed/used more. News channels that are satisfying the needs of the audience thrive more than those that fail to meet the demands of the viewers. It is not about giving what people want but news and views that matter to the people at large that makes a channel likeable, in turn increase their dependency on that and maybe in turn rises the credibility of the news channels.

Media credibility matters, and how? People are not blindly accepting what is given to them in the form of news and views on news by news channels. There is a conscious (cognitive) effort that is made to shift through the information that is available from all media sources. Only the medium that is considered reliable and trustworthy is accepted; and the news on that medium is relied upon by the young college going students of the city of Bangalore.

The message for the television news channels is loud and clear: source credibility is important in judging the authenticity of news provided. Being first with news, dumbing it down for the sake of bigger audience numbers, shouting and abusing the spokespersons and experts, and calling each and every story breaking news does not pay. One has to not only give objective news but see that views are fair and balanced. Attempt should be
made to empower the viewer by providing news that is of use and not try and confuse them. Entertainment is one of the most important functions of television medium but not when it comes to news. News should not be commodified and celebrity news must be kept to the minimum. There are general purpose channels for the purpose of entertaining viewers. In the age of specialization and differentiation, television news channels should stick to strictly news and serious debates on important issues and leave the entertainment to other channels. By concentrating on what is the core and doing it well, news channels will prosper. In the age of differentiation, one needs to stand out from the rest and a credible news channel will definitely fit that bill.

When the dust settles over the news channels in India, one can hope for a few channels that survive the stiff competition to keep viewers’ interest in mind. Viewers will flock to the channel/s that provide credible news and balanced views on everyday incidents and issues. One can only hope that as it happened in the case of international English news channels, the quest for credibility brings about change for the better. BBC World News forced channels like CNN International to follow its best practices, when it comes to covering news stories- impartiality is the cornerstone of all news and current affairs reporting by BBC and that all reporters help deliver a fair and balanced coverage of all stories. Take the case of Al-Jazeera, who based their very existence on the principles borrowed from BBC. The perception that Al-Jazeera has internationally as a serious, factual, objective and fair news channel cannot be disputed even by Americans, who grudgingly acknowledge this fact.

As the saying goes, “It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation, but you can lose it in a minute.” Indian news channels have a long way to go in order to claim a reputation. NDTV has been around for thirty years and from time to time they too succumb to temptation of lucre. As long as TRP holds sway over the English news channels- as an indicator of quality, pretty little is going to change. Thankfully, news channels are breaking off from the hold TAM led TRP had on them and slowly moving to alternative ways of judging the popularity, nay dependability, in the eyes of the viewers. Digitalization of television is a move towards greater revenue generation directly from viewers and less dependency on the advertisers.
Time is running out. Internet based news delivery platforms are fast becoming the medium for news and current affairs for the urban young Indians. Their increased reliance on smart phones for getting updated on the news of the day can translate into falling viewers for television news channels. Credibility is again an issue with online news but if television news channels don’t change the way they collect, process and package news, the day will not be far when news channels will be overwhelmed by the sheer quantity and variety of news platforms on the internet providing constant updates and better control in terms of what, how much and in what way the customers want their news stories.

This also an opportunity for the news channels, especially the English ones. If they can tap into the doubts of online audience about the authenticity of news, they will not only hold on to their present viewers but may actually convert the young new media aspirant into English news channel viewers with credible news and balanced debates. National English news channels are here to stay for many years, perception of credibility being the only stumbling block, according this study.

5.3 **Recommendations for further research**

The following are some of the areas that other researchers can look at-

1. Source credibility is the main concern of this research but someone can look at the role of anchors in making of the credibility of news channels.

2. A comparative study may be done to compare and contrast the credibility of television news channels and newspapers and or news websites.

3. A comparative analysis of an Indian news channel and an international news channel can be undertaken.

4. One can look at the role of ethics of journalism in building of the credibility of news channels.

5. A comparative analysis of English news channels with the local/regional news channels can be taken up.

6. And, finally, to take this present research forward the national level credibility of the English news channels can be studied.