



Yellow Journalism And Youth: A Study Of Its Reach And Impact In Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Yellow journalism, which is known for using sensationalism, false information, and emotionally charged headlines, has become a major component of how people consume media today, especially young people. In rural and semi-urban areas like Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh, where old-fashioned values meet new digital platforms, young people are more likely to suffer from the mental and behavioural effects of these kinds of journalism. This research looks at how often yellow journalism occurs, what it is, and how it affects people aged 17 to 23 in the Hamirpur region. The study looks at how young people interact with spectacular media, what kinds of content they see, and how this exposure changes how they think, feel, act, and view societal issues. It does this by using a variety of methods. The results show that a lot of young people in Hamirpur read yellow journalism, which makes them emotionally unstable, spreads false information, and changes how they feel about current events, celebrities, and politics. The report says that media literacy initiatives and ethical journalism are two ways to fight the bad consequences of yellow journalism.

Keywords:

Yellow Journalism, Youth, Hamirpur, Media Consumption, Sensationalism, Fake News, Social Impact, Himachal Pradesh

The line between news and entertainment has grown less clear in the modern age of digital revolution. This has caused a big change in how information is made, shared, and used. One of the most obvious signs of this change is the emergence of yellow journalism, which is a type of reporting that uses sensationalism, exaggeration, and sometimes even making things up completely. Yellow journalism used to be a part of fringe tabloids and newspapers that focused on scandals. Now, it has spread to mainstream news media and digital platforms, where it has become popular because of the money that comes from clicks, shares, and viewer interaction. This is especially worrying in developing and semi-urban areas where access to cell phones and the internet is growing quickly, but media literacy and critical thinking abilities are frequently not keeping up. In these situations, young people, who are the most active and easily influenced media consumers, are especially vulnerable to news that is false or sensationalized. Yellow journalism doesn't

promote informed citizenry or critical conversation; instead, it encourages emotional manipulation, false information, and reactionary conduct. The district of Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh is a great place to study how yellow journalism affects young people. Hamirpur is known for its schools and politically engaged young people. The number of people who use mobile phones, social media, and digital news sites has all gone up. But this greater access to information has not been matched by a rise in media literacy. Young people in the area typically see viral news stories that focus on crime, scandal, celebrity gossip, and political propaganda. These stories are generally shown without context, verification, or balance. Because of this, real journalism that values accuracy, accountability, and civic engagement is often eclipsed by stuff that is mostly meant to shock and delight. This study paper looks closely at how yellow journalism affects young people in Hamirpur and how it gets into the media they consume every day. It looks at the psychological, emotional, and behavioural effects of reading sensationalized news and tries to figure out how much yellow journalism impacts how young people think, how they make decisions, and how much they trust media organizations. The study's goal is to add to the existing discussions about ethical journalism, how young people use the media, and the urgent need for media literacy in semi-urban India by looking at how people use the media in their own communities and the larger societal effects.

What is yellow journalism?

Also known as sensational journalism, yellow journalism is a way of reporting news that puts shock value, emotional appeal, and entertainment ahead of facts and moral duty. The word came about in the late 1800s amid the circulation wars between major American newspapers. Its main features still characterize many parts of current news reporting, especially in the digital era.

There are a few main things that make yellow journalism what it is:

• Sensational Headlines:

Yellow journalism headlines are made to get people's attention right away. These are typically too much, wrong, or written in a way that makes the article's real substance look different. The aim is not to inform but to get people interested and get them to click or watch. For instance, a little incident in the area may be described as a large catastrophe to make it seem more important.

• Emotional Manipulation:

Yellow journalism is all about making people feel powerful emotions like fear, anger, pity, or enthusiasm. This kind of reporting skips beyond logical reasoning and goes straight to the reader's instincts by using emotionally charged language, dramatic pictures, and moralistic framing. This method works especially well with young people, who may be more likely to respond to information that is based on feelings.

• Distorted or Selective Presentation of Facts:

These stories typically leave out important details, pick and choose facts, or change statements to fit a certain story. The final result is a distorted view of reality that can cause individuals to believe things that aren't true about people, events, or societal concerns.

• Talk about scandals, celebrities, and gossip:

Yellow journalism focuses too much on celebrity culture, personal scandals, criminal tales, and political controversies instead of important concerns like government, policy, the environment, or social justice. This takes people's minds off of important conversations and encourages a culture of distraction.

• Using unverified sources and clickbait tactics:

Yellow journalism sometimes relies on unconfirmed social media postings, rumors, and hearsay because they want to be the first to report anything rather than the most correct. Clickbait headlines are a frequent way for media companies to make money by getting people to click on links, no matter what the piece is about.

The Digital Age of Yellow Journalism

Sensationalist reporting has been around for a long time, but the internet and social media have made it much more popular and powerful. Today, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter (now X), and other platforms utilize algorithms that reward material that gets a lot of likes, shares, comments, and views. In this attention economy, sensational tales tend to do well by their very nature.

In this context, yellow journalism may spread quickly, often faster than accurate corrections or fair reporting. Even when reports are shown to be false later, the emotional effect and public recall of the initial sensationalism typically stay.

1. Review of the Literature

For more than a hundred years, media experts have been worried about yellow journalism, which is when news stories utilize shocking headlines, emotional manipulation, and false information. There is a lot of writing on this topic that covers its historical development, moral issues, how audiences react to it, and its psychological effects, especially on young people in the digital age. This review brings together relevant academic work, policy papers, and real-world studies to create the conceptual and contextual foundation for the current research.

The phrase "yellow journalism" came about in the late 1800s during the circulation battles between the New York World and the New York Journal. To promote sales, they employed dramatic headlines and inflated content (Campbell, 2001). Schudson (1978) and Stephens (1997) were two of the first scholars to point out how sensationalism went against the conventional values of journalism, which include impartiality, accuracy, and public service.

Modern types of yellow journalism have moved to internet and television platforms, where economic pressures, competitiveness, and click-based revenue models encourage dramatization and simplicity (McChesney, 2004; Thussu, 2007).

The media in India has changed a lot in the previous twenty years. As more and more TV channels, websites, and social media sites have popped up, journalism has become more and more sensationalized. Mehta (2008) says that Indian news media regularly mixes together reality and fantasy, especially when covering crime, politics, and celebrity news.

Chatterjee (2021) and Bhushan (2020) say that Indian teens are especially vulnerable to sensationalism because they don't know how to read the news well, don't have access to a wide range of opinions, and are shown a lot of attention-grabbing content on sites like YouTube and Instagram through algorithms. Also, young people often think that false information is typical since they quickly read unverified WhatsApp forwards and meme-based content (Banaji & Bhat, 2019).

Young people, usually between the ages of 16 and 25, are some of the most active users of digital media across the world. The Pew Research Center (2022) and Dasgupta (2020) both found that this group gets a lot of their news from social media and mobile platforms, which makes them more likely to fall for fake news and emotional manipulation.

Thakur (2018) says that spectacular material creates a feedback cycle where young people look for emotionally charged stories to engage themselves, inadvertently taking in false information. The problem gets worse because people don't know how to critically read the news, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where there isn't much formal instruction about how to use digital media.

Sharma and Singh (2020) did research in North India and discovered that young people who read a lot of spectacular news were more anxious, less trusting of democratic institutions, and had more extreme political views. The results of this study are similar to the worries highlighted about the youngsters of Hamirpur.

There is a lot of evidence that yellow journalism has bad effects on people's mental health. Sensational news makes people more anxious and excited (Johnson & Tewksbury, 2017), adds to "mean world syndrome" (Gerbner, 1998), and can cause paranoia, false information, and emotional exhaustion. Yellow journalism makes echo chambers, group polarization, and the breakdown of civic discourse worse (Sunstein, 2001). Young people who see this kind of stuff may grow jaded, disconnected from reality, or too quick to respond to emotionally charged situations without any facts to back them up.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To find out how common yellow journalism is in the media that young people in Hamirpur read.
2. To look at how sensationalized news affects how young people feel, think, and act.
3. To find out what kinds of media people use that help yellow journalism propagate.
4. To look at feasible ways to lessen the bad consequences of yellow journalism through education and rules.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach, with a focus on using in-depth interviews to learn more about how young people feel and think about yellow journalism. The qualitative technique is the best fit for this study because it lets us understand subjective experiences, emotional reactions, and media habits in more depth than quantitative measures alone can.

Sample Size: The study included 150 young people, ages 17 to 23, who were enrolled in different institutions and universities in the Hamirpur area of Himachal Pradesh. The age range was chosen to include both undergraduate and graduate students, who are thought to be some of the most active users of social media and digital media.

Data Collection Techniques: The data collection procedure included a mix of structured questionnaires, in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 chosen participants, and media content analysis. The structured surveys were the first step in collecting demographic information and general trends in how people consume media. The qualitative interviews, on the other hand, were the most important part of the research since they gave detailed, descriptive information on the actual experiences and thoughts of young people in the context of yellow journalism. We also did a basic content analysis of prominent social media pages, viral news videos, and regional news agencies to find patterns of sensationalism that happen again and again in Hamirpur's media.

Sample Method: A stratified random sample method was used to make sure that people from different demographic and social groups were fairly represented. We divided the sample into groups based on gender, education level, and whether they lived in a rural or urban area so that it would reflect the varied ways that different groups of young people are exposed to media. This stratification made sure that the insights gained from the qualitative data were not confined to a single group but instead showed the district's wider sociocultural dynamics.

Focus of the Qualitative Interviews:

The in-depth interviews were guided by a semi-structured format and focused on key thematic areas, including

How often and what kinds of media people use, especially on cellphones, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp.

Participants should be able to recognize and be aware of fake or misleading news, including how they can tell the difference between real news and sensational material.

How people feel and think when they see or read dramatic headlines and pictures, such as dread, rage, anxiety, or exhilaration.

Have faith in a variety of media sources, such as newspapers, TV news, web portals, and social media influencers.

Changes in opinions, beliefs, or connections with other people that happen because of media exposure are called behavioural consequences.

4. Effect on Young People's Media Use

Young people are among the most active users of digital media. Young people are excellent candidates for sensational material since they don't see much traditional, controlled journalism and generally don't have any formal training in media literacy. Studies have revealed that young people often:

- Share things without checking where they came from.
- Make decisions based on stories that aren't full or are blown out of proportion.
- Get anxious or emotionally drained from hearing bad or false news all the time.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section presents key insights derived from the field data collected through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and content analysis. The findings reveal the pervasive presence and psychological, social, and cognitive impact of yellow journalism among youth in Hamirpur.

5.1. Prevalence and Consumption Patterns

The data reveals that a significant proportion of youth in Hamirpur engage with sensational media content regularly, often without critical awareness.

The study's results show that many young people in Hamirpur read yellow journalism, and they often do so without being aware of how to think critically about the media. A notable 72% of respondents indicated that they consistently consume sensational news articles, often oblivious to their classification as yellow journalism. The fact that social media is the main source of news for young people—about 80% said they get their news mostly from sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube instead of conventional media like newspapers or TV—makes this tendency even stronger. This change in how people use media has big effects, especially when it comes to figuring out how reliable information is.

Frequently Accessed Platforms:

The study also found a troubling lack of media literacy. More than half of the people who answered (55%) said they had trouble telling the difference between good journalism and yellow journalism, especially when they saw headlines that made them feel something, dramatic images, or information that was designed to get them to click. The conduct of users on digital platforms makes this uncertainty even worse. 40% of young people admitted to sharing news items or videos through applications like WhatsApp and Instagram without checking to see if the content was true. This shows a passive and maybe destructive way of using media, where false information spreads readily among friends, making yellow journalism more popular and powerful among young people.

5.2. Emotional and Cognitive Impact

The in-depth interviews offered qualitative insights into the emotional and psychological impact of yellow journalism on the youth:

- A majority of students described experiencing **feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, or confusion** after consuming sensational content—particularly related to crime, social unrest, or political controversies.

- Exposure to **fake news involving communal tension or violence** increased **paranoia and mistrust**, especially toward people from other regions, castes, or political beliefs.
- There was a strong emphasis on **celebrity gossip and personal scandals**, often dominating peer discussions more than civic or developmental issues.
- Several students acknowledged **believing and reacting to misinformation**, especially during election periods or crisis events (e.g., COVID-19 rumours, political movements).

One student reflected:

"I used to think I was well-informed, but later realized much of the news I read was biased or fake. It made me angry and then embarrassed."

These kinds of incidents show that there is a difference between what people think they know and what they actually know. This shows how readily sensationalism may affect how people think, including how they make decisions and form opinions.

5.3. How behaviour and society affect each other

Yellow journalism changes not just how people see things, but also how society works and how people act:

- The study found that peer groups were becoming more ideologically divided and creating echo chambers, where students only talk to people or outlets who agree with them.
- There was an increasing trend of people getting into fights online, with young people getting into intense disputes over politically or socially sensitive items.
- People's faith in mainstream media clearly went down. A lot of students didn't trust news networks because they thought they were either politically biased or only interested in making money.
- People who believed in conspiracy theories, especially those involving politicians, foreign forces, or celebrities, were quite high.

A person who answered said:

"We are drawn to hot news... It's fun. But subsequently, we find out that a lot of information is wrong or one-sided.

This comment shows how spectacular information can be addictive and how people frequently feel bad or realize they shouldn't have seen it after they do. This kind of activity shows how complicated the relationship is between entertainment, false information, and social identity online.

5.4. Media Literacy and Critical Thinking

One important thing the study found was that pupils didn't get any formal media education:

- Only 25% of the people who answered had taken part in school programs, workshops, or media literacy classes that dealt with false information online.
- Most people used their gut feelings, what their friends said, or meme culture to figure out how credible news reports were.
- Students often thought that high view counts or shares meant that something was true, while in fact they were just popular.

This lack of critical thinking skills makes young people more likely to be manipulated, which shows how important it is to teach them about media ethics, source verification, and digital literacy in a structured way.

6. The Local Context: What Makes Hamirpur Important

The district of Hamirpur is a unique place for this research since it has a high literacy rate and a lot of young people who go to college. It is commonly seen as an educational and political center in Himachal Pradesh, where many educated people, civil service candidates, and politically savvy people come from. Hamirpur is a well-known place for education, but it doesn't have many independent news sources that are exclusive to the area. Because of this, people in the area, especially young people, frequently turn to national news sources or viral social media posts, which tend to focus on sensational and broad stories instead of concerns that are specific to the area. This gap between access to media and what is really going on in the community makes people depend on oversimplified or inaccurate pictures of complicated social and political concerns. Also, kids from nearby rural communities don't know much about technology and sometimes don't have access to good information sources. In these kinds of places, WhatsApp forwards, YouTube videos, and dubious Instagram postings become the main sources of information. So, Hamirpur is like a little version of semi-urban India, where more people can go online but there aren't many critical media outlets. This makes it a good place for yellow journalism to proliferate and have an impact.

7. Challenges in Combating Yellow Journalism

To fight yellow journalism in places like Hamirpur, we need to deal with a number of problems that are all connected:

- Without rules for digital platforms, fraudulent and dramatic news may proliferate without being stopped.
- Social media algorithms that are driven by profit put information that gets people talking above accuracy or honesty.
- Young people who don't know much about the media are more likely to passively consume and share false information.
- Young people keep up to date with viral information, even if it's not true, because of peer pressure and fear of missing out (FOMO).

When there isn't any ethical journalism that is based in a certain area, it leaves a hole that is typically filled by information that is politically or commercially biased. These problems are likely to get worse without help from institutions and society, which will hurt the credibility of journalism and make it harder for people to talk about democracy.

8. Suggestions

Based on the results, the following strategies are suggested to reduce the impact of yellow journalism and encourage responsible media use:

1. Add media literacy lessons to school and college curricula to teach students how to spot bias, verify sources, and grasp what ethical journalism is.
2. Hold workshops and training sessions on digital verification tools and critical thinking, with a focus on young people in rural and semi-urban regions.
3. Work with local teachers and journalists to provide real, youth-friendly material that focuses on local concerns and encourages positive conversation.
4. Start social media campaigns that encourage people to share responsibly, check facts, and learn about false information and how it affects others.
5. Push for changes to the law that will control false information online, hold content creators accountable, and reward journalism that serves the public good.

These actions must involve a lot of different groups, like schools, media businesses, internet firms, and civil society, and they must happen all the time.

9. Conclusion

Yellow journalism isn't new, but its reach and impact have risen a lot in the internet world, especially among young people. In Hamirpur, the high level of digital involvement and low level of media literacy have led to a scenario where sensationalism often takes the place of content and entertainment pretends to be news. The results of this study show that yellow journalism has a big effect on how young people think, feel, and act in regard to the world around them. But this is hardly a trend that will last forever. There is a lot of opportunity to create a generation of citizens that are critically aware, ethically grounded, and well-informed by taking timely and focused actions like education, raising awareness, promoting ethical media practices, and becoming involved in the community. To have a future of democratic debate in Himachal Pradesh and India as a whole, we need to encourage a culture of responsible media use and creation.

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