Ensuring an ethical news media

What is the issue?

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The news media is under threat due to various internal factors.

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What are the problems in this regard?

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- **Paid news** had been a long debated issue that was used to describe malpractices in newspapers.
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- This is now being rephrased into **“advertorial” content** to legitimise and blur the distinction between reportage and paid content.
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- Ex: A government policy keeps appearing in news in the form of advertisements from the known beneficiary of that policy.These in essence are **politicised news**.
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- The prevalence of bribed reporters, lobbying senior editors and politically biased journalists questions the legitimacy and ethics of the news media.
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- **Corporates** have huge financial stakes and significant control over print or visual media.
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- This has allegedly led to blurring of distinction between managerial/ownership activities and editorial jurisdiction.
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- It is also being the cause for corruption and **conflict of interest** which are increasingly operating in the news media.
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- **TRP** (Television Rating Point) and sensationalism are being the driving factors as they determine the advertising revenue.
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- The legislative and regulatory powers of the Press Council of India (**PCI**) is inadequate to take stringent measures against all these.

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What should be done?

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- Some **ownership restrictions** on cross holdings and aggregate holdings have to be legislated.
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- **Legislation** must also define the distinctions between managerial and editorial departments to avoid conflict of interest.
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- Working on **labour standards** to let journalists work without fear of retribution, to refuse any form of work that infringes upon their professional codes or conscience is essential.
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- Creating genuinely **independent and transparent systems** for assessing circulation and ratings of media is needed.
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- Introducing **internal systems** for disclosing potential conflicts of interest and to deal with complaints.
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Source: The Hindu

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