Twitter Thread by Vasundhara Sirnate



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I’ve finally managed to get through the Arnab Goswami Chatgate pdf. Everyone has already highlighted those portions that needed highlighting. I have a slightly different tack.

1. The messages tell me that news is a carefully constructed consumer product.

This is something we all already know but it’s nice to see confirmation. Events are presented in the high-decibel manner that has become the standard because the product is crying for attention.

2. These folks don’t care about what has actually happened and to whom. They’re

callous about it. Their eye is firmly on the ratings. There is no empathy in their conversation. The empathy on screen is constructed.

3. Overall the chats reveal varying degrees of competition between channels to get real close to those in office. One thing that stood out

is reference to the PMO asking who leaked a particular story. Even the state doesn’t have control over its disinformation. Power centers within the state seem to be disseminating different info to their preferred reporters or channels.

This was fully flagged in an old piece I had co-authored on Pulwama in 2019. How there was so much contradictory information about one singular incident.

4. The real issue then is what about journalism. Is this even journalism or should we be calling it something else?

5. There’s a lot I didn’t know about how organizations function. I knew TRPs are important. I guess I didn’t know just how important they are. And the other thing that stood out is how nasty this whole business about “getting ahead” of the competition is.

6. This tells me that more than ever we need independent bodies that can fact-check and hold news corporations accountable. I don’t think I would trust these channels on anything after reading those chats.

7. If news is produced as consumer product solely based on the state

and what it wants to say, we need a new business model that can undercut this collaborative and propagandist model.

8. Also PMO seems to keep a sharp eye on local channels. Is this how they're getting their political positions?

9. There is a discussion about sabarimala in

the chats where they talk about an RSS funder for a local channel Janam. The channel gained viewers because it took a "pro devotee" stand. So there is no fairness here. Conservative values here are editorially mobilized for viewership.

In short who can we trust?

10. The thing that really got to me is how nationalism and the armed forces are also commodified for ratings. They more the mayhem, the better these channels do. It's a shame. They won't work towards lack of bias because that doesn't bring in ratings and revenue.

I don't see these folks as journalists anymore. I will be calling them "corporate news workers."

Last year some people who quit Republic had talked about how they were told to film "chase sequences". And we all saw the hyperventilating young reporter following what was alleged to be Deepika Padukone'a car. That's complete manufacturing and yet we all watched it.

Even the whole Justice for SSR trend was done to make inroads into viewership in mofussil towns and cities in specific states. And we know why some states are ignored. According to the chats a whole army of reporters went to Kashmir to report on the abrogation of 370.

They came back with not a single credible story. They participated in the production of that episode of mass incarceration and backed it on national TV.

If like me you've gone through the chats you can see that there isn't a single discussion on facts. They're not really talking about what has happened and how they feel about it (unless it affects them directly). It's all business.

The thing is if news is now just another dodgy product on a shelf, you can choose to not buy it anymore because it affects your health.