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# Popular Imagination of the Indian Economy: Understanding Mediated Responses to a Food Scandal

Diksha Narang<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Doctoral Scholar, Department of Sociology, South Asian University, [diksha.narang12@gmail.com](mailto:diksha.narang12@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** This paper highlights the popular imagination of the Indian economy that arose after the pan-Indian ban on Maggi noodles. In 2015, the famous Maggi noodles sold by the multinational corporation, Nestle was banned because of discrepancies between explicit claims and reports around adulteration. Through a discourse analysis of national English and Hindi print and television news during a five-month period around the scandal, the nature of public opinion around the economy, corporations and regulations is highlighted. A multilingual sample of opinion pieces showed that there are distinct patterns in English and Hindi news media around the representation of the Indian economy alluding to a ‘split public’. While the English news media called for the end of disproportionate regulations on foreign corporations in India, Hindi news media highlighted the problem of foreign capital and commodities that are ruining the ‘Indian body’. Regulations and reforms in the economy are then informed through popular understandings of the economy and its interface with a nationalist imagination. This paper attempts to understand how the economy is imagined, contested and debated through the news media.

**Keywords.** *Popular culture, news media, controversy, split public*

## **Introduction**

Several commentators have gone as far as to argue that, “wheat, rice and Maggi” are the staple foods in the Indian diet (Sinha et al, 2015). Maggi noodles of the Swiss Corporation, Nestle entered the Indian marketplace in 1983 and has over the years become a business-school story of the success of a food commodity entering the Indian household. This was considered as especially surprising because the preference for home-cooked food has been noted as an obstacle towards the consumption of ready-to-eat, processed or instant food in the Indian market (Mazzarella, 2003; Donner, 2016).

A nation is essentially an ‘imagined community’ which is brought to being through a spread of a ‘homogeneous clock time’ through calendars, market coordination and clocks (Anderson, 2006). For the idea of the ‘national people’ to take form, the spread of national newspapers is necessary to spread the belief of being part of a homogeneous community. Appadurai (1990) has argued that the shape of this imagined community could only emerge through the spread of commodity forms including the novel and the newspaper. There is, however, an intimate relationship between the imaginations of an economy and the nation-form (Fernandes, 2000). Deshpande (1997) and Fernandes (2000) introduces the notion of imagined economies in order to understand how the economy can be used as a mnemonic device in the construction of the nation. The imagination of a nation was invoked through the Maggi scare showing how a national debate can be invoked around a commodity.

Maggi in the year 2014 was regarded as one of the five most trusted brands of India, however, in May-June 2015, a series of incidents led Maggi to be banned in several states of India. Sections of the media compared the Maggi crisis of 2015 to the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. However, the Nestle CMD Suresh Narayanan, replied to this allegation saying, “only a heartless person can compare this with something as tragic as what happened in Bhopal in 1984. But that’s what happened and when that happens, a brand that is much loved suddenly starts melting down” (Pandey, 2018). Nestle was accused of selling a product without declaring that it contained harmful additives such as Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) and zinc. That the Maggi scandal was a food scare of colossal implications was emphasised through the amount of Maggi that had to be incinerated (27,000 tonnes) as well as the crores of rupees that Nestle would lose through even a single day of the ban—described as the largest recall in the MNC’s hundred years of running (Mitra, 2015).

Nestle throughout the ban maintained that the product was safe and there were unfounded confusions in the market. However, the ban lasted five months and in November 2015 on Dhanteras, an auspicious day of the Hindu calendar, Maggi returned to the market with the tagline— “is safe, was safe and will always be safe” (Mookherji & Dutta, 2015). This paper analyses the agenda-setting of the Hindi and English national news media platforms and how discourse around consumption culture and multinational corporations was formed. It tries to understand what happens when a Multinational Corporation (MNC) is blamed for being an adulterator. Primarily through opinion pieces in the Hindi and English print and television news media that appeared in the year 2015, it examines how the Maggi ban created public opinions around the relationship between regulation and economy.

### **Theoretical discussion**

Economic ideologies have long been studied such as by Karl Marx (1970), Max Weber (2013) and more recently, Karl Polanyi (1944). The economy is a key signifier in the formation of the national imagination. Deshpande (1993) takes us through three imaginations of the Indian economy: the first is the colonial economy through the Swadeshi movement in which commodities were invested with a ‘social hieroglyphics’ that enabled “the construction of the nation as an economic community to which loyalty is owed.” Post-independence, there was an era of Nehruvian development planning with its ‘five-year’ plans in which there were attempts to “optimise the ideological impact of the idea of a modern industrial economy by developing it into a powerful vision of the future of the Indian nation” (p. 30). The contemporary economy however is centred on opening up its boundaries and creating a global consumer. This is parallel to shifts in the structure of the middle-class in which more

people than ever before are aspiring for the consumption cultures that are defined within this lifestyle such as new technological commodities like washing machines, televisions or cars (Donner, 2016; Baviskar 2018).

While there have been several studies of consumption culture understood through desires and aspirations for middle-class lifestyle and commodities, the notion of a 'crisis' brings up debates around regulation, the role of the state and the expectations of the consumer and so on. 'Adulteration' or a food scandal is, therefore, an important medium to understand the imaginations of the economy and nation-form. Several histories have been written on the emergence of anti-adulteration legislation in different parts of the world (Atkins, 1991; Stern, 2003; Scholliers, 2016). Food adulteration is said to have been a problem since ancient Greece where inferior fats were alleged to be added to olive oil. Some have argued that regulation emerged in a context of free competition which was leading to adulteration (Rioux, 2015). While others have argued that regulation suited the needs of capital in terms of developing monopoly and curbing innovation (Stanziani, 2004). World-over there is scholarship on a new system of regulations that frame the reforms of the economy. Some have termed the new regulatory capacities of states and international organisations as the 'global diffusion of a regulatory capitalism' (Levi-Faur, 2005). Just as laws around property and enclosure were at one point seen as the originary moment of capitalism, the contemporary moment is said to be framed around the dual movements between privatisation and regulation (Levi-Faur, 2005).

This paper seeks to understand the 'enframing of the economy' in the news media—where divisions are made between organised/unorganised or corporate/traditional economy. It aims to locate these new ways of perceiving the economy through categories, classifications and organisations. Food scares are moments when the black-boxing of the economy is opened allowing the emergence of debate about what kind of regulations are needed, where are they needed, what part of the economy is over-regulated and what is under-regulated, and what is the role of the citizen in this regulatory capitalism and so on. The mediatisation of food scares allow an observer to understand 'regulatory politics' rather than simply the 'onslaught' of regulations.

## **Methodology**

The news media is both a site of representation and of the constitution of reality. The methodology of discourse analysis allows one to appreciate the co-constitution of news media and reality rather than a narrow focus on 'representation'. In this, discourse also has the power to shape and collaborate with multiple centres and positions of power (Gill, 2000).

Rather than a linguistic device, discourse is shaped through social, political and economic relations and values and has political effects (Freeman, 2009).

News media as a critical site of meaning-making in contemporary society, co-creates reality through framing a problem. Entman (2007) defines, “framing as the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation.

Fully developed frames typically perform four functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment, and remedy promotion” (p. 164). While framing theory looks at the possibility of how a problem is constituted in the news media, the idea of ‘media campaign’ stretches this to understand the intermixing of media and on-ground reality. In the Maggi crisis, the twinning of ‘civic’ issue with activism and vigilantism around consumption then creates a new kind of citizen-consumer subject. Udupa (2014) writes of this intermixing as the “new idea of the newsroom as agents of civic activism” (p. 14).

Many contemporary studies on the news have been done on a form of a campaign that would have a beginning and end such as the *Anna Hazare* campaign, the *Pink Chaddi* campaign or the 2014 elections (Udupa, 2012, 2014; Rajagopal, 2011). Thussu (2008) writes on the ‘campaigning frame’ in which the news media, “declares the news outlets stance on a particular issue or cause and typically seeks to galvanize sympathies and support for its intentions, political or otherwise, beyond the world of journalism” (p. 8).

This paper analyses the media campaign that emerged around the Maggi scare in 2015. To understand this media campaign, it primarily analyzes opinion pieces as a specific form of news media which is often neglected in favour of hard news reporting. Opinion pieces are a key way in which public debate takes place. It is a medium through which ideas are presented in a way that rhetorically aims to influence public judgement and present a ‘point of view’ (Nikolaev & Porpora, 2007).

Opinion written texts in newspapers appear either in a column with a signed author or without an author. However, in this paper, there is an attempt to widening the scope of understanding opinion pieces, this paper includes an opinion written pieces in the print news media and debate formats in television news media. Changes in the news media ecology have also led to a blurring of boundaries between television and print as there are many mixed-media experiments by mainstream news especially in the digital turn. Today there is also more dispersed, open and accessible media ecology in which there is a significant media production by citizens themselves. The mainstream news media, however, often uses these social media as content for news production. Both television and print media invite commentary from experts, concerned citizens and consumers in the debate

around Maggi. The nature of opinion production in news media is, therefore, often through a 'network architecture' involving several actors as opposed to news reporting by professional journalists.

### **Data collection**

The issue of language becomes a key site of bifurcation of news media in India creating separate public spheres (Rajagopal, 2001). In this paper, there is an attempt to capture similarities, fissures and contradictions between two major spheres of news production – national English news media and national Hindi news media. Understanding this variegated and often, contradictory news landscape would also lead us to a deeper view of the nature of news media as opposed to studies that focus on one language alone.

The timeline of the food scare and the subsequent ban on Maggi is taken as the key point to building a sample of news pieces. In order to develop an archive from June-November 2015, the data collection involved mining the digital platforms of print and television news media. Through searches of daily reporting, articles and videos based on the Maggi crisis were collected. *Economic Times*, *Business Today*, *Live Mint*, *Times of India*, *the Hindu* and *the Indian Express* were the English print news media platforms. Some platforms that are blogging sites linked to mainstream news such as the *Economic Times blog* and *Times of India blog* were also used. In addition, data was collected from weekly magazine including *India Today* and *Fortune India*. For English language television news, debates on the Maggi ban were collected from India Today, CNN-IBN and NDTV. In terms of Hindi news media, I used print sources including *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Dainik Jagran* and *Amar Ujala*. I also used blogging news digital platforms such as *iChowk*. For television sources, I used *Zee news*, *ABP news*, *News24* and *India News*. In total, there were 245 print and television news articles.

### **Findings**

The findings of this paper include textual analysis of the recurring themes in the print and television news pieces. It follows the three-step method to understand meaning-making that was put forth by Hall (1975). The first phase includes a light reading of texts through which the scope of the concepts and values are understood while keeping in mind the larger ideas which in this case was the regulation economy and the Maggi crisis. The second phase includes identifying the patterns of information that would eventually be conceived of as themes of the texts. Lastly, there is the task of interpretation through which the categories are discovered and the analysis process is undertaken. A textual analysis as argued by Gitlin

(2003) also analyses various forms of rhetorical strategies, visuals, voice and authority and what underlying values are present in the text.

### ***“What about” the real issue?***

In the English news media, several opinion pieces surfaced arguing that Maggi was not the ‘real’ issue, but the real issue was the lack of regulation over the unorganised sector. There was an attempt to exonerate Nestle through shifting the goalpost towards what the pro-business English news media such as *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Business Standard*, *India Today* or *Livemint* defined as the ‘real problem’. This was an argument that MNCs are treated unfairly in an economy that is plagued with ‘red tapism’. It was put forth that other foodways had ‘much more’ adulterous substances. Therefore, this argument was not around contesting that Maggi did not contain lead or MSG, rather it proposed that other kinds of food provisioning have more heavy metals, leaky chemicals and bacteria. The Maggi crisis was called a regulatory excess in different news articles: an “exaggerated negative action” (Bhattacharya, 2015), “overreacted and destroyed a brand without conclusive evidence” or a “spasmodic angst” (Raghunathan, 2015).

For instance, in an *Economic Times* article titled, “Is banning Maggi the only solution for India?” (Somvanshi, 2015), the article reads, “banning a brand that has been sold in the country for more than three decades and made in factories certified by state authorities smacks of double standards being followed by regulators.

Especially, when rampant contamination in most of our street food, which goes grossly unregulated. Our children fall sick by contaminated food served in state-sponsored mid-day programmes and yet there is a sense of euphoria as the state and central machinery are working overtime to prove Maggi is not what it’s meant to be.” The article goes on to say, “branded packaged foods become easy targets by regulatory arbitrariness, even as a show of foods from the unorganised sector continues to threaten public health. Shouldn’t we rather strive to achieve parity in the implementation of our regulations? So why just stop all noodles? Government should scrutinise the quality of milk, flour, veggies and even drinking water.” Here, the author puts forth that there is a bias in the regulatory mechanism in India: it ignores the unorganised sector, the street vendors, or the government mid-day meals rather than focuses on a small minority of corporations.

This question of “what about street vendors”, “what about mandis”, “what about traders”, “what about open defecation”, “what about basic sanitation”, “what about the Yamuna?”, “what about the lizard found in mid-day meals?”, “what about the bad air pollution in Delhi?”, “what about the junk food you get on the street corner?” were responses

to the Maggi crisis pointing towards the binary of 'real issues' and 'soft targets'. The Hindi news media, however, did not make such arguments on the 'real issues' being the unorganized sector. Where there were arguments on 'real issues', these real issues were rather that "gutka, alcohol, cigarettes" (*Bhaskar News*, 2015) should be banned as well. However, it is not as if the Hindi news media does not display or conduct sting operations on the unorganised sector at other occasions, however, it does not point towards the unorganised sector in order to exonerate Maggi.

In this "what about"-ery of the English media they show a stance that is explicitly pro-business. The language that was employed during the Maggi crisis was also akin to business schools talking about brand image and image loss. Two-three years after the Maggi crisis, pro-business sections of the English media featured interviews with the CEO of Nestle India, Narayana on how he handled the crisis, how Maggi's stocks are rising (Shashidhar & Dubey, 2017; Tandon, 2019; Reddy, 2019; Naryanana, 2018).

### ***The inadequacy government science***

The Maggi ban was a unique food scare in India because it originated from the work of the regulatory authorities. However, English news media such as *Times of India*, *India Today*, *Live Mint* or *DNA* also highlighted the inability of government science to make accurate claims. Articles emerged that state laboratories were "crying for a revamp." Though the Nestle corporation did not accuse government science of not being capable of producing such scientific results, English news media produced extensive reportage around the nature of government science (Raghunathan, 2015). For instance, the fact that different states of India had different results with regard to the lead in Maggi was used as an argument to claim that there was something lacking in the 'science' in government regulations. In a *Times of India* article titled, "Devil's advocacy for Maggi" by Raghunathan (2015), it is said, "when there is no unanimity yet across on the states on the actual level of MSG and lead in Maggi noodles. Could there be the explanatory phenomenon across states, that explains why some find the contents dangerous and others not? Given the overall scientific caliber of our average scientific laboratories, I for not will be not be surprised." In an article in the *Economic Times* by (Chakrabarti, 2015), it is said, "Maggi was pronounced unsafe by a food quality inspector in UP. An orgy of regulatory excess, led by FSSAI followed. No questions were officially asked on laboratory standards and test parameters."

While Nestle had argued at one point that journalists are welcome at their quality assurance centre, several journalists rather made their way to government labs. Several news articles emerged on the abysmal condition of government labs – poor equipment, staff

crunches, callous attitudes and low budgets. Articles in the English media emerged that food safety officers' positions hadn't been filled out in years. Aroon Purie (2015) at the *India Today* argued that the state where the food scare emerged from Uttar Pradesh had only five labs in which they lacked the “technical wherewithal and the manpower to tackle complicated food-testing cases.” In another English news article by Walia (2015), it is said that, “notably, the FSSAI has been notorious for its substandard food testing, given its lack of staff and scientific expertise.” Scientific expertise is thereby, seen to be lacking in this poorly funded state service. The state is not adequately equipped to deal with the corruption of the marketplace. It is considered that private testing by industries is one step ahead of government testing. Government science has therefore, not been able to become ‘world-class’ like private companies in this public debate.

### ***Indian standards***

Further, an idea of the uniqueness of Indian standards emerged in two ways: the first was that—“are Indian standards so high that we can charge an MNC and leave the unorganised sector untouched?” and the second revolved around the question “are Indian standards so low that MNCs can do whatever they like here”. While the former is addressed above in ideas of the “what about” the real issue, the second idea of the ill-treatment of the Indian body by the MNC is addressed in this section. A frequent statement that was made was that the Indian body is “discriminated against”. This notion of discrimination also went along with discourse around “Indian immunity” and that the Indian body has suffered through long decades of mistreatment by the market-leading to hyperactive immunity. This betrayal by the ‘*videshi*’ (foreign) company is the dominant reaction in the Hindi news media. For instance, there was a print article (iChowk, 2015) that focuses on several commodities like medicine, face washes and Maggi noodles that have been banned in Western countries. It ends the article by saying, “these big companies have admitted to this as well that standards differ between India and the rest, however, keeping the health of a human in mind, how can they be different?”. The article alludes to the idea that if everyone around the world has the same body, why do the MNCs treat Indians differently?”

The allure of the global commodity and the MNC went hand in hand with celebrity endorsements adding to the glamour of the commodities (Nayar, 2009). In the scare around pesticides in Coca-Cola in 2006 or the Cadbury worms incident in 2003, celebrities were used in order to build trust back in the consumers. However, in the case of Maggi, there was a backlash against celebrities. FIRs were charged against Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit, Vidya Balan and Preity Zinta. The media hounded these celebrities for statements on the

Maggi crisis. Celebrity, Vidya Balan replied to the controversy by asserting: “I don’t think that after a limit it’s an actor’s responsibility. because if I am endorsing a product, I can only find information to a certain extent like what sort of material has been used to make that particular product. But I cannot go to a factory and make that product” (*Indian Express*, 2015). Amitabh Bachchan issued a statement that even two years before the ban he had stopped trusting Maggi. When Maggi returned, they did not involve celebrity endorsements but rather had personal stories from consumers as their advertising campaign.

Visvanathan (2016) writes on Maggi, “Maggi was never seen as a multinational product. There was something *desi* about it. Maggi sounded like a *desi* name. Maggi referred to all noodles. The way the name Tommy referred to all dogs. Brand and genre merged to create household folklore” (p. 41). While Visvanathan has argued that Maggi was never seen as a foreign product, we see how during this scare, Maggi travels the distance to being seen as something from a “big company”, an “MNC”, a “*videshi* company” (foreign company). An argument that was often, used in defence of the new regime of consumption post-liberalization was that foreign products brought with them a higher ‘quality’. Vedwan (2007) however, urges that we think of quality in relational, aspirational and material-semiotic ways. Foreign goods which were in the preliberalisation era mostly brought through kinship networks were considered as rare and quality products.

Vedwan (2007) writes that with the liberalisation of the economy, “the flooding in of the foreign MNCs were perceived as synonymous with the coming home of the “abroad”, or in other words, progress” (p. 224). Local brands in this rendition are seen as provincial and not as participative in a global consumptive culture. However, we see how the ‘foreign’ returns to introduce fresh debates into the Maggi controversy. The FSSAI and various state FDA’s following the Maggi ban proposed that they would now be studying various ‘imported food products’. The ‘foreign’ now comes to fall short on quality as Vedwan (2007) writes that this consumerist crisis leads to an inversion of foreign = quality, and *desi* = low quality.

These opinion pieces around the lack of ethics of foreign companies in India also represents the Hindi news media’s stance of ambiguity with globalisation. Foreign brands which promised a certain international quality were surrounded by aspirations and desires, however, the fact that they often, use ‘double standards’ is then seen as a betrayal of this global and foreign promise. The ‘discrimination of the Indian body’ by the foreign MNC threatens the glamour, foreignness and allure of the global capital. The promise of the global brands versus their practice then leads to civic anger.

Hindi news channels also carried public protests such as the burning of Maggi packets. Some of these burnings were done by children, while others were done by adults

(Fry, 2016). Vedwan (2007) has shown how even in the Coca-Cola incident, there was a similar destroying of Coca-Cola bottles by university students operating through a century-old symbolic legacy of political protest centred on the swadeshi movement. The public destruction of commodities in the anti-colonial movement was done as a sign of economic boycott of British products, however, today the same form of public protest is used as a sign of consumer's betrayal of trust in the corporations. Slogans included, "stop the sale of Maggi" or "stop life-threatening Maggi" (ABP news, 2015).

### ***Meat in Maggi?***

An interesting translation of 'lead and MSG' took place in the Hindi print media. For instance, in *Dainik Bhaskar* (2015), it was argued that, "meat and lead Maggi have a new regulation from the government, it will be banned throughout the country!" This article puts forth that many readers came forward arguing that meat and lead were present in Maggi. Lead which is translated to '*seesa*' in Hindi also means 'glass' and several newsreaders took it to mean that glass particles were present in Maggi. *Dainik Bhaskar* has then highlighted several of the comments that came forward around this claim of "meat and lead/glass" such as one reader who put forth, "We are Hindus and according to our tradition, we have to care for animals. This sinful Maggi should be charged with punishment and it should be sealed. These people are eroding the Hindu faith." This issue of Maggi being 'unsafe' because of non-vegetarianism was not highlighted by the English news media. This invocation of the hurt sentiments of Hindus by a foreign MNC paves the way for new ways in which economic development is sought. In the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the uprising is often attributed to the popular sentiment that the rifles that the sepoys had been given by the British were adulterated with cow meat and pig fat. In the questions over meat in Maggi, this same imagery is used of a foreign actor hurting the religious sentiments of the population and the sepyo mutiny gets alluded to in the fears around meat in Maggi.

It was in this context that in October 2015, Baba Ramdev, a popular Hindu Guru who runs an FMCG company called Patanjali that competes with all major MNCs entered the market with "Ayurvedic noodles" to replace Maggi noodles. In November 2015, Ramdev launched his product in Delhi. News reporters were called for a press conference where Ramdev himself was making Maggi which he then served the audience. Ramdev argued that his Maggi was pure because it was made of wheat rather than flour (*maida*). Khalikova (2017) argues that Ramdev used an idea of moral consumerism around Indian grown commodities in order to sell his products. In Ramdev's speeches and Patanjali's marketing and advertising, there is a constant invocation on how the Indian body is being depleted through

dependence on foreign products. Ramdev often, labelled products by foreign companies as 'slow poison' and 'sweet poison'. During the Maggi crisis, Ramdev articulated this very poisoning of the Indian by the *videshi* MNC.

We see then, how regulation formed a separate public between pro-business English news media that emphasized how MNCs were unfairly treated in an economy of 'red tapism' and other parts of English news media and Hindi news media which placed the 'foreignness' of the MNC as a core element in debates around regulation.

### **Discussion**

In this debate around regulation and economy, the primary emphasis was on a 'country of consumers' that was brought into a national conversation. . Populations across the country were imagined as aggrieved consumer-citizens: soldiers at Siachen who only ate Maggi and eggs because nothing else survived at that altitude, civil servant aspirants living away from home or the lakhs of fussy children who were only satiated through Maggi. News reporters often, argued that this is an issue of the 'children of the nation'. Maggi which had always advertised primarily to a child consumer, now was ironically found to specifically contaminate children with lead and MSG (both substances are vernacularly understood as affecting the mental growth of children). Opinion polls, editorial opinion pieces, news debates were all organised around the issue of Maggi: is it safe or unsafe for our children? In this national debate, we see how citizenship is constituted through a "right to consume" quality, goodness and safe food rather than a "right to food".

The public debate after the food scare around Maggi nowhere featured a reaction against mass-produced food but was rather framed through ideals of progress, development and the nation's economic wellbeing. Even in the cases of reactions against MNCs, it was not against corporations per se, but rather about their '*videshi*' (foreign) status.

Therefore, the same news channels that were questioning the morality of a foreign MNC that does not care for 'Indian bodies' as it does Western bodies, were soon promoting Patanjali, a '*desi*' company that came up around instant noodles. Each state in India had to ban Maggi after its own FDA had declared that it was unsafe for human consumption. Which state had banned it and in which state it was still available was often the focus of the news media producing an imagination of the nation. Opinionated publics emerged during the Maggi ban around the relationship between nation and global corporations, regulations and the state's capacity to enforce regulations.

We see also, how regulation formed a separate public between pro-business English news media that emphasised how MNCs were unfairly treated in an economy of 'red tapism'

and other parts of English news media and Hindi news media which placed the ‘foreignness’ of the MNC as a core element in debates around regulation. Several scholars have noted the bifurcated nature of mediated discourse in India with a primary split between English and Indian language news media. Rajagopal (2001) argues that the English language news was established through a nationalising elite with modernising values such as secularism.

The split public of the news media is such that Rajagopal (2001b) argues that while English language media starting from the colonial times has always treated the popular expression of the people as disruptive, a threat to public order and within the reductive capacities of law and order, the Indian language press has been more positive and sympathetic towards popular agitation. In Udupa’s (2015) analysis there is a split in English and Indian language news over their relationship with globalisation. The ‘local’ was constituted differently in this split public. Udupa (2012) argues that in the English news media local was defined through an ethos of cosmopolitanism, “ideal inhabitant of their local was mobile, flexible, economically ascendant, culturally accommodating and young” (p. 825). Further, the English news media emphasised: “neoliberal redefinition of the local as cosmopolitan, interests in lifestyle, personal career growth, individual fitness and world-class civic infrastructure” (p. 826). However, the regional language market of news media is not celebratory of the neoliberal market. Rather, Udupa (2012) argues, “Kannada news media emerges as a resistance to the classist underpinnings of global modernity” (p. 829). In this paper, we see how a ‘split public’ emerges around the national imaginaries of the economy.

Hindi and English news media are split in their symbolic uses of economic history. In Hindi television and print media, the burning of Maggi packets and the suspicion of meat in Maggi are all ways in which a swadeshi economy is being re-imagined. While on the other hand, opinion pieces in the English news media were dominated by views around the unfairness with which MNCs are treated invoking a celebratory stance of foreign capital in the wake of the liberalisation reforms.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to capture the way that economic categories, histories and futures are deployed in a national crisis surrounding a commodity. Food scares thereby, open the black box on how the economy is debated and politicised. The Maggi ban constitutes various divisions and binaries in the economy such as the unorganised sector as opposed to a multinational corporation or a foreign or *videshi* MNC like Nestle and an Indian or *desi* MNC such as Patanjali. It raises ethical questions around what should be regulated in an emerging relationship between state-society-corporate. However, in another way, the Maggi ban also

naturalises the place of regulations and further, the role of the scientific standards, laboratories and experts in determining the course of the discourse – whether people were debating for or against MNC, the role of standards played a central role. The five-month-long extensive reportage around the crisis of Maggi is an opening into many categories that emerge in the economy such as *desi/videshi* (Indian/foreign), corporate/street, regulated/unregulated or formal/informal.

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