

# POWER THEFT-AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION AMONG FLEDGLING JOURNALISTS

## Abstract

Power Theft is a silent crime. Millions of revenues from power utilities are syphoned off by this illegal activity, resulting in higher electricity tariffs, accidents, and frequent power outages. Power utilities, by and large, are on the verge of bankruptcy and are unable to invest in loss reduction or capacity expansion works to meet future needs. The media has an important role in publicising this social issue and educating the public, alerting policymakers about power sector difficulties, and updating authorities to develop long-term approaches. Understanding of power theft among aspiring journalists must be ensured to critically analyse their eligibility in the profession and understand the issue.

**Keywords:** Power Theft, Print and Visual media, Budding journalist, Awareness.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Power theft is a social evil that affects the collective progress of any country. About one-quarter of electricity in the capital city of India is lost due to pilferage alone. It means a loss of precious revenue to the Government and a shrinking of the ability of Power utilities to invest in new projects. Most importantly, it leads to increased tariffs for the public. The burden of Power theft is passed on to honest consumers who pay electricity charges regularly. Only limited research work has been done on this topic as this Sector was under Government control hitherto where loss and theft are determined by guesswork without giving serious thought or effort by Power utilities.

### **What is Power Theft?**

Electricity is a commodity made available to consumers after precise measurement. However, quite a few avoid payment and get away from the actual electricity charges to power utilities by performing devious methods for unrecording or under-recording electricity meters or direct tapping from electricity lines. According to various provisions of the Electricity Act 2003, Power Theft includes any activity of tampering with an electricity meter, loop connection or any other device or method which interferes with accurate or proper registration, calibration or metering of electric current or otherwise results in a manner whereby electricity is stolen or wasted. This is a criminal offence that invites both penalty and imprisonment globally.

The impact of power theft is huge and multi-faceted. besides colossal loss which comes to about 1.5 per cent of the GDP of India, Power theft paves the way for the interruption of electric supply, overloading and burning of transformers, fire and electrocution etc. (Sreenivasan, 2012) Media as a trailblazer has to identify various social issues, research it and place it before the policymakers and authorities through various types of reportage. With each passing decade, journalism has become more professional in order to meet the challenges presented by the media environment of the time. At the moment, there is a need for specialized skills to find unreported common problems and context of issues and report them in a way that will help people engage with larger networks. (Iorio,2004)

A major obstacle in achieving accelerated growth in capacity addition and attracting the required investment is the poor financial health of the power sector distribution licensees. This is mainly due to high Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses. Power Theft is a major constituent of AT&C losses. Investors in the power sector see this as a major risk despite the enactment of a progressive Electricity Act and the functioning of a regulatory framework under the provisions of the Electricity Act.

## **II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The media is not just a reflection of society, reflecting 'the reality' out there. If this were the case, journalists would simply focus their camera or tape recorder in any direction and let the tape roll. Rather, active judgments are made at each level of the process of generating and distributing media information, about what should be included and what should be removed, as well as how and when the content should be presented and essential in modern life. (Ann Sanson et al, 2000) The attitude and beliefs of society can be better controlled through media which has an active role in mind-shaping the readers and opinion

makers. (Prashar & Sreenivasan, 2015) It can be achieved by various forms of reportage and educating the mass social evil and civic conscience. Power theft being a civic problem, the watchdog of society –the media- has a role to play in containing this silent crime which eats away a good chunk of the nation's wealth.

The importance of the study evilness needs no overemphasis and it would be appropriate to know how the fledgling journalists of the capital city of India conceived the subject and their awareness of the topic as crime and civic issue. This study will help the academic bodies to concentrate on this subject who is not in the curriculum syllabus, and experts of Industry can throw light on the issue by way of seminars, lectures, discussions etc. at the University level.

### III. METHODOLOGY

A Survey method for collecting data has been adopted for this study. The Survey involves the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions, and owes its continuing popularity to its versatility, efficiency and generalisability and consideration of time and expense make it a preferred data collection method(Bachmen&Schutt,2011) The Methodology is a collection of organised and systematic ways that help to locate the best available information quickly and efficiently, verify it and display it in stories(Bruce Grundy et al.,2012)

1. **Universe of the Study:** Journalism students of Delhi University are the universe for this study. This would cover the majority of media study centres in the capital city.
2. **Sample Selection:** Normally, random sampling should be used to reduce bias and assess sample error. Purposive sampling, on the other hand, is deemed ideal when the universe is small and a known property of it is to be explored thoroughly. (Jawale,2012) The journalism program at the University of Delhi began in 1989. The course is aimed to provide students with an intellectual and multidisciplinary approach that prepares them for the discipline, and it has made a niche for itself as one of the University of Delhi's most sought-after courses. The ultimate purpose is to achieve students' professional, intellectual, and creamy-growth, as well as to build a lively harmony with the media sector. (University of Delhi, 2010). The sample has been designed in such a way that the institutes selected have students hailing from all parts of Delhi and had enrolled in media studies.
3. **Data Collection:** Samples are drawn from respondents inspired to be journalists in the national capital Region, Delhi. Fifty students each have been selected from the North and South Campus of Delhi University through purposive sampling technique where it has been assured that equal representation from both genders. Another universe has been ignored in the process to restrict the study to the journalism stream of education. The Survey has been done among journalism students with the help of a structured questionnaire covering education, reading/viewing habits etc to gather their perception about Power Theft. Both open and closed-ended questions have been included. The researcher undertook all care to see that representation of both genders has been included and that the ratio of female to male is matching with that of Census 2011 in Delhi.

#### IV. Research Questions and Discussions

- If power theft is a serious crime, due to which State is losing revenue, then who are the ultimate sufferers of this social evil?
- Who are the beneficiaries of this wicked activity?
- Why do people pilfer energy?
- Has the media themselves conceived this social issue comprehensively and realised the criminal nature behind this silent crime?
- What is the awareness of budding journalists on this issue which eats away substantially from the exchequer?

1. **Discussion:** The National Capital of Delhi is losing about one-quarter of its electricity due to theft and losses. If one per cent of theft is prevented, the savings would be to the tune of Crores of rupees and the relief of electricity tariff would be considerable. The power utilities in Delhi boasted of having implemented the state-of-the-art methods to reduce loss and control power theft. These utilities are under the control of an efficient management system in the private sector, but still, the electricity is stolen. This shows that technology per se cannot control power theft beyond a certain level and the role of media is significant.

There is power theft all over the world (Sreenivasan, 2012) Like any other commodity, electricity can also be stolen. Power Theft is rampant wherever public services, agriculture etc. are prominent and in countries having huge populations. It's a crime both in terms of cost and safety and dwelling places are the soft targets of this criminal activity. The main reason behind the heinous activity is the objective of saving utility bills. Delays in releasing electricity connection, power restrictions, huge differences in tariff structure etc. are the other major reasons behind this crime.

How can the Media be a torchbearer of society get rid of its responsibility by not reporting the serious crime appropriately which ultimately affects the common man? The control of Govt. over the tariff of electricity has been lost consequent to the legislative approval of the Electricity Act 2003. The state regulatory commissions (SERC) after prudent checking of the annual revenue requirements (ARR) of power utility and decides the issue of Power tariff. It can voluntarily pass orders for escalation of electricity tariff if a power utility fails to submit a request for a tariff hike. The law-abiding citizens are mainly affected by the frequent increase of electricity tariffs and in Delhi –NCT the prevailing electricity tariff structure is one of the highest in India.

2. **Data Analysis:** Descriptive statistics are used to describe the features of data in this study. It helps to crunch figures which are hard to visualise and present in a meaningful way and helps to interact further. Also, this method helps to explain a large bunch of data collected during research work.

#### V. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the educational background of the students. Among them, 80 per cent are graduates and the rest are postgraduates. Two students have dual degrees at the graduate level also. Among the post-graduates, the females outnumber the male participants.

**Table 1: Education Background Students of Budding Journalists.**

<b>Core Subject of Study at Graduation</b>	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Postgraduates</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Arts	56	40	96
Commerce	24		24
Humanities	24		24
Journalism	8		8
Literature	24		24
Science	24		24
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>200</b>

Concerning the classification under the core subject for graduation, 48 per cent of students have done graduation in Arts, followed by 12 per cent each in commerce, humanities, literature and science. Only four percent have done graduation in journalism and the rest are undergoing interdisciplinary study. As the topic for media coverage has gone more scientific and technical in the contemporary space age, understanding basic science and engineering processes would be added advantage. It is seen that 12 per cent of students have a science background which will help them to cover subjects related to Power, Industry, Science and Technology, R&D, Space, Defense, etc. later in their profession.

The selected sample students have already decided about their career and the researcher would like to analyze whether their selection of career is by chance or by choice. Intensive and voracious reading of all subjects is required for a successful career both in print and visual media. Hence the habit and pattern of newspaper reading of “budding journalists” have to be ascertained and analyzed in detail. This is explained with the aid of Table -2

**Table 2: Number of Newspapers the students read daily.**

<b>Newspapers Reading habit</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
One Newspaper (1)	88	48	136
Two Newspapers (2)	24	8	32
Do not read News paper	8	24	32
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>200</b>

Sixty-Eight per cent of students read one newspaper whereas 16 per cent read two. It is quite surprising to note that 16 per cent of students do not read any newspaper at all. But to study a subject thoroughly and to develop the right opinion, reading the editorial, columns, articles etc of newspapers are a must. This will develop good language and also, helps them with future assignments. There are three times more male students than that of a female who said no to a newspaper.

Up-to-date information about current events is of high significance in the perpetually changing life around and, newspaper reading has grown with the growth of literacy and makes us believe that we are a part of a fast-growing world. This is mainly because newspapers are miniature encyclopedias. The popularity of newspapers is an indication of

their acceptance and Newspapers are the most accessible written documents to the largest people of all categories, young and old, students and workers, elite and peasants, literates and illiterates. (Babalola, 2002) It promotes critical thinking, retention of information, problem-solving and queuing of information sources.

The function of a newspaper varies depending on the reader. It could be for recreation, public affairs, information, entertainment, socialization, and so on. (Berelson, 1949). The importance of regular newspaper reading needs no overemphasis and few budding journalists lack the comprehensibility of information in the absence of such habit and the chain of information has been broken due to uneven reading. After going through different types of reportage, one can develop own opinion and perception about an issue and policy. This may transform them into a better-informed scholar over some time and equip them to take part in every discussion relate to current events.

The researcher, while collecting data, tried to get as much as possible data through sub-questions and body language. A good number of students who reported reading one newspaper daily (68 per cent) do not read a newspaper regularly but only casual readers and glance through it. They responded affirmatively just to keep a fair image in front of someone who examines media critically and not to make others suspect their eligibility for this course. Table-3 shows the subject they would like to read in a newspaper, and the maximum response went in favour of Cinema. This is followed by politics and civic issues equally. Though there are umpteen ways of entertainment around us, Cinema related programs enjoy a comfortable position as far as their acceptance among the new generation is concerned.

**Table-3: Topics Journalism students like to read in Newspaper**  
(\* ) multiple answers

<b>Subjects like to read (*)</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
News(city)	8		8
Business page	8		8
Cinema	72	40	112
Civic issues	40	32	72
Editorial	32	16	48
Others	8		8
Politics	32	40	72
Science & tech		8	8
Sports	24	32	56
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>392*</b>

It may be noted that Politics, Entertainment, Sports and Crime are the mostly covered topics in the National channel according to a media study by CMS Media Lab. The coverage trends of Crime and entertainment remain by and large the same. The survey conducted among journalism students and the study report on TV trends by the CMS Media Lab is agreeing with each other.

Only 40 per cent of journalism students have seen any report or advertisement in the newspaper describing power theft-related stories. The majority are unaware of the issue and

its social impact. This is clear from Table-4. Eight per cent of the students have no idea what the subject is and have publicly voiced their ignorance.

**Table 4: Newspaper coverage on Power Theft observed by Journalism Students**

Seen any Report/Advt in a Newspaper covering Power Theft?	Female	Male	Grand Total
Don't know/Can't say		16	16
No	56	48	104
Yes	64	16	80
Grand Total	120	80	200

Further analysis revealed that about 70 per cent of students have seen the news about Power theft in print media and 40 per cent has seen reportage that creates awareness against power theft. This is a multi-response questionnaire as shown in table-5.

**Table-5: Topic about Power Theft read in Newspaper.**

Specify the topic seen on Power Theft	Female	Male	Grand Total
about power theft	48	8	56
any other topic	16		16
awareness against power theft	16	16	32
advt against power theft	8	8	16
penalty or action against power theft	16		16
Grand Total	104	32	136

To the question of what program these budding journalists would like to view in visual media, almost an equal share has gone to the cinema and news-related discussions. Sports was the third most demanding topic in this category as shown in Table-6

**Table-6 Nature of Program Journalism Students like to View on TV  
(\* Multiple Answers)**

Programs you like to view on Television?*	Female	Male	Grand Total
any item	16	32	48
cinema and entertainment	88	56	144
civic issues	32	8	40
news and discussion	72	88	160
sports	16	56	72
Grand Total	224	240	464*

Regarding programs or advertisements on television, only 12 percent have seen any program on power theft and the majority is still in the dark as far as this silent crime is concerned. Media in the capital city of India has not considered Power Theft as a major social issue till 2012 when they were taken by surprise by the movement led by India Against Corruption (IAC). However, it went beyond the normative approach when Arvind Kejriwal

re-connected electricity which had been disconnected earlier by Power utilities due to Power theft.(Prashar&Sreenivasan,2015) Only a minority has seen programs relate to power theft and awareness as per Table – 7.

**Table 7: TV coverage on Power Theft Viewed by Journalism Students**

<b>Seen any program or advt on television covering Power Theft</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Don't know/Can't say	8	8	16
no	96	64	160
yes	16	8	24
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>200</b>

While 32 per cent of the respondents are aware of electricity theft happening in their locality by neighbours, friends, shops and relatives etc., eight per cent reserved their opinion, indicating that they too are aware, but not prepared to share their experience with strangers and have concern over this issue i.e. 40 per cent are specifically aware of power theft in their locality. This is shown in Table – 8

**Table 8: Information about the occurrence of Power Theft in the locality.**

<b>Seen Electricity theft by relatives/ friend's neighbours/shops/ unknown persons etc.)</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Don't know/Can't say	16		16
no	56	64	120
yes	48	16	64
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>200</b>

To the question of what can be done on seeing the irregularity of Power Theft, 56 per cent reported that the same can be reported to authorities, i.e. to bring the lawbreakers to book. These groups of students are aware that the activity performed is against the law and needs to be corrected. This is shown in Table–9. Sixteen per cent of the students do not know what to do and the rest 28 per cent believe that proper advice will transform them into law-abiding citizens.

**Table 9: Actions that can be done on seeing a Power Theft**

<b>What can be done on seeing power theft?</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Advice	32	24	56
Don't know/Can't say	24	8	32
Report to authorities	64	48	112
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>200</b>



It is surprising to note that though the majority of the respondents are aware of the evils of power theft, only 12 per cent ever reported a case to authorities. This is leaving a conclusion that these budding journalists are apathetic towards this social evil and have not yet developed a state of mind to protect the nation's assets and indirectly feel that Government services should be given free of cost. The perception of civic conscience is not yet developed among them. This is illustrated in table-10. The mindset of this category of students is almost similar to that of the perpetrators, the difference being the latter perform the activity while the former has an unconcerned attitude to them, both are equally dangerous in a cultured society.

**Table 10: Actions initiated by journalism students against Power Theft**

<b>Have you ever reported a case of Power theft to authorities?</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
no	104	72	176
yes	16	8	24
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>200</b>

The journalism students have been asked to know their understanding of the seriousness of Power theft. To a question, 88 per cent reported that the activity is criminal (table 11) in nature

**Table 11: Awareness of the Criminal Angle of Power Theft**

<b>Are you aware that Power Theft is a criminal offence</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Don't know/Can't say	16		16
No	8		8
Yes	96	80	176
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>200</b>

However, eight per cent does not know its legal status and four percent even remarked that negatively. This is shown in Table 10. Though the majority are aware of the criminal nature and its happening in the immediate neighbourhood, very few i.e. 12 per cent has ever made any attempt to curtail the issue. This is an indication of the civic doctrine of fledgling journalists. (Table 10&11). Crime prevention is the prediction, understanding, and evaluation of criminal risk, followed by action to eliminate or lessen that risk. Inquisitive journalism students can alert authorities about these offences. However, the results of this survey show that young journalists are apathetic and are turning their backs on problems.

More than 75 per cent are aware of the impact of power theft on the increase in electricity tariff and its shortage, one quarter is floating in nature and doesn't know what impact power theft can build on society. (Table 12)

**Table 12: Awareness of the impact of Power Theft**

<b>Power theft increases electricity tariffs, electricity shortage etc.?</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Don't know/Can't say	16	8	24
No	24		24
Yes	80	72	72
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>200</b>

Though various suggestions have been made by the fledgling journalist for containing Power Theft, they proved themselves weak in implementing the same. Nearly 40 per cent of remarks were in favour of strict vigilance followed by 25 per cent favouring media campaign. Here also, 12 per cent of the 'baby journalists' have no suggestion to put forward and are unaware of the social issue. (Table 13) While few journalism students are prepared to accept this social evil as a way of life, about one-third of suggestions was in favour of media campaign. This is an indication of the students realising the power of the career they selected. An almost equal suggestion has come forward for the privatisation of Power utilities and believes this would control the social evil of Power theft. However, privatisation is not a panacea for the ailments of this sector and considered Public-Private participation in the distribution sector, combined with transparent functions of the independent regulatory commission, would provide the common man better service both in terms of quality of supply and cost (Sreenivasan. G,2012)

**Table 13: Suggested Remedial Action against Power Theft.**

<b>What can be done to control power theft?</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Don't know/Can't say	16	8	24
it cannot be controlled	8		8
media campaign	40	24	64
other views	16		16
privatisation of utilities	32	24	56
strict vigilance	48	56	102
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>272</b>

A check question was asked to verify the students' response to power theft when seen last time, only eight per cent replied having reported the issue to authorities. The majority remained silent on this crime which eats away a huge chunk of the exchequer. Media is one of the four pillars of democracy which can bring out corruption and crimes in a society where authorities and policymakers pay attention to the issue. If the students are unaware of this economic crime and prefer to keep silent even by those who know the severity, the future of investigation journalism in the capital city of India remains as bleak. (Table 14) Power theft is a street business and a way of life in Delhi. Students have admitted that they too are aware of the incident happening in the surroundings and have hands-on experience of the issue.

Media has a role in highlighting the issue so that Government agencies and policymakers can arrive at appropriate decisions. Increasing tariff regularly is a highly

distressing issue as far as Delhi is concerned. DERC diligently functions their duty after prudent checking and passes over the increase in expense of power utilities to the consumers regularly. However, quite a few journalism students are unaware of the impact of power theft and believe that power theft is harmless while others have not made up their minds and have yet to study the implication of the social issue. Government and Media should target their campaign to educate fledgling journalists first. If this is the knowledge level of prospective journalists, who are expected to cover the issue and highlight it before society, better not to speak about the knowledge level of the general mass, who in turn receive information through the works of these journalists through their reportage.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The dearth of discussion and brainstorming on the subject has contributed to the nascent journalists' ignorance of the numerous implications of power theft. Even those who are aware of it prefer to ignore it due to a lack of knowledge about the impact of power theft. The future of budding journalists remains concerned in the absence of in-depth reading and research work. Most journalism students do not know what development journalism is or its social background. The bulk of the younger generation has strong feelings against issues like poverty, child abuse, irrigation, women's empowerment, etc. Although they are well informed about various developments on other continents, the features of latest car variants, and the most recent Hollywood film, they are unaware of what is happening in their area. Instead of flitting from one event to other, journalists should focus on civic issues plaguing the society at large and deliberate rationally on it. Journalism is more than writing for which in-depth reading and research are necessary. Journalism students should develop these qualities and appreciate the power of printed words or spoken words so that great stories can be developed in their professional life.

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