



International Journal of Advanced Mass Communication and Journalism

E-ISSN: 2708-4469
P-ISSN: 2708-4450
IJAMCJ 2024; 5(1): 19-22
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www.masscomjournal.com
Received: 09-11-2023
Accepted: 19-12-2023

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Rise of the fake and decline of the real: A study of small Hindi newspapers in India

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27084450.2024.v5.i1.a.74>

Abstract

The research paper is based on the study of small Hindi newspapers in India. 'Small newspapers are the pillars of democracy', they cater to the needs of the majority of the Indian people especially those who live in rural India. But in recent times, commercial interests and other benefits that accrue from the profession have gained an upper hand, motivating more and more people to venture into the field. Unfortunately, also lead to a rise in the number of fake newspapers. Robin Jeffrey highlighted some negative aspects of small newspapers. The paper is based on the influence theory. The study seeks to highlight the unethical practices in Small Hindi Newspapers in India. Researcher has adopted purposive sampling and observation method.

Keywords: Small newspaper, influence theory, DAVP, RNI, fake newspaper, unethical practices

Introduction

According to Templeton Mark, "every one shall have the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of his choice" (Naregal, 2000) ^[13]. Press has become so powerful that it has acquired the status of the "Fourth Estate", it is also indispensable to the democratic functioning. This notion is widely accepted to an extent that Thomas Jefferson once said "were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the letter". In the same vein, Jawaharlal Nehru declared "I would rather have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom, than a suppressed or regulated press". This is because; newspapers are platforms for debate, a forum for the expression of people's viewpoints and ideas (Merrill, 1969) ^[14]. Indira Gandhi in April 1971 defined the role of the press as a medium "to report to the people and advice the government" (Henderson, 1980) ^[9]. Now 'newspapers have become very strong mediums of expression' (Modi, 2016) ^[15].

Small newspapers in India

'Small newspapers are the pillars of democracy' in India. Small newspapers cater to the needs of the majority of the Indian people especially those who live in rural India. Small newspapers are brought out by people with small means. They come out both from big and small towns and carry local news and present problems concerning the local people. Small newspapers carry on grassroot level work to bring about a social-economic change and to connect people with democracy (Jeffrey, 2000) ^[10]. Small newspapers serve, with their intimate involvement, the local scenario and play a more direct role in the process of democratizing communication and motivating social-economic transformation. The review of literature also substantiates this (Future of print media, 2001) ^[6], (Ray, 2005) ^[20], (Sharma, 2006) ^[21], (Tripathi, 2018) ^[22].

Smaller newspapers are producing quality reporting. For example the storm lake, Times of Storm Lake, Iowa is a twice-weekly paper with a staff of nine. It won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing. In the Indian context, the review of literature also substantiates this (Anuradha, 2011) ^[2].

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In recent times, commercial interests and other benefits that accrue from the profession have gained an upper hand, motivating more and more people to venture into the field. That has, unfortunately, also led to a rise in the number of fake newspapers.

One of the functions of RNI is to compile an annual report on the press in India. This gives a clear indication of the fact that many of the registered newspapers are not in publication. The RNI is the authority for the verification of the circulation claims and has modest yet effective machinery at his disposal for taking up cases of verification every year (Bhatt, 1997) ^[3]. The study conducted by the RNI shows us that some newspapers that are included in Press in India in actuality do not exist.

Review of Literature

Small newspapers are accused of lacking professionalism. To combat this, one can enforce what was followed in 1980 in the UK. As per the 'National Union of Journalist (NUJ) had an agreement with nearly all the national newspaper that they would not hire journalists unless they had worked in a regional press either for three years if non-graduate, or two years, if a graduate (Cole, 1998) ^[4].

Local journalism today is changing in part because of the larger changes underway in our media environments. This transformation puts the future of local journalism in danger. The existence of local media is in question because the business models are under tremendous pressure and because of the very social and dynamic significance of categories like 'news' and 'journalism'. The digital media environment, undoubtedly, represents considerable potential for inspiring new forms of local journalism (Nielsen, 2015) ^[17].

Eapen stresses that the Hindi newspapers have a potentially larger audience than the population of the US but face many problems. The pattern of ownership is among the most disturbing factors of Indian journalism (Eapen K. E., Daily newspapers in India: their status and problems, 1967) ^[5]. According to Rao, one handicap with small newspapers is the paucity of good news and feature services at cheap rates. While the big papers subscribe to most of the news and feature syndicates and besides have their own correspondents and news services as well, small newspapers find it beyond their means to subscribe to news agency services, let alone having their own correspondents. They often have problems filling their pages with quality material. They have many difficulties but small newspapers always do remarkable work in the Indian press (Rao, 1966) ^[19].

In 1965 an inquiry into small newspapers revealed that six proprietors who ran their publications were doing so at a loss; as missionary work (Jeffrey R., India's Newspaper Revolution, 2000) ^[10], 'Generally a vernacular journal was the product of a singlehanded effort where usually an individual was the editor, the owner, and also the publisher. A regular body of the staff was almost unknown. These editor proprietors all over the country working on their own not only managed their newspaper but also wrote nearly all the articles' (Gupta, 1977) ^[7]. The same situation can sometimes be found at small-scale newspapers in India.

Ironically, small newspapers printing a few hundred copies draw a newsprint quota for the thousands. Money can be made by selling newsprint. Small newspapers recognized by state or union government draw regular government

advertising. Circulation claims are rarely checked for small newspapers. Proprietors need to print only a few copies to satisfy government authorities that the solicited advertising has appeared (Jeffrey R., India's Newspaper Revolution, 2000) ^[10].

Jeffrey highlighted some negative aspects of small newspapers. He describes that 'small newspapers can be used for blackmail'. These practices are known to be found in newspapers of all languages (Jeffrey R., Urdu: waiting for citizen kane?, 1997) ^[11].

Many small newspapers do not maintain accounts and no financial data regarding their capital, expenditure, revenue profit, and loss is available. They hardly have any sense of modern business methods applicable to newspapers. It is found that a large majority of the small newspapers are not capable of self-sufficient growth and cannot be regarded as economically sustainable (Rao, 1966) ^[19].

Research Methodology

Objective of the Research

To identify the unethical practices in Small Hindi Newspapers in India

Keeping in mind the objectives of the study, observation method use for the study. In India small Hindi newspapers are published in only 16 States and 3 UTs. Two small Hindi newspapers of highest circulation in that State have been taken for purpose of the study. Small Newspapers of Hindi to be specified as per 54th annual report of the registrar of newspapers for India.

Sampling: Purposive Sampling

Taking into account the purpose of the study, two Hindi newspapers each from the 19 States (including 3 union territories) had been selected for the study, which amounts to a total of 38 newspapers. The selected 19 states are the only states showing the presence of small newspapers in Hindi language.

Procedure for selection of sample

For the purpose of selection of sample and to rule out the element of bias, firstly the states are arranged in alphabetical order as shown in column one, then two Hindi small newspapers dailies having the largest circulation in that States of India have been taken.

Theoretical perspective

Influence theory: 'Most of the work here depicts the media as private businesses producing profit, increasingly conglomerate and non-competitive. There corporate interests pursue government policies that benefit the bottom line. While these ways indirectly affect the flow of information, it is of less interest here than other theories of media influence because it falls more in the domain of interest group politics and can be understood through those models of policymaking. There seems to be little systematic literature in the question of the media using its communication power to influence more global aspects of public policy directly, although this would not rule out agenda setting effects and other indirect influence to policymakers, aiding them in weighting the importance of issues and issue dimensions. (Jones, D. Bryan; Wolfe, Michelle, 2010) ^[12].

Table 1: List of Small Hindi Newspapers

Andhra Pradesh	1. Swatantravaartha (Nizamavadi)	2. Swatantra Vaartha (Vishakhapatnam)
Assam	3. Dainik Purvoday (Guwahati)	4. Dainik Purvoday (Jorhat)
Bihar	5. Bihar Ki Hakikat (Muzaffarpur)	6. Mona Times (Muzaffarpur)
Chandigarh	7. Pahali Khabar (Chandigarh)	8. Jansatta (Chandigarh)
Chhattisgarh	9. Samacharkhoj (Raipur)	10. Chhattisgarh Swar (Raipur)
Daman and Diu	11. Saveria India Times (Daman)	12. Asali Azadi (Daman)
Delhi	13. Rashtrawadi Times (Delhi)	14. Ishan Times (Delhi)
Gujarat	15. Janabhumi Herald (Surat)	16. Jan Hitaishi (Baroda)
Haryana	17. Babyian Times (Rohtak)	18. Tyagi Times (Sonipat)
Himachal Pradesh	19. Dainik Bhaskar (Shimla)	20. Dainik Jagran (Kangra)
Jharkhand	21. Chamaktha Aiyana (Jamshedpur)	22. Apna India (Ranchi)
Jammu and Kashmir	23. Dainik Jagran (Jammu)	24. Northern Times (Jammu)
Maharashtra	25. Dopahar Ka Samana (Mumbai)	26. Tarun Mitra (Thane)
Madhya Pradesh	27. Dainik Alok (Bhopal)	28. Kriti Kranti (Bhopal)
Punjab	29. Dainik Jagran (Patiala)	30. Dainik Jagran (Bathinda)
Rajasthan	31. Asian Standard (Jaipur)	32. Hello Times (Jodhpur)
Uttar Pradesh	33. City Times (Lucknow)	34. News Reader (Lucknow)
Uttarakhand	35. Rudra Times (Haridwar)	36. Kumaon Times (Haldwani)
West Bengal	37. Hind Samwad (Asansol)	38. Rajasthan Patrika (Kolkata)

Finding

However, the findings below are indicative just enough because of the non-foolproof method adopted by the Registrar of Newspapers in India in gauging total daily circulations in a given state. It bases its circulation statistics on statements provided by the publishers. "The number of statements submitted is far fewer than the total number of publications registered in a particular state and the RNI does not check the accuracy of statements filed. Still, assuming that the level of inaccuracy does not change over time, the trends are clear enough to allow firm conclusions to be established" (Ninan, 2007) [16]. RNI's figures cannot be considered accurate, they may show the tendency but it often lacks clarity (Jeffrey, 2000) [10].

According to this research covering 38 small newspapers in India, 15 small newspapers are fake. Also, it is interesting to find that some of them were not publishing regular newspapers but still the DAVP was providing them funds for advertisements. The newspaper, Northern Times, published from Jammu was not available on the registered address and they could not even provide a single copy of newspaper to the researcher but were still receiving money from the DAVP. A similar trend was seen in other newspapers, for example in City Times (Lucknow), Ishan Times (Delhi), Rudra Times (Haridwar) and News Reader (Lucknow).

The prospective publisher of a newspaper has to first apply to the district licensing authority, mainly the DM or the police commissioner, for filing a declaration that he would bring out a paper from a certain location and print it in the specified press. The DM then forwards the application for the paper to RNI (Bhatt, 1997) [3]. However, the research conducted for this thesis has revealed that this process is not always followed as per the guidelines.

To eliminate fake newspapers the Press Council of India proposed that the RNI, the DAVP and all governments/ UTs should coordinate their efforts to identify such papers and initiate action against them. The proposal if implemented properly will not only prevent public money going to fraudulent hands but will also divert it to genuine papers which are in need of encouragement. Fake newspapers are not only eating up crores of rupees through advertisements from the state exchequer every year, but are also indulging in unethical practices.

It is alleged that, small newspapers generally inflate their circulation merely to get government advertisements. In this research, out of the 38 newspapers, 5 were such that have never been published but have received grants for advertisements from the DAVP.

The small newspapers are numerous in publication and also several of them have a tendency to exaggerate their circulation. A Nonetheless, the big ones too have some in their ranks that have been accused of the same behavior (Bhatt, 1997) [3].

The problem of fake newspapers is rampant when it comes to small scale newspapers. In this study, 15 small Hindi newspapers were found out to be fake out of the 38 that were included in the study. Both *Bihar ki Hakikat* and *Mona Times* published from Muzaffarpur (Bihar) are fake newspapers with a wrong or bogus registered address. The people on the mentioned addresses are generally not aware of such practices and hence cannot even report it. Chhattisgarh's small Hindi newspapers *Samachar Khoj* and *Chhattisgarh Swar* edited by the same person Ganesh Singh Rajput but had different owners. Both the newspapers were found to be not inaccessible. The above newspapers were never published for the public but only for government's advertisement aid. The researcher tried twice to obtain a copy at different time intervals but they never provided even a single copy of a newspaper. Both of these small Hindi newspapers are not in circulation in there mentioned publication area.

In a similar vein, *Rashtrawadi Times* and *Ishan Times* are published from Delhi. The newspaper, *Rashtrawadi Times* was found to be available at the registered address but they only published newspapers when they got an advertising grant from government agencies and they published only a few copies of the newspaper in order to appear legitimate to the concerned authorities. *Ishan Times* also turned out to be a fake small Hindi newspaper being published from Delhi. *Ishan Times* was not even found at the registered address but they still received money from government organizations.

The *Babyian Times* newspaper published from Rohtak (Haryana) also has a false address. The newspapers *Apna India*, Ranchi (Jharkhand), *Northern Times*, Jammu (Jammu & Kashmir), *Asian Standard*, Jodhpur and *Hello Times*, Jaipur (Rajasthan) have also been found to default on

similar practices.

City Times and *News Reader*, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) both have offices on the registered address but they were found to publish only a few copies of newspapers when they received the advertising grant. *Rudra Times*, *Haridwar* (Uttarakhand) were also published only when they received the advertising grant. Even they were unable to provide even a single copy of their newspapers.

Parallel to the fraudulent practices prevailing at the small-scale publication, there are other small Hindi newspapers which are neither fake nor false. For example, *Kumaon Times*, Haldwani (Uttarakhand) has been running in a good condition without the support of the government's advertising grant because 'they can't afford bribing' the DAVP (Gupta, 2016) [8]. The newspaper, *Hind Samwad* published from Aasansol (West Bengal) is concerned with accountability and community participation. The newspaper stands for 'Continuing the publication of this newspaper with the help of community support through crowd funding' (Khan, 2015) [12]. Small Hindi newspapers published from Madhya Pradesh such as *Kirti Kranti* and *Dainik Alok* (Bhopal) have been providing ordinary people with news and information that has proved to be relevant and useful to their daily lives.

Savera India Times and *Asli Azadi* are small Hindi newspapers published from Daman. They talk about issues which affect people every day. The newspapers present an intense scrutiny of the local democracy. These small newspapers are an important part of the process of development taking place in the local areas of Daman local. Small Hindi newspaper *Tyagi Times* published from Sonipat (Haryana), documents the huge spectrum of local happenings from street level civic problems to local sports. In this newspaper, local community is well represented and reflected. *Chamaktha Aiyana*, another small Hindi newspaper published from Jamshedpur (Jharkhand) has earned the title of 'local watchdog'.

In Gujarat, Small Hindi newspapers such as *Janabhumi Herald* (Surat) and *Jan Hitaisi* (Vadodara) give independent and critical commentary on local administration and hold them accountable whilst providing a forum for the expression of local views.

Thus both, ethical as well as unethical practices have been following in the domain of small scale newspapers in India. Thus, the researcher has highlighted the main tendency of unethical practices in Small Hindi newspapers. Some publish only for governments advertising and not for the readers, other default on their addresses and were not found by the researcher at the mentioned address given by the RNI. The 'main purpose behind such practices is "commission" and not "mission and profession (Agrawal, 2017) [1].

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