

Media Coverage of Agriculture: From Soil to Headlines

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Abstract

Media have the power to shape, influence and construct public opinion. Media proves to be instrumental in environmental sensitisation, and endorsing environment-friendly practices. In this era, covering environmental issues may be considered as one of the primary functions of the media. Media have function to teach the art of effective and environment-friendly agriculture practices to the farmers. It has a role to disseminate scientific knowledge in an easily and understandable form. The use of picture-supported communication for the improvement of agricultural extension may result in icing on the cake. In this regard, the study aimed to gauge the coverage garnered by agriculture in leading Indian English dailies. It also aimed to analyse the trend in covering agriculture by Indian English dailies at various points in time. Content analysis of the newspapers reveal that agriculture in totality has been allocated a minuscule space of 0.20 per cent by Indian press.

1. Introduction

As people understand science mainly through media coverage and less through experience or education (Nelkin, 1987), the media are considered to be the science teachers of the masses (Goodfield, 1981). Media have the power to shape, influence and construct the public opinion. Media proves to be instrumental in environmental sensitisation, and endorsing environment-friendly practices. In this era, covering environmental issues may be considered as one of the primary functions of the media.

Media have function to teach the art of effective and environment-friendly agriculture practices to the farmers. It has a role to disseminate scientific knowledge in an easily and understandable form. The use of picture-supported communication for the improvement of agricultural extension may result in icing on the cake.

Media “conveys improved or recommended practices to farmers in a bid to improve their methods of production and marketing of their agricultural produce.” They are key “agents of information education, entertainment and motivation to farmers for accepting agricultural people” (Shuwa et al., 2015).

2. Background of the Study

The agriculture sector remains one of the most significant sectors of the Indian economy. Agriculture employs significant workforce in the India. It is one of the main sources of India’s Gross Domestic Product.

On the other side, agricultural practices have a direct impact on the environment. Pollution, soil erosion and imbalance or the lack of closure of nutrient cycles are some of the main concerns. “It is necessary therefore to encourage farmers to play their environmental role. The definition of sustainable agriculture does not prescind from this role, and it is possible to stress the concept that agriculture, by playing this role, becomes the ground for a sustainable society” (Sequi, 1999).

Media here can play a cardinal role of a communicator and science teacher for the betterment of a sustainable and environment-friendly practices of agriculture extension.

3. Objectives

Keeping in view available literature, following objective has been drafted for the current study;

- To gauge the total coverage area garnered by agriculture in leading Indian English dailies.

4. Relevant Literature

Examining the pattern of agricultural news coverage in six Indian dailies published in Hindi, Singh and Chandra (2004) found that while news related to agriculture had utility for the farmers and they get benefited from its coverage, yet such news was rarely published in any of the selected newspapers.

Concluding that agriculture news was comparatively low, Narayana and Kumar (2009) found that the highest percentage of agriculture news was merely 4.61 per cent compared to that of political news - 27.3 per cent.

Karackatt (2015) found agriculture stories are covered least and crime stories dominate all the newspapers. He further concluded that The Hindu newspaper had sufficient space allotment for environment stories compared to other newspapers in Kerala.

Ovwigho and Orogun (2013) carried out a content analysis to investigate the extent of agricultural news coverage by The Pointer newspaper in Nigeria in 2009. The study found that agriculture news coverage took a backseat in comparison to sports, politics, religious, foreign, business, entertainment, and other news. The study suggested that there was a need for the newspaper to devote larger attention to agricultural news by providing it more space in the newspaper.

Akoijam (2012) found that agriculture had been allotted only 3 per cent of the total coverage by the newspapers. The researcher discovered that The Hindu and The Indian Express reported more frequently on agriculture or development issues as compared to other dailies. He concluded that sports, politics, crime, legal news, etc. remained to be the most covered issues.

Barghouti (1974) analysed the content of media in Jordan, only to find that political news was given more representation than news related to agriculture.

Atinmo and Jimba (1998) concluded that there is a need to create further awareness about the issues of concern, such as agricultural chemicals and noise pollution.

5. Method

It spells out the method adopted to conduct the study. To draw inferences, quantitative content analysis method has been used to collect and analyse the data.

Four leading Indian English dailies based on certain important factors like circulation, popularity, total readership, impact factor and total followers on social media were selected for the study. Further, in Indian context the newspaper readership trends are particularly significant, because while registering a decline in the West, print circulation continues to increase in Asia. "Circulation is like the sun. It continues to rise in the East and decline in the

West” said Christoph Riess, CEO of World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA; Kilman, 2011), while presenting the annual survey at the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors Forum in Vienna, Austria.

The selected newspapers include; The Hindu, The Times of India, The Indian Express and Hindustan Times. Each story and photograph published in the selected newspapers was chosen as the unit of analysis.

5.1. Brief Introduction of the Newspapers

- **The Hindu**

The Hindu was founded in Madras on September 20, 1878 as a weekly by four law students. According to Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) The Hindu has a circulation of 1.51 million copies. According to the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2012, The Hindu is the third most widely read English newspaper in India with a readership of 2.2 million. The Hindu has always maintained moderation in its policy towards issues and people. It is considered one of the Indian newspapers that adhere to international standards.

- **The Times of India**

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (India), The Times of India is the largest selling English-language daily newspaper. The Times of India is also the third-largest newspaper in India by circulation. According to the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2012, the Times of India has a readership of 7.64 million. The Times of India is one of most important newspapers owned and published by Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

- **The Indian Express**

Founded in 1932, The Indian Express enjoys mileage of being one of the most important newspaper of India. Known for its investigative journalism, the newspaper has a wide range of readers. The newspaper has played a major role in the social and political circles of the country.

- **Hindustan Times**

Hindustan Times is one of the most important daily Indian English newspapers founded in 1924 by Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri. According to the Audit Bureau of

Circulations(ABC), Hindustan Times had a circulation of 1.32 million copies as of December 2013.

5.2. Sample

To ascertain if there was any visible trend in covering agriculture during each of the span, the total time duration of the study has been divided into 11 years. The period has been broken giving a five-year gap creating three stages of time.

Through multi-stage systematic sampling technique, a sample of newspapers was drawn from the whole population of newspapers for the study. 1008 issues of all the newspapers figured in the sample, out of which 13 issues were not available accounting for holidays on national festivals and others. Therefore, a total of 995 issues of newspapers were studied and analysed.

5.3. Procedure

Sifting of all the selected issues of the newspapers was done. Pages like sports pages, business pages and any other special page were not taken into the account and were excluded from measurement. Advertisements and advertorials were also excluded from the study. The space available in the newspaper for journalistic coverage was measured in square-centimeters. No. of stories and photographs were also counted and categorised. To analyse the coverage trends, the data collected was arranged accordingly.

5.4. Statistical Measurements

As the study aimed to examine the variation and levels of significance in total coverage among all the four newspapers, a statistical test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also applied on the data in addition to the percentage analysis. Statistically significant ANOVA was followed by Tukey's HSD.

5.5. Classification

Stories and photographs on agriculture were identified on the basis of the predetermined keywords present in headline or intro or caption or other supporting text. Coverage related to agriculture (production/consumption), food security and other issues qualified for the selection of database.

The journalistic categories chosen for analysis include; news stories, articles, editorials, letters to the editor, photographs and others. Based on formats and style of the write-ups, the stories have been included in a particular journalistic category. Except the above specified journalistic categories, other forms and formats of newspaper coverage have not been taken for analysis in the present study.

6. Result

The tables below document coverage area (in square-centimeters) and number of stories published by the selected newspaper on agriculture.

Table 1. Newspaper-wise comparison of total coverage area (cm²) vis-à-vis coverage of agriculture and its percentage

Newspaper	Total coverage (cm ²)	Agricultural coverage (cm ²)	Coverage (%)
The Hindu	3781459	10858.25	0.29
The Times of India	2064618	2681	0.13
The Indian Express	3333324	6522	0.20
Hindustan Times	2261800	2429.25	0.11
Total	11441201	22490.50	0.20

Table 1 shows the comparison of total coverage area (in cm²) vis-à-vis coverage of agriculture in the selected newspapers. In terms of percentage of agriculture coverage in each newspaper as compared to the total published material minus the left out categories, it was found that The Hindu has devoted highest (0.29 per cent) of its space to agriculture.

On the other side, Hindustan Times was found to have dedicated least (0.11 per cent) space to agriculture among all the newspapers. When analysed in totality, agriculture was found to have received a minuscule space of 0.20 per cent.

Further, ANOVA was applied to calculate the significance level among the newspapers.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, standard error on agriculture for the selected newspapers

Descriptive						
Agriculture	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
Newspaper					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
The Hindu	84	129.26	257.86	28.13	73.30	185.23
The Times of India	84	30.06	127.39	13.90	2.41	57.71
The Indian Express	84	77.64	277.76	30.30	17.36	137.92
Hindustan Times	84	28.92	107.25	11.70	5.64	52.20
Total	336	66.47	210.16	11.46	43.92	89.02

Table 3. Level of significance between the groups and within the groups on agriculture

ANOVA						
Agriculture	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	571517.67	3	190505.89	4.44	.004**	
Within Groups	14224794.67	332	42845.76			
Total	14796312.35	335				

**P < .01

Table 3 shows a significant difference among the newspapers on agriculture. The F-value (4.44) is significant at .01 level of significance. Further, statistically significant ANOVA was followed by Tukey's HSD.

Table 4. Multiple comparisons and level of significance on agriculture between the selected newspapers using Tukey's HSD

Multiple Comparisons				
(I) Newspapers	(J) Newspapers	Mean Difference (I-J)		Sig.
The Hindu	The Times of India	99.21*		.01
	The Indian Express	51.62		.37
	Hindustan Times	100.35*		.01
The Times of India	The Hindu	-99.21*		.01
	The Indian Express	-47.58		.45
	Hindustan Times	1.14		1.00
The Indian Express	The Hindu	-51.62		.37
	The Times of India	47.58		.45
	Hindustan Times	48.72		.42
Hindustan Times	The Hindu	-100.35*		.01
	The Times of India	-1.14		1.00
	The Indian Express	-48.72		.42

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F = 4.44$) ($p < .01$).

7. Discussion

Findings reveal that agriculture has been allocated a minuscule space of 0.20 per cent by all the selected newspapers. Corroborating the study, Narayana and Kumar (2009) concluded that regional newspapers also accord fairly low coverage to agriculture in India.

The variation in coverage of agriculture over the different points in time under investigation shows a decline of 49.19 per cent over the period of time, initially. However, there was an increase of 45.05 per cent, thereafter. Overall, the frequency of the stories registered a decline of 25 per cent from over the decade.

The newspaper-wise coverage of agriculture in terms of space (cm^2) and number of stories, spread over the different periods of time was also analysed. The space and number of stories

provided to agriculture was highest in The Hindu. Analysis reveals that The Hindu has given more coverage to agriculture among all the newspapers as a whole. The Indian Express was found to have published more stories after The Hindu. These findings are substantiated by the results of the study carried out by Akoijam (2012).

Further, it was found that there is a statistically significant difference between The Hindu and The Times of India and The Hindu and Hindustan Times on coverage of agriculture ($p < .05$). Meanwhile, there was an insignificant difference between The Hindu and The Indian Express ($p > .05$), The Times of India and The Indian Express ($p > .05$), and The Indian Express and Hindustan Times ($p > .05$) and The Times of India and Hindustan Times ($p > .05$) on this variable.

It was found that all the four newspaper have covered agriculture mostly in the form of news stories. The Hindu, The Indian Express and Hindustan Times have preferred coverage through articles after the news stories category. While, The Times of India was found to have allotted more space to editorials as compared to articles. The study of variation in coverage of agriculture reveals that except The Times of India no other newspaper was found to have allocated photographic coverage to agriculture. In the same way, The Times of India was found to be the only newspaper allocating space to letters to the editor related to agriculture.

8. Conclusion

In totality, agriculture was found to have been allocated a minuscule space of 0.20 per cent by all the selected newspapers. Even though, a significant difference in agricultural coverage was found among the selected dailies, when scrutinized individually, all the newspapers were found to have assigned little space to agriculture (The Hindu – 0.29 per cent, The Times of India, 0.13 per cent, The Indian Express 0.20 per cent and Hindustan Times 0.11 per cent).

The Hindu was found to have devoted significantly highest of its space to agriculture. With the findings of the study, it may be well established that among all the newspapers, The Hindu was found to have been priority to agriculture.

It was found that agriculture has garnered space in the newspapers in the form of news stories significantly which is basically an event-centric write-up and tends to rise and fall with happenings and events. Therefore, such content lacks the inspiring and motivational

dimension which is required to create a deeper impact of a particular theme or concern on readers at large.

9. References

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