

Synopsis

Introduction

Human beings achieved communication long before they could write. However, that communication of words, signals and gestures was greatly restricted in scope and reach, and was weakened by many barriers. Yet, curiosity to share news impelled humans to look for alternative ways of interaction. Newspapers were born out of this curiosity of human beings to exchange news. Today, newspapers have become an indispensable part of daily life and carry many items of social and commercial importance such as advertisement, job opportunity, buying and selling, matrimonial, greeting and other neatly classified information. Although radio and television have robbed newspapers of some popularity and reach, they are still unable to replace it completely. While radio and television have competed unproductively among themselves, newspapers are still serving as information repositories and platforms for news analysis, follow-up and prediction. Thus newspaper is a skillful synthesis between traditional and modern forms of communication.

Nevertheless, newspaper has faced many challenges ever since it evolved. It is suffering more so in the recent decades. This era of i-phones and e-papers has made things worse as every other news medium attempts to make inroads into the base of newspaper readers. With the average Indian home now keeping a television set on for more than seven hours a day, time available for reading a newspaper of choice has declined dramatically. Evening newspapers, which once provided refreshment and family discussions in the evening Indian homes, disappeared from many cities. Newspapers too should take the blame in this regard. In the past, newspapers served only to know what happened around in the world. Now they go to the extent of shaping individual, group and social behavior of people. More clearly, newspapers have effected for themselves a steady and gradual transition from being merely a news medium to a mind control mechanism Paid news, blatant bias, wilful extolment or degradation,

suppression of truth, highlighting superficial happenings, mixing facts with falsehood, deceptive titling, misleading arguments, confusing wordings and diversionary tactics are the realities of today. Many independent investigative journalists claim collusion among consortium of publishers to attain their ulterior goal of misleading and controlling the society by controlling the flow of information. Therefore, the need for a study of the newspaper industry with its influence upon the society was felt by the researcher, and the study was undertaken.

Statement of the Problem

This study is concerned about the analysis of newspaper in its historical and social perspectives, with reader attitude towards it being the very important component. For, the flow and control of information should be understood in proper perspective by the reader so that he or she should not get corrupted or swayed away by either the attitudes and values sown by newspapers or by sensational and trivial news items. This is owing to the fact that these days newspapers concertededly strive to define the personality of individuals, the characteristics of social groups/communities, and the worthiness of ideologies. With carefully developed psychological techniques they enable the reader to cultivate in himself or herself a disposition by associating a sum of attributes that define the total personality of the individual, social group or ideology. It is also true that newspapers wilfully treat unequals as equals, deliberately compare apples with oranges, knowingly equate hundreds with ones, and purposely fail to effect one to one correspondence. Hence, selective publishing at the one end and unbiased dissemination of truth at the other end have consequential impact on the society. More than that, when newspapers fail to look for greater common good, they even undermine social harmony. Furthermore, influence of advertisers, industrial corporations, governments and vested interest groups should not lead to the creation of unwanted cartels that act against the society. In short, of the factors that bear upon the industry's

functions, services and operations, the genuine needs and preferences of the society and readers should get topmost priority.

Therefore if the readers are truly understanding, they will decide the direction the newspaper has to go, the values the newspaper has to uphold and the set of news items the newspaper has to offer them to read and believe, not otherwise. More than anything, the reader's ability to read between lines, as to why the newspaper puts such headings and wordings, why it highlights a news item while playing down another, why it presents a news under a false or twisted comparison, why it wilfully applies different yardsticks for same situations or same yardstick for different situations, why it fails to effect one-to-one correspondence, why it intentionally mixes good and bad, and finally why it offers perversions as the standard norms of the society, ought to rather determine the survival or otherwise of a newspaper than advertisement revenues, product promotion strategies and other external influences. In a nutshell, the reader has the power to accept or reject that news and its associated influence.

Therefore, awareness of newspaper subscribers and readers gains centre stage. Their knowledge or lack thereof with respect to the influence of news media on their lives is one of the most instrumental factors deciding the direction of the society. Therefore a study of reader attitude towards newspapers is desirable when the same is effected in conjunction with the presentation of the origin, growth and development of the newspaper industry. This way, the industry shall be evaluated of its strengths and weaknesses as against the opportunities and threats it faces so that possible corrective and control measures are put forward. These rationales have caused to this research being entitled, "Newspaper Industry - A Study with Special Reference to Madurai, Tuticorin and Tirunelveli Districts".

Objectives

The research has the following primary objectives.

1. To study the origin, growth and development of newspapers in worldwide, Indian and Tamil journalistic perspectives.
2. To study the historical growth of printing and related technology.
3. To study reader attitude towards newspaper by analysing the readership environment, reading characteristics, distinctive choices and tendencies, reader preferences, usefulness measures and prominence rankings. Here the dealer and channel aspects are also touched upon.
4. To study recent trends in newspaper journalism and offer suggestions for reader, government and newspaper industry.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are framed to attain the objectives.

1. People do not want to interact with others and are not eager to share information and opinions. Newspapers have been imposed unnecessarily upon them with hollow utility value.
2. Growth of newspapers is independent of social and technological developments and do not reflect changes therein.
3. Growth and evolution of newspapers and the development of printing and publishing technology have not gone in a parallel and mutual manner.
4. The history of newspapers in the Indian and Tamil contexts does not serve to understand the social, communal, political and economic conditions which prevailed during the respective times.
5. Influence of newspapers upon modern readers, communities, societies and nations is too insignificant to deliberate.
6. Every newspaper serves to disseminate truth by publishing unbiased information regardless of caste, community, region and ideology.

7. Newspapers always submit themselves to government oversight, will of the masses and ethical and moral standards.
8. Reading preferences towards newspaper do not set in readers based on the social environment, information content, coverage and presentation of news items.
9. Reading newspaper and taking its contents word for word are enough to understand social perversions, communal influences, distorted meanings, vague interpretations, unfair comparisons and hidden motives, if any.
10. Inclination of reader towards a newspaper does not have any qualitative correlation to his/her individual, social, economic, communal and/or political standing.
11. News presentation, coverage, content and composition have no correlation to the prevalent socioeconomic conditions and social direction.
12. Reader attitude, news agent/dealer information, circulation data and structure of distribution channels do not reveal the prominence of individual newspapers.

Scope and Methodology

The study is carried out in Tuticorin, Tirunelveli and Madurai districts in the State of Tamilnadu, India. Data collection was effected between July 2010 and July 2012. In that study area, the research attempts to measure newspaper reading habits, choices and preferences, and subscription patterns of the respondents. To do that, personal and social environment of the readers, and their distinctive choices and preferences with regard to newspaper reading and subscription are qualitatively analysed.

The field work was accomplished through an empirical survey. In that the sample respondents are regular newspaper readers with permanent subscription. Three hundred of them were selected through Convenience

Sampling. However, it was purposive in the sense that respondents were seen not to get polarised on any personal or social condition. For that originally four hundred and fifty respondents were chosen and virtually subjected to stratification in terms of personal and social factors including gender, age group, education, income, and the like. Therefrom, three hundred subscribers were absorbed to have a representative sample.

Everyone was administered a questionnaire and responses therefrom were recorded, summarised, tabulated and analysed. If necessary, an unstructured personal interview was also effected to minimise the negative aspects of questionnaire. Information related to personal, family and occupational conditions, newspaper reading habits, brand, language and form preferences, and distinctive reading choices were collected by way of the questionnaire. For secondary data, various hard and on-line sources including books, journals, bulletins, articles and unpublished research theses were consulted.

All data are analysed through several stages. First, coding and categorisation of the data are undertaken. Then, explorations and summarisation are effected to decide on the nature of analysis and tools. Finally, a reflection on data within each category is effected with much deliberation and thought. The following tools are used for the purpose of data analysis.

1. Central Tendency Measures
2. Percentages and Percentiles
3. Simple Correlation
4. Ranking based Hypothesis Testing
5. Chis-square Analysis

Findings

Findings are provided under three major headings namely Indian Newspaper Industry, The Tamil Press and Subscriber Attitude towards Newspapers.

Indian Newspaper Industry

There were newsletters during the Mogul dynasty in the 16th century India. The first ever printing press was established in Bombay in 1674. In 1780 India got its first official newspaper namely Bengal Gazette published by James Augustus Hickey from Calcutta. Hickey is acclaimed as the Father of the Indian Press. In the British India, Governor Generals enforced rigid press control. Newspapers of that time were only in English. News items too were limited to British activities in India. The Indian side lacked technology, infrastructure, political influence, and administrative skills to run a newsprint.

Of the Indians, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar succeeded to some extent in printing. The Press in India in the early 1930's consisted of more than 300 daily newspapers with an aggregate circulation of 45,00,000 copies. Indian Newspapers formed their own cooperative news agency in 1948 under the name, Press Trust of India Ltd. In the pursuant decades, the press became more popular and remained as a power tool for information and education. During the time of Independence, many leaders fought for the freedom of the press. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Gangadhar Bhattacharya were the front runner among them. Newspapers by them created waves of influence among nationalist movements. In the post Independence period, as States were created according to languages, local language gained priority over Hindi and English. Mass journalism gradually replaced political journalism.

Now, after the liberalisation drive of the early 1990's, newspapers have become a business proposition. They are instrument of mass conditioning, tool of socioeconomic influence, weapon of power, proponent of particular agenda and source of easy profit. Large corporate houses and political outfits have

invested heavily in the industry. It has witnessed impressive annual growth up to the year 2007. Yet, owing to the dynamism of environment, facts and figures related to the industry sharply contrast between 2005 and 2011. Additionally the male and female ratio as regards readership remains static with females consistently lower in readership percentage. Finally, the Press Council of India and the Registrar of Newspapers for India oversee the print media. Meanwhile the Internet platform is evolving rapidly,

The Tamil Press

The Press in Tamilnadu grew in four major stages namely, Missionary Press, Sectional Press, Dravidian Press and Nationalist Press. The sustained printing endeavours by Catholic and Protestant Missionaries marked the beginning and growth of printing in Tamilnadu. The contribution of missionaries was both unparalleled and unsurpassed. Yet the first newspaper appeared in Tamilnadu only in the latter part of the eighteenth century. It was Madras Courier founded by Richard Johnson on 12 October, 1785. Also during that period the Government Gazette was introduced in Madras. Various sections of society observed that the press served as an effective medium in the hands of the missionaries. It obliged the enthusiasts of other religions to act upon in defending their respective religions, which resulted in sectional newspapers. Nevertheless, any difference of objectives or issue between various sections did not break the social fabric.

Initial Tamil language newspapers and journals were apolitical. The first Tamil monthly magazine was Tamil Patrika published by the Religious Tract Society in 1831. Viveka Vilasam, promoted by non-Christian Tamil intellectuals, appeared in 1865 with the objective of counteracting the missionary propaganda. Papers like Madras Times (1860), Madras Mail (1868), the Spectator (1836) and The Anglo Indian (c.1840) defended Anglo-Indians and British rule and policy in India. The Hindu was the first mainstream newspaper owned by Indians. It acted as a buffer between the readers and the

British rulers. However at one stage it became anti establishment.

G. Subramania Iyer of The Hindu established the first newspaper in Tamil, the Swadesamitran in 1882. Like Hicky's Bengal Gazette, the Swadesamitran was a major journalistic development in the history of Tamil newspapers. Swadesamitran became even popular when Tamil poet C. Subramania Bharati joined as a Sub Editor in 1904. Bharati was the pioneer of cartoons in Tamil. He employed them a good deal in his own newspaper, India. However, Bharati's journal exclusively for cartoons named Chitraveli did not take off. Muslims for their part started newspapers to defend their communal and religious interests. Live-ul-Islam and Saiphul Islam were the two most prominent Muslim newspapers. Similarly, leaders of the non-Brahmin communities organised the Justice Party in the Madras Presidency. The origin of the Dravidian press was closely connected with this. The Justice Party adopted a pro-British attitude. The party published three newspapers namely The Justice (in English), Non-Brahman and the Dravidan. These papers remained the chief organs of the Justice Party and its Non-Brahmin Movement.

Rise of the nationalist press lead to the diminishment of the sectional press. Nationalism was forced upon the public above any other interest. The common man was not at all in despair to be liberated from the British as it was made out to believe. Contrarily the elite wanted themselves and their activities freed from the British purview and hence were badly in need of mass mobilisation as their shield. A number of newspapers carried on this propaganda. Even some newspapers of the sectional press like Desabakthan changed their old path to became nationalist in character. The Vernacular Press Act (1878), The Press Acts (1908 and 1910) and Assumed Emergency Powers during the Great War (1914-1918) helped the British control anti-government writings in the Press. In addition, the Anglo-Indian and Dravidian Presses helped the administration to weaken the political polarisation against them.

In the Transition Period between 1930 and 1960, many important

newspapers of today like Dinamani, Dina Thanthi and Dinamalar began to emerge. They introduced many innovative changes in content, coverage and presentation like photographic coverage, sensationalism and targeting of semi-literate people. They gained immediate popularity and caused the demise of old newspapers like Swadesamitran.

Analysis of Subscribers

Personal and Socioeconomic Attributes

Subscribers are of all age groups, yet those of the lowest and highest age groups are very small in percentage. Therefore news variety that caters to every age group is the essential element for newspapers. Married subscribers with planned family constituted the largest category of respondents. Distribution of subscribers based on education is more like a normal distribution. Similarly distribution of subscribers based on religion and community is in conformity with the demographic structure of the study area. As religion and community affect the choice of information, it is desirable that news composition is fine tuned accordingly. Education of subscribers has not resulted in the corresponding occupation. Respondents instead have gone to family business, entrepreneurship, public service or private employment. The priority of subscribers, irrespective of education, is dominantly inclined toward government job. As regards monthly family income, an inverse proportion is observed between income category and number of respondents.

Reading Characteristics

Self obligation is the most important influence factor to buy a newspaper. Subscribers with 10-20 years of reading experience constitute the largest category. It shows that the choice of newspaper for subscribers in the less experienced categories is a near-voluntary decision with possible guidance from elders. Moreover majority of the subscribers have settled with their newspapers and their preferences have formed already. They are not likely to make a switchover to another newspaper. Further, respondents are reluctant to

be identified as obsessive news chasers. Many subscribers also discredit any external inspirational source. Easy availability, inexpensiveness, necessity to read and luring advertisements work together to weaken the need for an inspirational source. Thus, traditional inspirers such as parents, teachers and friends play an insignificant role here. Hence, individual-directed approach is the best for a newspaper to win over the readers. Furthermore, seven out of ten subscribers read only general newspapers. However, those reading both general and business newspapers is unexpectedly high at 29.33 percent, because the combined weight of professionals and private concern employees has pushed up this category. More than half of the respondents give importance to English language newspapers irrespective of their personal qualities. Likewise, most respondents believed that English papers cover political, business and international news better.

Distinctive Choices and Tendencies

Subscribing patterns of Tamil and English newspapers show a noticeable difference. While in Tamil the reader's choice is more widespread, in English it is much restricted. Moreover every newspaper including local ones has carved out its niche subscriber base. Further, 'Personal interest' is the dominant reason for newspaper reading. 'Language development' and 'Educational purpose' are other compelling reasons. Similarly, 'Own purchase' is the strongest choice for nature of acquiring newspapers. While three quarters of the subscribers read hard copy, the remaining read e-edition. Although it shows the reach of the Internet, tangible physical newspaper at hands is still the preferred form. Only one in eight subscribers purchase newspapers in shops and the remaining prefer it dropped in their doorsteps. Eighty percent of the subscribers are well satisfied with the quality of the newspaper they subscribe. Nine out of 10 subscribers restrict their reading time to not more than an hour a day. Impact by the newspaper varies from reader to reader wherein personal qualities and requirements determines the type of impact. Finally, a substantial section of the

respondents compare news items with that of television and radio.

Reading Preferences

Politics is the most regularly read among the news items. After that comes educational, sports and regional news items respectively. Further, 'Timely and updated news presentation' is the most preferred aspect in any newspaper. After that, 'Attractive language' is the second most preferred aspect. 'Accurate and unbiased information' and 'Excellent coverage' equally share the third position. It is strange that subscribers give more importance to 'Attractive language' than 'Accurate and unbiased information'. Moreover, 'Biased news' is the most disliked aspect in any newspaper. It would cause nearly half of the subscribers to make a switchover. 'Poor paper quality' comes next, which the subscribers associate with readability, utility and recycling values. 'Annoying and boring language' comes third as subscribers expect written and oral forms should differ properly. These three aspects of dislike altogether record 78.67 percent of the responses. Other aspects of dislike register minimum number of responses. While an aspect of dislike itself is not adequate for the subscribers to give up a newspaper, collective weight of the factors like bias, paper quality, language, coverage and cost will bring down the newspaper.

Usefulness of Newspaper and Supplements to Target Audiences

Usefulness of a newspaper means differently to different target audiences. Perception, age and generation gap play a larger role in interpreting usefulness. Having weighed the worthiness of their newspaper for quite long, many subscribers stay with that. While elder respondents see rationale in rating superficial, sensual and sexually deviant news items as useless or waste, some male, many female and almost all younger respondents do not see anything aberrant/abhorrent in such news items. Moreover, although many respondents regard newspaper a waste of time, they continue subscribing it. This has become a social compulsion, reinforced further by negligible cost, educational requirements and employment opportunities. Finally, respondents' viewpoints

towards supplements do not change with their age. As supplements are not worth much to the target audiences, respondents are indifferent and homogeneous in their opinion.

Ranking of Tamil and English Newspapers

About one third of the respondents give Dhina Thanthi first rank. It is followed by Dhina Malar and Dhinakaran. Here Dinkaran is an exception in the sense that one-fifth of the respondents rank it to be the worst. It shows while quite a section of the respondents are forced to purchase Dhinakaran for some reason, it is otherwise unacceptable to many others. After the three dominant ones, Dhinamani is the most preferred choice. Evenly distributed responses across the eight ranks show that Dhinamani is a good alternative and centrist newspaper. In addition, Dhina Poomi, Malai Murasu and Tamil Murasu have their own preferred reader bases. Likewise, no one has put Local Newspapers in first or second rank. In the ranking of English newspapers, The Hindu is the most preferred one. Respondents have not ranked it below the third place. It is followed by New Indian Express. Times of India too has its satisfied subscribers. These three newspapers are held in high esteem by their readers.

Suggestions

The weight of suggestions centre on the amendments to the Press Council of India Act, which are pending for long. The Council should be accorded punishing power to enforce its adjudications. Financial autonomy of the regulatory bodies is another area to look into. Thirdly, the focus of the newspapers should turn towards rural reporting to reflect the true socioeconomic conditions, which is hitherto neglected. Further, the elements of journalism need improvement by way of infrastructure enhancement and funding. Training workshops, sensitisation programmes, and setting up of media academy in every State with able resource persons shall be considered. Ultimately, if the readers decide to stand for the truth, no newspaper can stand in their way. They ought to understand the hidden or ulterior meanings and

messages of newspapers, if any. It is in their hands to get true enlightenment or be deceived.

Conclusion

The print media has a glorious tradition sprawling centuries. It is a formidable strength for Indian democracy. That is why it has special privileges. The need for the hour is serious introspection by the print media to play the role of fourth estate in the true spirit. They should always have the discipline of verification, maintain independence from those they cover, serve as an independent monitor of power, and provide a forum for public criticism and compromise. For their part, readers should see where they stand individually and collectively in relation to age old morals and social values, and act upon that with courage and determination. Every one of them ought to learn to differentiate truth from deception and put things in a proper perspective without preconceived notions and preformed opinions. In this way, they cannot be made puppets by any ulterior power centre.