

DO INDIAN NEWSPAPERS FOCUS TOO MUCH ON CRIME STORIES?

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Abstract

Crime stories generate a significant amount of curiosity among readers. Such has been the impression of crime stories that these have inspired television serials in India on popular channels. The local editions of newspapers leave an impression on the minds of readers and crime stories that appear in local editions are an obvious element that creates curiosity. Usually these crime stories relate to some appalling development in the city cause curiosity among readers who are residents of that area.

A comparison of crime stories in both newspapers and their local editions was done in this study. This analysis comprised identification and statistical representation of the number of crime related stories and spots carried in local editions of these newspapers. Do newspapers go overboard give enough significance to crime stories? The study aims to evaluate the crime coverage in local editions and compare the frequency in a week's time.

The study aimed to evaluate the coverage of crime related stories in local editions of two leading English newspapers. A comparison of crime stories in both newspapers and their local editions was done in this study. This analysis comprised identification and statistical representation of the number of crime related stories and spots carried in local editions of these newspapers. Suitable suggestions and recommendations were given in the study.

Key Words: Crime Stories, Indian Newspapers, Media Industry, English newspapers, Crime reporting

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Introduction:

Crime stories have always been enticing and have created a substantial amount of interest among readers. Such has been the impression of crime stories that these have inspired television serials in India on popular channels.

The local editions of newspapers too have an impact on the minds of readers and crime stories that appear in local editions are an obvious element that creates curiosity.

Crime stories and those that are interesting and relate to some appalling development in the city cause curiosity among readers who are residents of that area.

This study aimed to evaluate the coverage of crime related stories in local editions of two leading English newspapers. Archives over a week were considered fit for evaluation. As per the Indian Readership Survey 2013 findings The Tribune newspaper continues to lead the English newspaper category readership in North India and Times of India is the nation-wide most read English newspaper according to readership survey. A comparison of crime stories in both newspapers and their local editions was done in this study. This analysis comprised identification and statistical representation of the number of crime related stories and spots carried in local editions of these newspapers.

Different newspapers have their preference of extent to which they carry out crime related stories and other genre of stories. While for some it may be a deliberate decision while for others it may be a selective bias to grab readership.

Some social scientists agree that certain newspapers selectively report events and erroneously report other information. This is selection bias and description biases respectively identify researchers (Mc Carthy et al. 1996).

These crime stories range from accidents, to police investigations to crimes like robbery, thefts, among others. Local crime stories naturally excite the readers because it concerns their locality, their city and this crime took place closer home.

Stovall (2011) describes that media world is demanding and tiring also. Even for media professionals, coverage of crimes stories day after day rigorously is an onerous task. Local

reporting is challenging and demanding at the same time. A tough competition from rival newspapers poses a challenge in local reporting and hence the style of coverage is different for all local editions.

The Indian Media Scenario:

There is a transformation being witnessed in the Indian media scenario (**Kohli-Khandekar, 2010**) and there are attempts to meet the expectations of the investors, keep pace with the fast digital world, keep profitability high among others issues.

The present study involves analysis of local editions of two leading English dailies. India's largest media company- Bennett, Coleman & Company (BCCL) grew from Rs 19.91 billion to an estimated Rs 42.82 billion in the financial year ending June 2008 (**Kohli-Khandekar 2010**).

Revenue and profit centric news, popular news culture is picking up in the Indian media scenario. A considerable amount of attention is being given by media organizations to revenue sources, newspapers find it tough to cope with pressures of neutrality and unbiased reporting. Certain other scholars however suggest that newspapers sometimes commit murder everyday and yet to unpunished (**Colburn, 1927**).

Newspapers as tools of research and teaching:

Newspapers can be important instruments and resources for research scholars to study the reporting style, content, design and several other dimensions which a newspaper. Researchers have often challenged the notion that do newspaper really has any concern with yesterday or have considerable base for research (**Salmon, 1926**).

Media professionals, particularly journalists, have this challenge of meeting deadlines, competing with rivals and live up to the target of filing maximum stories. A historian however has much more time to dig deeper and research more.

Scholars (**George & Waldfoegel, 2003**) have also argued that newspaper market is well suited for studying externalities.

Newspapers have also proved to be an effective tool to research and teach. The data itself is a treasure house.

About the two English newspapers:

The Tribune, a regional paper, which has been market leader in terms of circulation for several years according to Indian Readership Survey (IRS) ratings, the Tribune newspaper, published from Chandigarh. It started publication on February 2, 1881 and Sardar Syal Singh Majithia, a philanthropist started this newspaper. 133 old English edition is largest selling in North India and it also has a Hindi and a Punjabi edition besides the English one.

The Times of India continues to be the **largest selling English newspaper in the country**, **The Times of India is controlled by the Bennett Coleman and Company Limited**. 170 years old, this newspaper also has an active online portal. The newspaper has presence all over the country, with 41 centres and 15 main editions. It has interesting editions too offering a variety to the readers like the **Times of India Metro Edition**, which is about lifestyle and latest happenings in the city, **Times Pulses** which contains advertisements and civic issues of the area and **Times Ascent**, which is career related edition.

Objective of the Study:

This research aims to analyse the content in local editions of two leading English newspapers over a week's span and give critical comments on the crime news coverage in these newspapers. The Wall Street Journal dictionary of journalistic terms states that spots are hard news that are instantly relevant and special stories comprise extra effort by the reporter or the team.

Each journalist has a beat allocated and newspaper teams often have a dedicated crime reporter. In certain cases, there are two crime reporters in some city editions of bureaus.

Archives over a week were considered fit for evaluation. As per the Indian Readership Survey 2013 findings *The Tribune* newspaper continues to lead the English newspaper category readership in North India and *Times of India* is the nation-wide most read English newspaper.

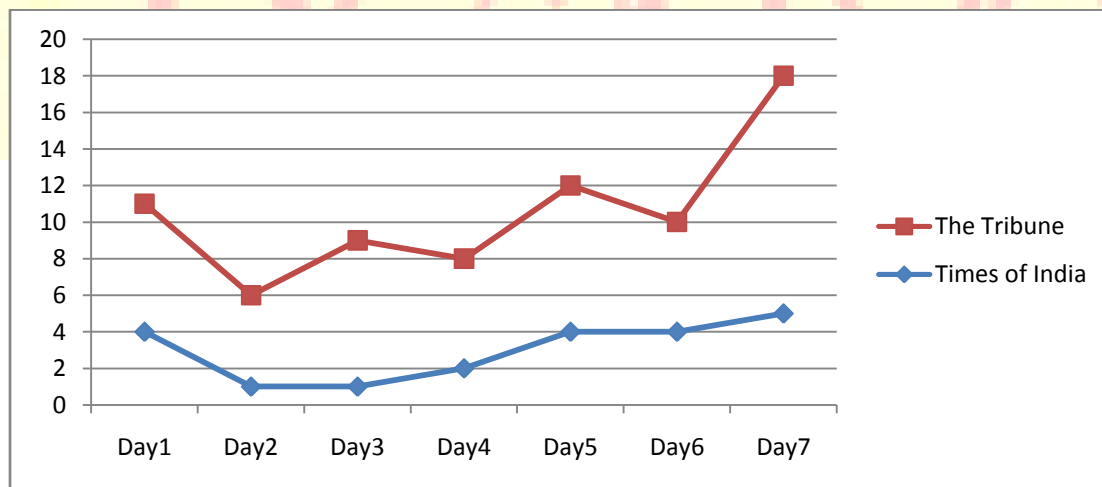
Data Presentation and Analysis

Table1: Stories related to crime in local editions of Times of India & The Tribune

Newspaper (Local supplement)	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Total
Times of India	4	1	1	2	4	4	5	21
The Tribune	7	5	8	6	8	6	13	53

The above graph indicates that the number of news stories related to crime is much more in The Tribune newspaper. The occurrence of news and frequency is unevenly distributed between local editions of Times of India and The Tribune. 21 news items relating to crime in a span of one week in Times of India local supplement and more than double the number of news items related to crime in the Tribune. Since the Tribune is a regional newspaper and much of its coverage is related to local areas, this implies that the readers are supplied with more crime stories that happen in their area. These stories do not include the snippets, briefs and engagements for crime spots and happenings.

Figure1: Graphical representation of stories related to crime in local editions of Times of India & The Tribune



The above graph represents the news related to crime in local editions of two leading English newspapers. The statistics indicate that The Tribune newspaper attaches far more importance to crime stories given the frequency of these news items compared of local edition of Times of India, which prefers soft stories over crime stories.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A significant importance is attached to the crime stories in local editions of The Tribune newspaper compared to Times of India. On an average, 3 stories are carried specifically related to crime everyday in Tribune and 7 on average in local edition of Times of India. Most of these spots are related to criminal activities in the city, theft, chains snatching, murders, among others that invoke a sense of curiosity among residents about their locality.

In local editions, special significance is attached to crime stories. There is scope and need for further statistical investigation and in depth analysis of more local editions and their comparison with main editions in terms of specific genre of coverage. Content analysis of newspaper can open up a host of possibilities to further research and the shift can be from popular articles to research based templates of newspapers. Increasingly, the emphasis is now being given to the research based editions in which newspapers know what content has high readability and this is possible when detailed analysis is performed.

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