

## POLITICAL NEWS COVERAGE ON FRONT PAGE OF INDIAN NEWSPAPERS: AN ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract:**

The quality and content of news published on front page of leading newspapers has much to do with the taste of readers and inclination of that society. A host of readership studies have found that markets depend on the demand of the readers and cater to the needs of that audience or readership. Political news has assumed a significant place when it comes to newsroom of various media organizations in India. This is one genre of news that cannot be ignored or sidelined in the country because of the huge political set up, continuously changing political scenario and proud democracy that the country has.

The present study conducts an analysis of 100 English newspaper editions of leading newspapers in the country and region to find out importance given to political news on front page. These newspapers include- The Times of India, Hindustan Times, Indian Express and The Tribune. The four newspapers were carefully selected for diverse evaluation of news coverage on front page. The study also includes analysis of various studies done in past on political coverage in different kinds of media. The paper compares the number of stories carried on front of newspapers for these 100 editions and the share of political news in that. The study includes analysis over four months and sampling has been selectively done to be evaluated statistically.

**Key Words:** Political News, Indian newspapers, Indian Media, newspapers

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**Introduction:**

Political News coverage has been an integral part of the newspapers in India ever since newspapers came to existence. There is a significant place given to the political news in newsrooms and special correspondents deputed to cover this beat. Political correspondents are common in most newspaper organizations and naturally assume significance during major political events.

Political news is one genre of news in this country which is hard to ignore or overlook. The **Press council of India (PCI)**, the statutory body of press in India had expressed its concern over the “paid political news” syndrome. The trend of political parties paying newspapers for advertising their candidates during polls and highlighting the schemes floated during their tenure had become common in 2010 when the PCI released its final report. Investigations were carried out and the Election Commission of India had taken a serious view of it.

This study considers an in depth analysis of 100 English newspaper editions in India. The objective of the study is to find out importance given to political news on front page of these newspapers. The newspapers selected for this study include- The Times of India, Hindustan Times, Indian Express and The Tribune. The study also includes presentation of various related studies done in past on political coverage in different kinds of media across the globe. This study compares the number of stories carried on front of newspapers for each of these editions for 100 editions and the share of political news in that. The study has been conducted for a span of four months in the year 2013 and front page articles frequency will be evaluated statistically.

**Political news coverage in Media:**

In US, the presidential campaign and the elections are an interesting case for the newspapers, televisions and researchers too. The 1992 presidential campaign was a case in point. The campaign coverage was deemed to be crucial since it plays a significant role in deciding the fate of the polls (Ridout, 1993). For a democracy it is crucial to provide alternatives. And much research has been done on adequateness of information to voters during the presidential elections.

**Ridout, 1993** found that talk shows were much more impactful. The two key observations from the Clinton's news coverage and talk show were that news was primarily focussing on campaign events. News hence was entertainment and not information as such. Talks provided a good platform to the candidates and voters. The study also concludes that the level of information could be an important factor that decides how much influence public has on government when it comes to political systems. Also if the quality of information is poor or less, this could have an impact on the interests of the citizens. Lack of information or poor quality information could also have significant impact on policy making and preferences and notions of common man.

Yet another study on political news coverage discussed the way in which changing media systems are affecting campaign styles and strategy (Goldenberg & TraugottSource, 1987).

There is difference between countries when it comes to political news coverage and print media. In US for instance, newspapers are independent of political parties unlike other countries. These are the usual patterns of political news and hold of political parties on press. There is also rapid technological change happening in different media systems which restrict political advertising. **Goldenberg & TraugottSource, 1987** cite that this may also lead to changes in the campaign style of political leaders.

#### **About the English newspapers in India:**

**The Tribune:** A regional paper, which has been market leader for several years according to Indian Readership Survey (IRS) ratings, the Tribune newspaper, published from Chandigarh 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 Hindustan Times:** This paper, which now has an urbane outlook, was incidentally started by Akalis who felt that a newspaper must enable them to reach to non-Punjabi reading audience as well. In 1922 the newspaper started to oppose the British government and got its name and form as Hindustan Times in September 1924 when it was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi. Even during independence days, this newspaper continued to write about freedom movement.

*The Times of India:* 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 supplements too offering a variety to the readers like the Times of India Metro Supplement, 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 supplement.

### **Press Council of India on Paid News Syndrome:**

After the 2009 general elections in the country, the attention of PCI and media statutory bodies was on the paid news carried out in newspapers for political mileage by candidates and political parties. The assembly elections in various states became the starting point of worsening of this syndrome of paid news. PCI quotes that this was more like redefining the news or reporting and much of financial exchange in lieu of news was done in a secretive manner. Several media companies were found engaged in this business of selling news as per the PCI report. Advertisements were often carried as news. News which was meant to be objective, unbiased and neutral was sold by these companies. The distinction between advertisements and the news started blurring during these assembly elections. The situation had worsened to a condition that the rates for carrying news items were fixed in most newspapers, which off course was a cause of concern for the PCI. The extent was such that certain newspapers denied coverage to candidates who did not invest money in these organizations. The morality in the news business was under threat due to paid news.

### **Research Methodology:**

The study consists of an in depth analysis of 100 newspapers between March 2013 till June 2013. The newspapers comprise- The Tribune, The Times of India, Hindustan Times and The Indian Express. The number of articles carried on the front page of these newspapers was evaluated and out of those political news was identified. The quantum of political news carried by English newspapers was found through statistical means. The objective of the study is to find significance given to political news coverage in English newspapers in India.

**Data Analysis & Presentation:**

For the purpose of analysis in this study, SPSS version 17.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) was used to carry out the results statistically.

Frequency, percentage, descriptive statistics i.e mean and SD and Chi-square test were the main tools of analysis. To see the association between news published on the front page of different newspapers, calculation was done using Chi-Square test.

Results obtained are as follows:

*For Total News on front page*

Chi-Square value among selected newspapers for the total news carried on front page was found to be 18.87 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance.

This implies that significant association was found for newspapers in terms of total number of news items carried on front page. The data reveals that a maximum of 5 to 6 news items were published on front page of the newspaper.

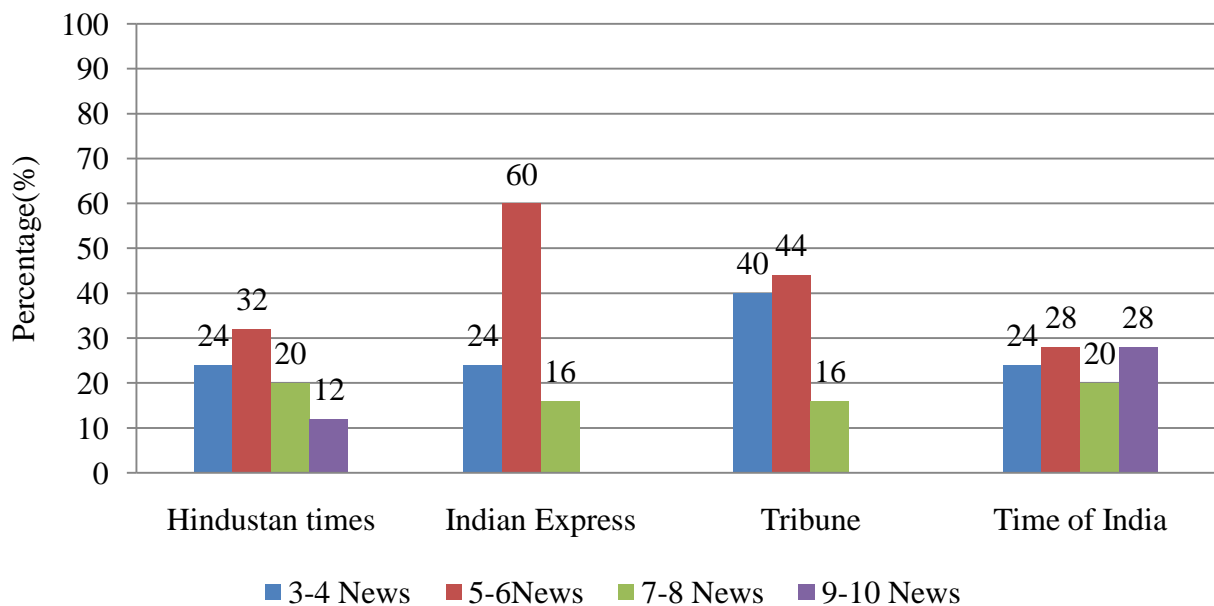
**Table1: Comparison of total news published on front page of different newspapers**

Total News on page1	Hindustan times N (%)	Indian Express N (%)	Tribune N (%)	Time of India N (%)	Total N (%)	Chi-square Value
3-4 news	6(24.0)	6(24.0)	10(40.0)	6(24.0)	28(28.0)	18.87* (Significant)
5-6 news	8(32.0)	15(60.0)	11(44.0)	7(28.0)	41(41.0)	
7-8 news	5(20.0)	4(16.0)	4(16.0)	5(20.0)	18(18.0)	
9-10news	6(12.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	7(28.0)	13(13.0)	
Total	25(100.0)	25(100.0)	25(100.0)	25(100.0)	100(100.0)	

\*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

The above table implies that on a given day, the quantum of news items carried on front page of the above newspapers is 5 to 6 on most occasions. The newspapers do not fill up the space with news items only but it is well balanced with other elements including visuals and advertisements as well.

**Figure 1: Proportion of total news on front page of different newspapers**



On publishing 5-6 news items on front page, it was seen that the Indian Express had this number of news items on 60.0% occasions, in Tribune it was 44.0%, Hindustan Times with 32.0% and Times of India with 20.0% news items. The proportion was very less for 9-10 news items on front page as seen in Figure 1.

**Political News:**

Chi-Square value among different newspapers for political news on front page was found to be 21.4 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. This implies that significant association was found among newspapers for political news items published on the front page.

Statistics reveal that a maximum of 1-2 political news were carried on 55.0% occasions whereas 16.0% of times there was no political news were published at all.

The highest percentage was for the Indian express with 76.0%, Tribune with 52.0%, Hindustan times with 48.0%, and Times of India 44.0% for publication of political news on front page.

Different proportion of various categories of political news items among newspapers is shown in Figure2.

**Table2: Association between political news published on front page and the different newspapers**

Political News on page1	Hindustan times N (%)	Indian Express N (%)	Tribune N (%)	Time of India N (%)	Total N (%)	Chi-square Value
No political news	1(4.0)	0(0.0)	8(32.0)	7(28.0)	16(16.0)	21.4** (Significant)
1-2 Political news	12(48.0)	19(76.0)	13(52.0)	11(44.0)	55(55.0)	
3-4 Political news	11(44.0)	6(24.0)	6(24.0)	6(24.0)	26(26.0)	
5-6 Political news	1(4.0)	0(0.0)	1(4.0)	1(4.0)	3(12.0)	
Total	25(100.0)	25(100.0)	25(100.0)	25(100.0)	100(100.0)	

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level of significance

**Fig2: Proportion of Political News items on front page for different Newspapers**

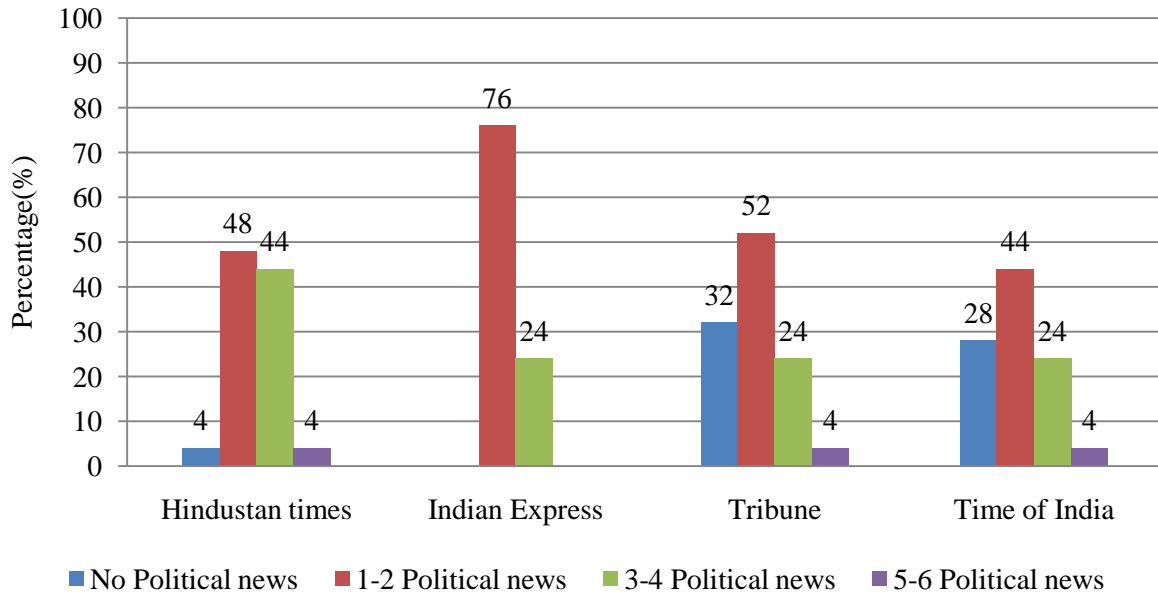


Table3: Average for Total News Items & Political News Items among different newspapers

News	Newspaper	N	Mean±SD
Total news on Page 1	Hindustan times	25	6.20±21.0
	Indian Express	25	5.28±1.06
	The Tribune	25	5.00±1.29
	Time of India	25	6.56±2.08
	Total	100	5.76±1.79
Political news on Page 1	Hindustan Times	25	2.40±1.12
	Indian Express	25	2.00±0.82
	The Tribune	25	1.40±1.35
	Time of India	25	1.80±1.50
	Total	100	1.90±1.26

Statistics reveal that the Time of India published on an average (Mean=6.56) more total number of news items than Hindustan Times (Mean=6.20) on its front page. These are followed by the Indian Express (Mean=5.28) and The Tribune (Mean=5). Much of this is attributed to the style and inclination of the newspaper. Incase of political news, it was observed that Hindustan Times



published on an average (Mean=2.4) more political news than the Indian Express (Mean=2.0), Times of India (Mean =1.8) and The Tribune (Mean=1.4) news on front page of their newspaper (Table3).

This is an interesting revelation implying that HT gives a significant place to political news on its front page.

### Conclusion & Recommendations:

Indian readership has a close connection and inclination towards political news of the country. Newspapers too understand the dynamics of democracy in the country and publish content that is readable and which the audience likes. On an average, 5-6 news items are carried on the front page of leading newspapers in the country and a significant proportion of it is political news alone. Hindustan Times, a leading English newspaper of the country carries maximum political news on its front page.

The study suggests that newspapers must also conduct regular surveys to ensure that they place news items in priority of how much significance the readers give to a particular genre of news. This would make the operation of newspapers more systematic and people friendly.

There is scope of further research in terms of content analysis of newspapers and finding what kind of news gets published in India. Unlike other countries, since print industry in India still has some time before it perishes due technological advances, people continue to rely on credibility of the newspapers.

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