

Content Analysis of Newspaper Framing of Chief Minister of Karnataka

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Abstract

A newspaper is a powerful tool that has the potential to not only inform but create public opinion on an issue, person, or political movement. There are many past examples of the effect of newspaper coverage of politics on the outcome of elections. Every media organization would have its political leanings, and such leanings act as a selection criterion in portraying an individual, opinion leader, or a political aspirant. This study is intended to see if the ideology of the newspaper has a relationship with the coverage given to political parties and leaders. The study would compare, using content analysis and framing theory, the coverage of the CM in an English newspaper, *The Times of India*, and a Kannada newspaper, *Prajavani*, to see if there is any bias that can be due to the political ideology of the two newspapers.

Keywords: *Times of India*, *Prajavani*, Siddaramaiah, Framing theory, Political ideology

Introduction

Newspapers have an impact on the readers has been proved beyond doubt.¹⁹ The high credibility newspapers have is also universally acknowledged.¹⁵ News and opinions are selected and featured on the pages of a newspaper. There is a conscious process involved in reporting and communicating the incidents and issues of importance to the general public. Some issues are highlighted due to the news value present or the intended utility for the readers. But there are other reasons like the ideology of the newspaper or the commercial angle/value of the said news article. From the point of the readers, when the story appears in bold on the front page, it is a clue that it is of vital importance to them. The agenda-setting function of news media highlights the impact of relevance to the readers.²⁴ The readers not only read the news but also think it as important enough to engage with and act upon it. During election time, potential voters can be impacted by the number of stories, the tone of the story, the photos that go with the text and the cartoons.²⁶ The editorial stance too has an effect on the readers during elections – one can be swayed one way or the other.⁴

The role of the media in political communication is well established.²² Newspapers have traditionally played an important role in the functioning of participatory democracy. Media is an important source of information about the immediate surroundings and beyond. The perception of politics, political parties, and politicians is mainly due to the representation of politics in popular media. The most important category of content in a daily newspaper is politics. Editorials take up political issues and guide the reader through the complex minefield of politics. Public opinion is important in a democracy as this prioritizes the issues for the government and brings about policy change and legislative impact on society. Can newspapers provide the space for bringing about a true public sphere where unfettered circulation of information, ideas and debates can take place is open to debate?¹³

There is nothing like an independent newspaper.⁹ Newspapers by definition are partisan, especially when it comes to the coverage of politics in particular and political parties in general. Very much like in the UK, Indian newspapers are either pro or anti-establishment in their ideology.¹ From the beginning, newspapers have aligned

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themselves with a political party and their editorial policies reflect this in the way they take a stance on issues in the news. *The Indian Express* had established itself as an anti-establishment newspaper in the past and was vociferously against the Congress government in its coverage and stance. Similarly, *The Hindu* has a left-of-center ideology that is again reflected in the news and opinion pages. The editorial support for the left parties who opposed the Indo-US Civil Nuclear deal in October 2008 showed the left and anti-imperialist stance of *The Hindu*.

The present research is being undertaken to see if, through the framing process, newspapers have an influence on the voters during the run-up to the elections. In a representative democratic setup, like in India, the role of the media, in general, is to not only link the people with their elected representatives but also guide them in taking important decisions, including voting for the right candidate and party. Due to the high credibility that newspapers carry, one is always curious about the impact they have on the voter's mind. *The Times of India* is the largest circulated English daily in Bangalore city and reaches the cosmopolitan crowd. *Prajavani*, on the other hand, is a reputed Kannada daily that represents the aspirations of the people of Karnataka. It was a conscious decision to take these two newspapers to see how they cover the government and in particular the Chief Minister. The image of the Chief Minister is vital for the survival of the government and for going back to the people and seeking a second mandate. But the agenda of the newspaper can come in the way they cover and report on a politician and his achievements. The present study will try to see if there is a bias in the way the two newspapers cover the Chief Minister, especially in the run-up to the Assembly elections of May 2018; is this bias due to the political affiliation of the newspapers in question and the make-up of the readers? The study relies on quantitative content analysis of the news coverage of the Chief Minister of Karnataka as well as any news involving him.

The Times of India: *The Times of India (TOI)* is India's leading English national daily published from 37 cities across the country. Established in 1838, it is the second oldest Indian newspaper still in circulation. Though it stayed more or less neutral in the 20th century, it always maintained a demarcation with the ruling government, mostly not attacking those in power.

Prajavani: Founded in 1948, *Prajavani*, a Kannada language daily, has been a reputed newspaper in Karnataka with active participation in shaping the cultural identity and setting a benchmark for literature. Though the ownership has political leanings, the reportage is mostly independent with a critical evaluation of the administration.

Review of Literature

The theoretical framework for the present research comes

from the framing theory. A multidimensional concept,²⁴ framing can be defined for the purpose of this study as a process of meaning-making by various actors, or "frame sponsors",¹¹ to provide a coherent and powerful explanation of unfolding events (Entman, 2004).

Framing essentially involves the selection of stories and the salience attached to them.⁶ To frame, therefore, is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and then make them more salient in a story, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.

This research, therefore, intends to study the news coverage and opinion pieces in the two newspapers knowing fully well that the selection and treatment meted out to the individual stories and images is a conscious effort to influence the readers to a particular political point of view.

Americans in the 1960s relied on media to shape their ideology.² They allowed the media to certify leaders and create celebrities through reporting news that fit within their media frame. Gitlin's definition of a media frame – "Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organized discourse, whether verbal or visual" – places a lot of importance on the influence of the journalists, the "symbol-handlers".²⁶

Most studies that applied framing theory to study the coverage of politics by news media have used the five news frames that have been identified by researchers: attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality.²⁸ Usually, news stories are selected and reported by journalists due to the news values that they see in the incident/issue. Most common of these is the value/frame of attributing the responsibility or assigning blame followed by conflict.

In a related study (Entman, 2010), framing theory was applied to study systematic bias in the coverage of election campaign of 2008. Despite the best efforts of the journalists, the framing of the news often favors one side over another in political disputes. This, in turn, can throw light on the effects of the news coverage on political power and public.

News bias was used as a frame to see how news media is in the business of furthering political power and democracy.⁷ By properly defining and measuring bias and slant in the news, one can infer the influence of media on the distribution of power: who gets what, when, and how. It has to be through a merging of framing, priming and agenda-setting theoretical framework that we can get conclusive evidence to support the effect of bias on audience thinking on politics.

When framing was used to examine the effect of news

frames on tolerance for the Ku Klux Klan, participants showed more tolerance when the news was framed in a free speech story format as opposed to public order story.²¹ News frames then have an impact on the perception of the audience about the issue/incident depending on how they are framed.

The concept of mediatization has received considerable attention in recent years in communication research aimed at analyzing the extent to which media influences politics or the political process.⁹ Politics becomes mediatized when increasing numbers of people rely on the mass media as their primary source of political information. Downey and Neyazi argue that in the Indian context media logic winning and politics becoming subservient to media demands.⁴ In the rapid development of Indian media, media has become commercialized, regionalized and vernacularized.

Newspapers in India mostly claim to be independent when it comes to their editorial policies. But the reality is otherwise. Many of the Indian newspapers align themselves with a political ideology or political party, without making it public.¹⁵ It is only through their news coverage and editorials that one gets this understanding of political bias. The political climate in India is conducive to newspapers benefitting by aligning with the party in power. Most of the newspapers in the past were pro-establishment (During the Emergency only three newspapers put up a semblance of resistance) and by default pro-Congress, as this political party ruled India for the first thirty years without a break. Now the situation is different as other political parties have come to power, mostly in the form of anti-Congress coalitions. Many political parties have their own newspapers at the regional level to push their agenda and stay relevant. Therefore, today the situation is more complex and the newspapers are aligning and realigning politically keeping in mind their survival.

Newspapers in India (IRS 2017) are doing well in terms of readership. The Indian language press is seeing unprecedented growth and is likely to continue on the growth trajectory in the coming years.¹⁴ In the early years of the newly independent country, English newspapers held sway even though the readership was small (elite) and concentrated in urban areas. There was a disproportionate impact that English dailies had on the policies and government in general.²⁹ Today, the scene is different with Hindi language newspapers replacing the English dailies as influencers at the national level.¹⁵ Similarly, the regional language newspapers are now showing increasing influence in the states and especially on government and its policies.²⁴ National English newspapers have very little impact in the states as its circulation is confined to the large cities. Considering the fact that regional newspapers are more region-specific, they tend to be more in touch with the regional aspirations than the national dailies.

We are arguing, in this study, that by framing the stories where the CM is of importance in one way or the other, readers are led to believe in a particular way about him. This then has an impact on the perception that readers have about the politician and his government at large.

Method

For content analysis, the news, editorials, photos, and cartoons, which appeared in the pages of *The Times of India* and *Prajavani* newspapers, were taken into consideration. Only Bangalore editions were considered for the study. A total of 14 days, every alternate day in the month, starting on the first day of February 2018, was content analyzed. Those stories that mentioned the CM either by name or designation was picked or assigned to the category depending on whether it had a positive, negative or neutral tone.

Objectives

1. Framing depends on the perceived audience of the media house as it caters to their reading preferences.
2. The political ideology of the newspaper has a role in the framing of news.
3. Framing also depends on the nature and type of story covered.
4. Framing during the political campaigning has an impact on the perception of the political leadership.

Hypotheses

The coverage given to the CM of Karnataka in *The Times of India* will be negative.

The coverage given to the CM of Karnataka in *Prajavani* will be positive.

The political ideology of the newspaper will determine the bias in the coverage of the CM of Karnataka.

Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis will be a news story, editorial, picture and cartoon in which the CM is referred by name or his designation.

Parameters Considered

Following parameters along with sub-parameters are considered for the research.

Tone of the Headline: Sarcastic, praise, criticism, neutral or ridicule.

Type of the story chosen: Political, developmental or other.

Stance/opinion of the story: Neutral, positive, negative.

Which page does the news appear on: Front page or the inside pages?

Editorial Tone: Neutral, positive, negative.

Pictures that go with the political stories: Yes or No

Cartoon – Sarcastic, praise, criticism, neutral or ridicule.

Population

Daily issue of *The Times of India* and *Prajavani* during the month of February 2018.

Sample

In total, the study was spread across 30 days in order to get at least two copies of a particular day's edition. Starting from February 1, 2018, every alternate day has been considered. 1, 3,5,7,9,11,13,15,17,19,21,23,25 and 27 are the dates which were, therefore, considered for this study.

Analysis

Table 1.Total Number of Stories of CM

Paper	Front Page	Inside Page	With Photographs
<i>TOI</i>	2	4	2
<i>Prajavani</i>	12	40	33
Total	14	44	35

During the period of research, *Prajavani* carried 52 articles involving the CM, of which 12 articles were on the cover page and 40 articles were on the inside pages.

TOI carried six articles in total out of which two stories appeared on the cover page and four in the inside pages. Whereas *Prajavani* carried 33 pictures, *TOI* carried only two photographs of the CM.

Type of Stories Carried

Out of 52 articles in *Prajavani*, 19 were on developmental issues and 33 were on other issues, whereas out of six articles *TOI* published, one was on developmental lines and the other five were on different issues, mostly dealing with politics. The fact that very little coverage was given to the government's development initiatives in the pages of the newspaper throws light on the agenda of *TOI*.

Table 2.Tone of the Headlines

Paper	Sarcastic	Praise	Criticism	Ridicule	Neutral
<i>TOI</i>	0	0	2	2	2
<i>Prajavani</i>	6	9	14	3	20
Total	6	9	15	4	22

Out of 52 articles found in *Prajavani* newspaper, 20 had neutral headlines, 14 headlines were critical in tone, 9 headlines were appreciative of the government and 6 headlines were sarcastic in nature.

TOI, on the other hand, had only six articles, out of which two were with neutral headlines, two critical and two had a ridiculing tone.

Paper	Positive	Negative	Neutral
<i>TOI</i>	0	4	2
<i>Prajavani</i>	23	15	14
Total	23	16	16

Out of 52 stories carried by *Prajavani*, 23 voiced out positive things about CM Siddaramaiah and his government either by covering the stories as mentioned or by giving elaborate space for the argued topics. At least 15 of them were critical or raised dissent, like issues of irregular appointments and malfunctions in various departments. Fourteen stories were neutral in their stance and mostly presented in the chronological order of the events, like that of the inauguration, laying the foundation stone for construction, or opening of a facility for the public.

Out of six stories carried by *TOI*, two were neutral and four were negative (critical) and there were no stories that were positive of the CM.

rather than praising the CM. Regarding the stance of the stories, 23 were of positive tone and 15 were negative followed by 14 neutral stance stories. Out of six stories *TOI* carried, only one was on the front page and most of them were either critiquing or neutral to the state leader.

Editorials are the voice of a newspaper. They set the tone and direction for important issues of the day. They literally lead the readers to come to a decision. There were no editorials carried by *The Times of India* whereas *Prajavani* carried six, out of which four were decisive, appreciating the government's move. The fact that *TOI* had no editorials during the period of study reflects its lack of involvement in shaping local political aspirations. The almost negligible

Table 4. Editorial Tone

Paper	Positive	Negative	Neutral
<i>TOI</i>	0	0	0
<i>Prajavani</i>	4	2	2
Total	4	2	2

Interestingly, there were no editorials carried in *TOI* in the period under study, whereas there were six editorials in *Prajavani*. Out of the six, four were positive, appreciating the government's steps/decisions and two were on the lines of critical evaluation of the government.

coverage of the CM by *TOI* in the opinion pages indicates its lack of interest towards CM and the stories related to him, reflecting the political leaning of the editorial policy. *Prajavani*, on the other hand, decided to give its opinion when it felt that the issue pertaining to the state was

Table 5. Portrayal through Cartoons

Paper	Sarcastic	Praise	Criticism	Ridicule	Neutral
<i>TOI</i>	1	0	0	0	0
<i>Prajavani</i>	9	3	4	2	1
Total	10	3	4	2	1

Political cartoons are a very important way through which one can express their opinion on the political issues of importance. Out of 19 cartoons *Prajavani* carried, nine were sarcastic in nature, four were critical and three cartoons were appreciating of the government. *The Times of India*, on the other hand, carried only one cartoon and it was along the lines of sarcasm.

important enough.

Discussion

The image of a politician is communicated through the media to a large extent. Newspapers have a huge role to play in the way public opinion is created and sustained. Through a conscious process of framing, the newspapers are able to influence the way people think about an issue or incident. The way the newspapers frame the issue/incident can create a positive or negative image of a celebrity/ politician. During the run-up to the elections, newspapers have a duty to provide a range of information and opinion on issues that voters can use to form political decisions.

The coverage given for CM of Karnataka or stories involving him in *TOI* seems to be very negligible (only 10%) as compared to its vernacular counterpart. *Prajavani*, a local newspaper, has been consistent in spacing CM or stories involving his office. As a geographically restricted newspaper, for *Prajavani* it is necessary to set the pulse of local agenda. Studying the coverage of *TOI*, the coverage was more diverse even though it is a Bengaluru edition. The less coverage for local leaders has been replaced with national ones and also the six stories carried in the period of study are more on critical or sarcastic lines.

When a newspaper takes it upon itself, due to ideological and commercial reasons, to go all out in support or oppose a politician/CM, it can be inferred to a large extent from the treatment given to the stories published in the pages of the newspaper. The fact that very few stories are published in the *TOI* where the CM is mentioned is an indication that the newspaper does not feel he is important in the state of affairs of Karnataka. Clearly, there is a bias that has come out openly through the pages of *The Times of India*.

Though there was a blend of developmental (19) and other kinds (33) of stories, in *Prajavani*, a majority were critical

Though the results of the analysis yield definite results correlating with the study's hypotheses, the extension of sample size would yield stronger patterns. The inclusion of other national dailies like *The New Indian Express* or *The Hindu* would also diversify the outcomes as their presence is also prominent in the state.

TOI takes a pro-BJP stance when it comes to national politics. *TOI* is an urban-centric newspaper that sides with the cosmopolitan crowd. It definitely has a bias when it comes to the attire and speech of the political leaders. Market-friendly politicians are preferred to rustic ones.

Prajavani, on the other hand, is pro-Congress due to historical and family reasons. Being a regional newspaper, it has no bias against the urban-rural makeup of the politician; if any, the bias is towards a politician who truly represents the aspirations of Kannadigas. So, it is natural that Congress as a political party gets positive coverage in *Prajavani*. CM Siddaramaiah has a positive image in the pages of *Prajavani*. Now it is clear that among the cosmopolitan sections of the city's population the present CM is losing ground but will more than make up in the traditional areas. It is going to be a really tight race to the finish and the scales may very well get tipped by the media coverage in the days to come, especially the two newspapers under study.

Come May 2018, the results of the Assembly elections may very well be on the lines of the results of this study with Congress garnering support among the readers of *Prajavani* and BJP winning comfortably among the *TOI* readers.

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