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INFLUENCE OF TV ON THE CONTENT SELECTION OF RURAL NEWSPAPERS: ANALYSIS OF RURAL NEWSPAPERS IN KARNATAKA, INDIA



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Abstract :

Journalism in India had grown from a non-profit, social service organ to a profit oriented and strategic business venture. As India is made out of heterogeneous communities, it is necessary to have the communication system specific to meet the demands, motivate, inform and set agenda for small communities. Rural press is one of the most important, viable and effective means of communication for reaching out to the vast majority of rural population. Research question “How does television influence the content selection of rural newspaper and what are the priorities of rural newspapers?” The study is quantitative study using survey and content analysis. Some qualitative data emerged from in-depth interview with the newspapers editors and journalists. Survey is conducted among 50 respondents and contents analysis of 4 rural news papers from four revenue divisions of Karnataka is taken. The research results reveal that the rural newspapers are serving the development agenda of rural community but its existence is threatened with the new media developments such as localized additions of state level newspapers and the 24x7 news channels. News channels have monopolized the media market, which is homogenizing the news contents. It has become a routine of a rural press employee to watch 3-4 news channels for their reference in content selection. Content analysis revealed that rural news papers provide average 71% of the space to local news, about 15 % of the Space to State news 11% of the space to National news and 3% of the space to International news.

Keywords: Content selection, rural newspaper, television, news channel, rural development, agenda setting.

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INTRODUCTION:

Newspapers constitute the heartbeat of the media systems of a country, as Gupta (2003) observed. From the days of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Raja Ram Mohun Roy, and Gandhiji, Journalism in India had grown from a non-profit, social service organ to a profit oriented and strategic business venture. As India is made out of heterogeneous communities, it is necessary to have the communication system specific to meet the demands, motivate, inform and set agenda for small communities. Rural press is one of the most important, viable and effective means of communication for reaching out to the vast majority of rural population. Rural newspapers have tremendous influence on rural folk as it directed toward them and from the member of their own community. Gandhi once said that India lives in its villages therefore the village development would lead to national development. All the empowerment strategies are pointed toward rural areas.

The rural press, as a medium for community communication, with its potential for creating awareness of, and articulating, people's problems; as a link between the policy makers, development bureaucracy and farmers; as second line of conversation of scientific knowledge into information for utilization in the field situation, imparting adult education and also a vehicle for reinforcing the literacy habit, is being increasingly recognized as an important viable means for the promotion of social awareness and national development (Gupta, V.S., 1995).

Wilbur Schramm in his book Mass Media and National Development, considered rural newspapers as one of the great movers of national development. Such a newspaper gives the neo-literate reason to learn to read better and makes public participation in governmental policies more informed and relevant and meaningful.

The development of community press in rural areas and small towns would not only provide print support for economic and social extension activities. This would also facilitate the production of functional literature for neo-literates as well (Agarwal, V., 1995).

Rural journalism analyst Al Cross says, "The best of these newspapers hold local governments and institutions accountable, by covering meetings and asking for records. They're prophylactics, by exposing bad things that are going on."

Rural press works as the second level of conversation. It also plays an important role as conveyer of information about development plans and programmes of the government, such as availability of seeds and fertilizers and loans through the bank. And the cooperative societies, market rates of agricultural produce. It establishes a link between government functionaries and the village and fills the much need gap in the information process.

One of the most formidable obstacles that a rural newspaper has to overcome is limited sales and circulation which creates a discouraging situation: since the circulation is limited, advertisements will not be readily forthcoming and without advertisements, the paper will find it hard to survive- a dismal situation indeed for any rural newspaper.

SIGNIFICANCE:

With the stiff competition from the state level newspapers and the 24x7 news channels rural newspapers have changed their priorities in the news selection for survival. Localized additions of state level newspapers have forced the rural newspaper to prioritize national and state level news rather than local development news. Once the rural press was key agent of development today its existence itself is threatened. As India with diverse population having varied development interests demands localized communication system rather than mass mediated communication. The government projects are geographic and community specific the information also should be community specific. The rural community is diverted with unusable information of the rural as well as state level newspapers. To make the community development efficient the rural newspaper can play a role of game changer. The present study would explore the possible solutions for the rural newspapers problems and to cater to the rural ethos.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Newspaper competition could have a variety of effects on content. As Lacy and Simon formulized it competition can (1) increase financial commitment to the newsgathering budget, (2) increase diversity of editorial content, (3) increase competition among individual reporters to get stories, and (4) increase sensational coverage. On the contrary, monopoly can decrease diversity. As assumed that ownership is strongly associated with monopolistic management, ownership should come to crucial concerns to communication scholars.

Visakha Samacharam, a Telugu daily in the city, chief editor of HMTV K. Ramachandra Murthy said there existed many heroes among rural scribes who were deeply involved in rural life and earned the affection of the local people by highlighting issues and helped to resolve them. However, small papers could survive only when they supplement the work of big papers, as the latter were too big to compete with, with a huge team of reporters working in every mandal, supported by marketing staff.

The political, social and economic interventions have shaped the editorial policies and directions of the press. At the same time the emerging changes in technology also brought certain difference in content selection of rural press.

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The financial commitment theory holds that competition among newspapers increase expenditures on news content (Litman & Bridges, 1986). This position holds some assumption that media firms in competitive market have an incentive to differentiate their content to avoid homogeneity. Several studies have supported financial commitment theory in terms of the form of more news space, more news services, increased use of color and graphics, and larger staff size (Lacy, 1992; Candussi & Winter, 1988; Wanta, 1994). Especially Lacy (1991) finds the chain-owned paper contain shorter articles and devote less space to news and editorial beats than independently owned newspapers.

In addition to this, critical and journalistic perspectives have supported former positions (Mosco, 1987; Bagdikian, 2001; McChesky 1997) in different ways by arguing that diversity should be decreased in monopoly situation because they don't need to take a risk by producing new format of story.

Rural people preference for development news of newspaper is very much influenced by their religious-cast affiliation, educational attainment, income, socio-economic status and nature of main occupation. But it is found that age and residence in places having different social overheads have no influence on the preference. Another interesting result is that people have preference for reading newspapers which are owned and/or managed by members of their own religion/community (Joseph, J.C., 1997).

Joseph J.C in his book Mass Media and Rural Development stated that there is strong positive correlation between mass media exposure and socio-economic development of the rural people. It is found the media have fairly high influence in causing awareness about the modern practices for development. About 64.75% of the respondents consider media as primary source of information about development practices. It is seen that the correlation between mass media exposure and development is the highest for agriculturalists. This indicates that rural newspapers are suitable agencies for bringing about agricultural development and rural transformation.

Despite stiff competitions being faced by Print Media in India, from the impact of globalization, proliferation of electronic media and online news, the Print media will secure its place in the Indian society (Ray, 2010).

Jain (1995) states that one of the major reasons for failure of most government plans is the absence of strong rural press to educate, inform and advise its readers.

The printed media have problems competing with the electronic media as sources of news. In order to survive, they are increasingly turning to other strategies such as entertainment, titillation, scandal mongering, and spreading fear - and spending fewer resources on serious researching of news. This is not only about the survival of the fittest of the news media; it is also about cultural selection and political selection. The news media are the most important channels for the propagation of culture, ideas, and opinions (Agner F, 1999).

Source of news has drastically changed over a period of time. In the present scenario 24X7 news channels are becoming a source for local newspapers. Live telecasts are important reference point for the journalist those who can't reach venue or those who just depend on such platform to perform their duties.

The sources of news may be public institutions, politicians, private companies, police, courts, interviewees, etc. These all have an interest in providing information that portray themselves in a positive light and withhold compromising information. There is a trade going on between source and journalist.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

Media has the powerful role of agenda setting which is essential with respect to development. Agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two basis assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: (1) the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it; (2) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. One of the most critical aspects in the concept of an agenda-setting role of mass communication is the time frame for this phenomenon. In addition, different media have different agenda-setting potential. Agenda-setting theory seems quite appropriate to help us understand the pervasive role of the media. Bernard Cohen (1963) stated: "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." (McCombs, M.E. & Shaw, D. 1972).

Mass mediated messages are double checked and treated. There are different levels of news content selection. Gate keeping theory explains this function. The gatekeeper decides which information will go forward, and which will not. In other words a gatekeeper in a social system decides which of a certain commodity – materials, goods, and information – may enter the system. Important to realize is that gatekeepers are able to control the public's knowledge of the actual events by letting some stories pass through the system but keeping others out. Gate keeping can also be dangerous, since it can lead to an abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass (White, D. M., 1964).

People are dependent on media to get the information, set developmental goals and the personal identity. Dependency theory proposes an integral relationship among audiences, media and the larger social system. This theory predicts that you depend on media information to meet certain needs and achieve certain goals, like uses-and-gratifications theory (Ball, S.J., & DeFleur, M.L. 1976).

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RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES:

The researcher would like to investigate the following question: “How does television influence the content selection of rural newspaper and what are the priorities of rural newspapers?”

Specifically the study seeks;

1. to gather changing content selection patterns of rural newspapers,
2. to analyze the social status of rural newspapers
3. to assess the impact of TV on rural newspaper content selection,
4. to identify the impact of changing media business context,
5. to explore what rural newspapers would require to improve to perform development agenda

To test our research questions, researcher has setup following hypotheses.

H1: Rural Newspapers content selection is influenced by 24X7 news channels.

H2: Rural newspaper has to serve the development agenda of their readers to survive in the competitive market.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is a quantitative study using survey method and content analysis. Some qualitative data would emerge from in-depth interview with the newspapers editors and journalists. Survey will be conducted among 50 respondents to gather the assessment of transition in content selection criteria. Four newspapers are selected for the content analysis. Seven issues of April and May 2014 is selected from each newspaper for the content analysis. Representation for all the days of the week is given in the section of newspaper samples. Respondents for the survey will be readers of rural and regional newspapers, proprietors and journalists working in rural and regional newspapers and Media experts. Interview with structured questionnaire is done to gather data from the samples.

Rationale for the selection of the four newspapers: One newspaper each is selected from four revenue divisions of Karnataka, India. Gulbarga – Suddimula, Belagavi - Kannadamma Mysore – Andolana, Bangalore - Praja Pragathi as the priorities of these division are different.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The enumerated data are analyzed using SPSS. The age is kept as independent variable in all the analysis as preference differs. The respondents are asked to give opinion on the page layout of the rural newspaper.

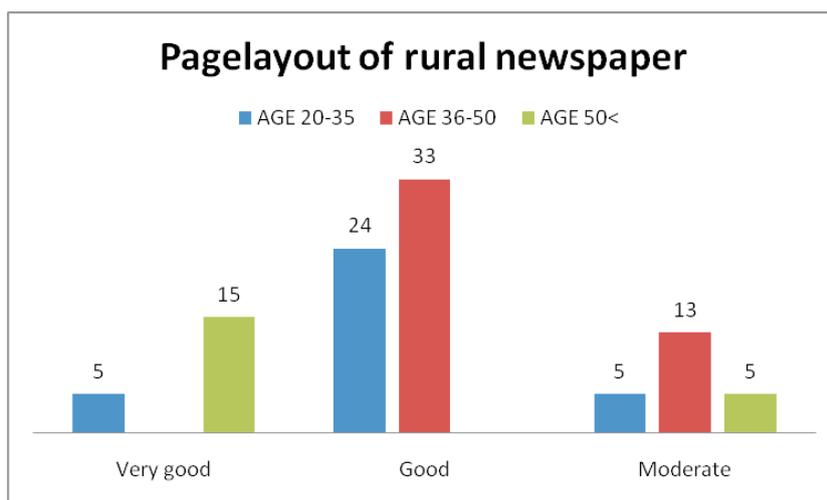


Chart1: Page layout of rural newspaper

20% of the respondents said page layout is very good 57% said it is good and 23% said it is moderate. As the layout also attracts the readers toward newspaper the respondents are asked to give opinion on this.

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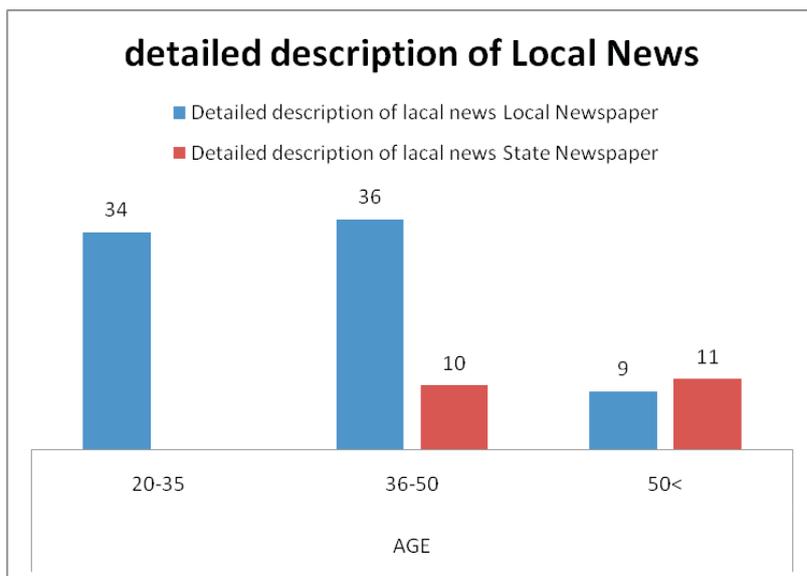


Chart 2: respondents' opinion on local news distribution.

Majority of the respondents opined that the local newspaper only can give detailed description of lacial news. 79% of the respondents felt that local media in appropriate to give local news. 21% said statelevel media is good for distributing local news.

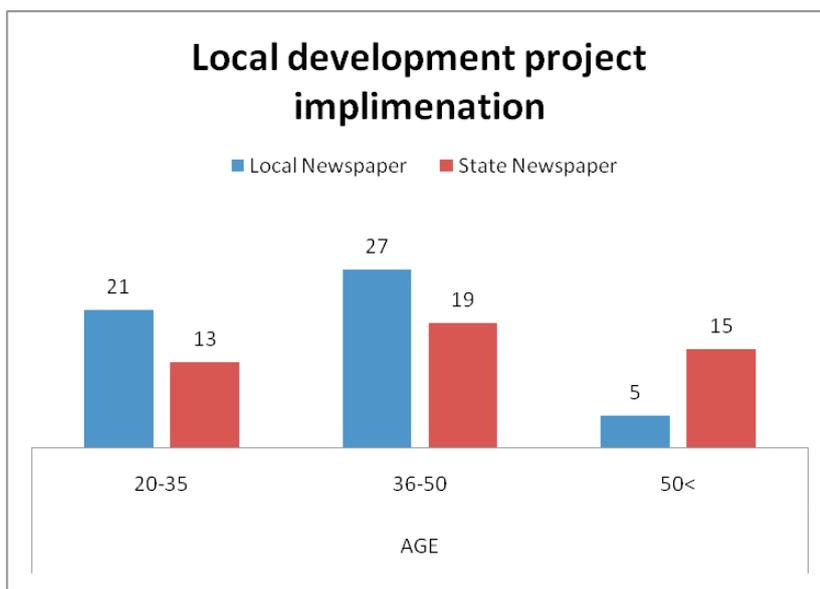


Chart3: The media which promotes local developmental project.

53% of the respondents said that the rural press is providing more information on local development projects and it also brings out the problem in the implimentation of govermemnt problem. The rural press is also appropriate to do this activity. The rest of the respondents felt the the same function in carried out by state level newspapers.

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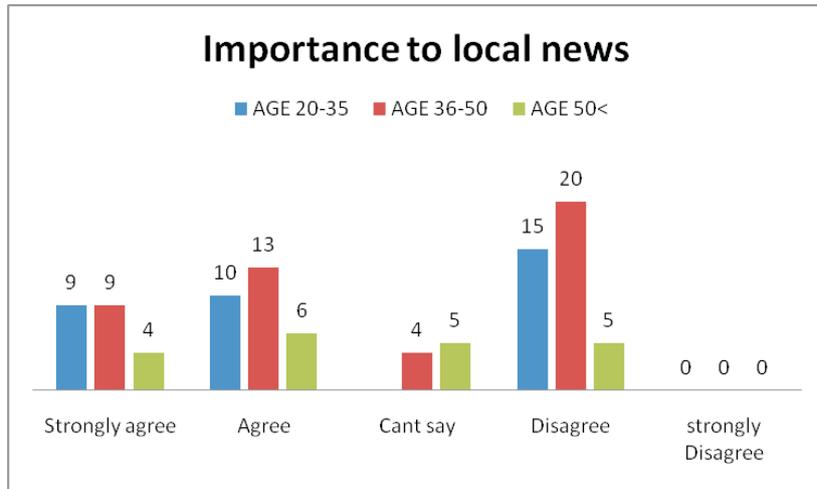


Chart 4: Respondents opinion on importance of rural news in rural newspapers

The respondents are asked whether the rural newspapers give importance to rural news. The Likert scale is provided for the answers. 22% of the respondents strongly agree, 29% said they agree 9% are indecisive, 40% disagree with the statement.

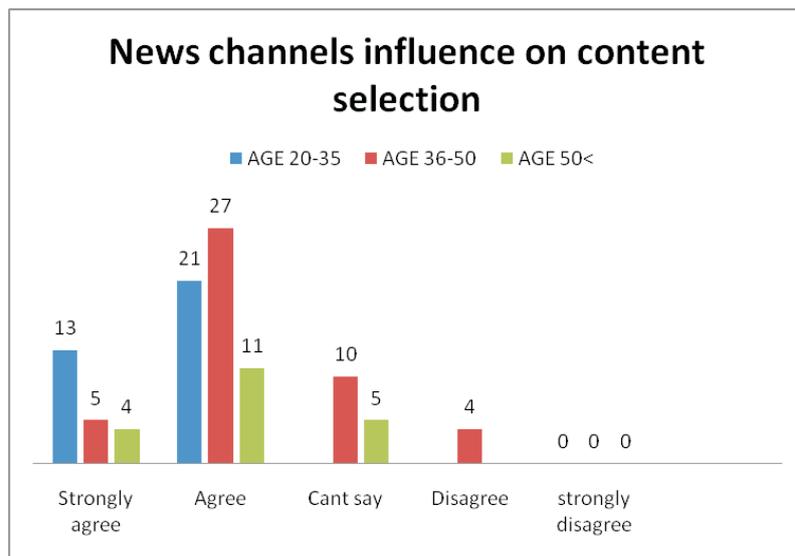


Chart 5: News channels influence on content selection in rural newspapers.

The respondents are provided with statement “News content selection procedure has changed with the influence of 24x7 news channels”. 22% strongly agree with the statement. 59% of the respondents agreed with statement. 15% are neutral and 4% disagree with the given statement.

Content Analysis:

Researcher has counted the number of stories of local area, state, national and international in each selected issue. Over a period of time with the various influencing factors the content selection and the presentation pattern of rural newspaper has changed. Rural Newspapers are comparing themselves with 24X7 television news channel for their reference. The lead story will be mostly first lead of state level news channel’s prime time bulletin.

Another influencing factor which is creating homogeneity in content presentation is considering news channels as primary source of information. It is most dangerous as it may be misleading or limited to television journalist’s view.

For the content analysis seven samples spread across 7 weeks have been taken for the analysis. Total 28

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samples from four selected newspapers are taken for the study. News items are segregated under four heads namely international, national, state level and local news contents. Meaning of local here is the news related the district from which selected newspaper is published. The analysis of front page lead story is done from all the selected issues.

Contents are divided based on geographical relevance under four categories namely, International, National, State and Local. Kannadamma has 12 pages main edition. It has 4 color pages and last page is containing mostly sports and rarely with film based information. Suddi moola which has 8 pages, with all in colors. It has pages related to neighboring districts, Gulbarga, Beedar, Koppala, Ballari and Yadagiri. Rest of the pages concentrates on Raichur local news. Andholana has 10-12 pages in main edition and supplements. All the pages printed in color. One page will be always dedicated to classifieds. Newsprint quality is on par with state newspapers. It uses colored fonts and plenty of photos.

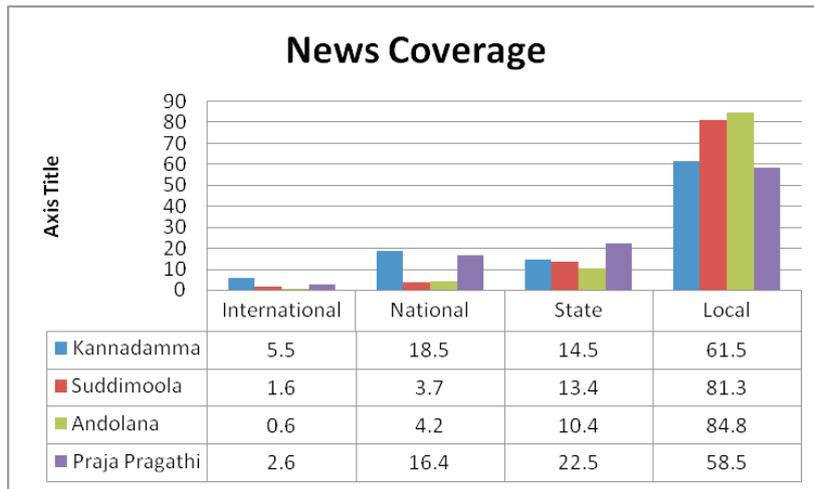


Chart 6: News coverage by four newspapers.

The front page main lead is also described along with geographic area related content preferences. It is found that Suddi moola gives more importance to local news comparing to other newspapers.

The analysis shows that Suddi Moola gives 77.1% of news related to local issues in the front page. Adholana gives 33.3% of space in the front page to local news. Praja Pragathi and Kannadamma gives 8.8% and 2% respectively for local news. As agenda setting theory reveals Mass media has potential to set the agenda for the people. Rural newspapers first lead would make the rural reader to think which as very important issue of that day. The news content selection is mostly based on news channels influence. On June first issue of Suddi Moola DC of Ballary district transferred, Reddy brothers are relieved (Biswas varga- Reddi relief) has occupied the first lead position. Kannadammas first lead about the Governor criticizing the government (Sarakarada mele apanambike: Rajyapalara teeke). Andolana carried the story about local school (Jai NTMS-Makkala Dakhalathige Siddaramayya Adesha).

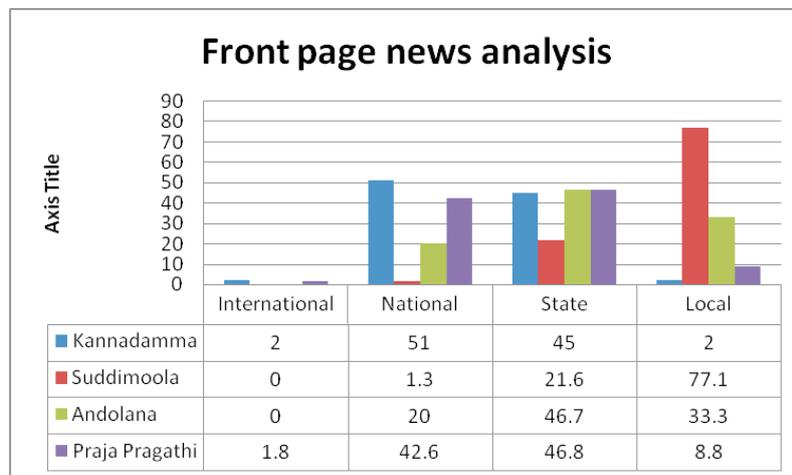


Chart 7: Front page analysis of issues

All the newspapers take photos of their own related to local issues whereas state and national news related photos are taken from agencies. It is also found the Kannadamma carried 2 photos from times now in the front page.

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Some of the photos are downloaded from the internet.

Andolana has letter to the editor column in the 5th page of every issue. 43% of the letters related to local problems. 29% of the letters are criticism related to national, state and local level issues. Rest 28% is opinions on published stories on the newspapers. The qualitative analysis shows that published complaints are getting solved and readers are thanking the newspapers.

It has four permanent columns namely Yojana Abhiyana, Dillige Illiya Binnaha, Sinchana-Samskruthi, and Seematheetha Sadhakaru. All the columns are related developmental issues. Yojana Abhiyana column introduces various plans of different departments relevant to the readers. Dillige Illiya binnaha column brings out the local problems.

All newspapers carry market rates of the day of local mandis. Suddimoola dedicates one page every day for the agriculture. Kannadamma reserves one page for human interest stories, Sudocu and sun sign forecasting.

DISCUSSION:

The priority of news channels is becoming the priorities of rural newspapers. As stated by the journalists the repeated telecast on any particular issue will take the lead position in the rural newspaper for the survival in competitive market. Rural newspapers are largely depending upon 24X7 news channels these days for the detailed contents. News telecasted in news channels would help the rural newspaper editor to alert their correspondents to collate detailed information on such news so as in state level newspapers. Due to increasing competition by news channels rural newspapers are forced to change their news selection, lead story and headline writing.

Rural newspapers take the TV footage for the photos. As expressed by the journalist from Raichur, for the photos of important meetings, programmes and especially political and crime related programmes photo are extracted from the TV footages.

A correspondent from Kannadamma newspaper opined that in the newspaper office sub-editors and the reporters will be continuously watching the 3 to 4 news channels. They follow the breaking news and headlines appeared in those channels. In some of the offices a sub-editor is deputed to note down the news contents of television channels. Editors will assign the work to the reporter to collect the further information on flash news or breaking news of television channel. Copying the content and imitating the content presentation has become common trend across rural newspapers.

Journalists working for rural newspapers have opined that, role of rural newspapers in rural development substantially declining because of stiff competition from both state level and 24X7 news channels. Localized editions of state level newspapers have been giving more coverage to political and social issues rather developmental based rural news in their editions. Since one decade, priority of rural newspapers have been slowly diverted from setting developmental agenda to villages to covering local political and crime related news.

Journalists also said that due to localized editions of state level newspapers, the coverage of local news is drastically decreased in rural newspaper. Rural newspapers have to compete with state level newspapers to cater both National, state, regional and rural news with limited editions and pages. Due to this, rural newspapers are not in a position to give good coverage about the proceedings in ZPs, TPs and Grama Panchayats.

All three local bodies have been discussing policies/ schemes and developmental programs to the villages. But in-depth news coverage on proceedings of local bodies is completely lacking. Rural journalists have only taken the figure and statistics given by the officials and cater the same to their readers.

Some journalists who working for rural newspapers in Kolar region have opined that, in spite of stiff competition from state level newspapers, rural newspapers are catering news which pertaining to rural development.

Newspaper are bringing awareness to their readers about governmental schemes like Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guaranty scheme and other ongoing development projects of the Centre and state governments. .But Local newspapers have failed to fix the responsibility to people's representatives and local bureaucrats on implementation of the developmental projects and schemes as their concentration on providing the more sensational news as appears in TV channels.

Some of the journalist suggested that Government should give more advertisements to Rural newspapers, then only local newspapers will take interest to publish governmental programs and policies. Rural newspapers are playing vital role in bringing awareness about governmental policies and programs through advertisements.

Survival of rural newspapers depends upon its priority towards local issues. Correspondents of rural newspapers have acquainted more with local issues and ongoing developmental projects in rural areas. News channels are also giving tough competition to rural newspapers as they give news on anything and everything. Local people are more interested to watch sensational news rather developmental issues in their locality. Changed perception of local readers also made impact on rural newspapers with regard to news selection. Understanding local needs and providing in a comprehensive way would demand more effort form the journalist. Some of the journalist just copy news form the news channels or from their state counterpart. This is leading to the sink of rural newspapers as they there won't be any new issues comparing to state level newspapers or news channel. The history reveals that major movements in the state

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started with the rural newspapers and brought changes in the society which leads to transformation.

CONCLUSION:

The research results reveal that the rural newspapers are serving the development agenda of rural community but its existence is threatened with the new media developments such as localized additions of state level newspapers and the 24x7 news channels. 53% of the respondents said that the rural press is providing more information on local development projects and it also brings out the problem in the implementation of government problem. The rural press is also appropriate to do this activity. The rest of the respondents felt the same function in carried out by state level newspapers.

The interviews with the professional revealed that rural newspaper is lacking with professionalism and facing infrastructural problems. Government agencies are not supporting considerable for its survival. Majority of the respondents opined that the local newspaper only can give detailed description of local news. 79% of the respondents felt that local media in appropriate to give local news. 21% said state level media is good for distributing local news.

The journalists are not researching the issues and actualities rather receive information from official source which be sometimes glorified or mislead. The newspapers should look at the development avenues for community and direct the community towards development but the present media is obsessed with news channel based content selection and presentation. Rural press has the potential to set the agenda for the rural community even today with the advent of 24x7 news channels.

News channels have monopolized the media market, which is homogenizing the news contents. This would result in biased analysis and presentation on news. National newspapers look at international channels for their international news and the local regional channels for regional news, state level newspapers refer national channels for national news in detail along with agency copy as they cannot appoint correspondents at every state. Similarly rural newspapers look at the news channels for the state or national news. These news channels also determine the news value and its importance. Sometime locally important news will be downplayed with the influence of news channels.

It has become a routine of a rural press to watch 3-4 news channels for their reference in content selection. The breaking news is noted down and reporters are assigned to work on the same. Even locally important news is reported by the rural reporter as presented in the news channel. For the photos news channels are emergency source. TV footages are taken to use as still photos.

28 issues from 4 selected news papers are taken for the study. Kannadamma 12 pages main edition. It has 4 color pages and last page is containing mostly sports and rarely with film based information. Suddi moola has 8 pages main edition with all color pages. Andholana has 10-12 pages in main edition and supplements. All the pages printed in color.

The analysis shows that Suddi Moola gives 77.1% of news related to local issues in the front page. Adholana gives 33.3% of space in the front page to local news. Praja Pragathi and Kannadamma gives 8.8% and 2% respectively for local news.

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