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EDITOR'S NOTE

The often heard statement is here again. Mass Communication research in India is still at an infant stage. Lack of professionalism, commitment and encouragement make impediments in carrying out research enquiries with rigour in our scenario, we know. With oddities at hand, our trivial endeavour to provide a platform to communication researchers sees its shape again in the form of this issue of *Communication and Media Studies.* The present issue showcases empirical as well as theoretical studies designed within our media matrix.

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Agenda Setting Functions of Malayalam News Television: A study on the Coverage of By-elections (2015) in Aruvikkara LAC, Kerala

■ **SANJEEV S. R.***

ABSTRACT

Agenda setting functions of Mass Media was widely researched and many scholars have sought the relation between media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda. A consistent follow-up of this study area has always resulted in putting forth some suggestions for better media practice. A politically sensitive and media-filled state like Kerala- an India State which was marked as a socially developed region born out of public action- is always a ground for further enquiry. The study enquired about the relation between media agenda and public agenda during a by-election campaign period to verify the agenda setting functions of regional news Television. Triangulation method was adopted to describe the media agenda and quantitative estimation was performed to label the public agenda. Both results were compared by using statistical tests and it was found that even with presence of positive correlation of issues featured in both agendas, the priorities of media and public were different.

Keywords : ***Agenda, Issue, Salience, Media Agenda, Public Agenda, News Television, By elections***

Introduction

Agenda setting functions of Mass Media has been widely investigated by media scholars around the world. The diffusion of Mass Media messages in developing countries has attained greater pace with the advent of globalisation and free markets. The existence of mass media institutions is greatly dependent on their financial, technological and innovative capabilities more in this competitive environment. However

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the role of media in nurturing individual freedom, socio-economic growth and development and democracy is becoming more crucial in a globalised system.

Mass Media in India is currently operating in India by facing these dual challenges. To retain its base and to expand further, mass media is in a constant search for issues that have direct bearing on its audience and innovative presentation formats to tell the story. This process brings about a media agenda which may or may not be structured in a deliberate manner.

These studies in Mass Communication over several decades revealed that the issues which found occupancy in media agenda at times influence the audience attitudes towards these issues and may invite responses from them. The pioneering research on agenda setting functions of media, the Chapel Hill Study by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw(1972), itself declared that mass media set the agenda for the public (Dearing and Rogers6-7). Apart from the media agenda or the set of issues that have been presented by the media in a hierarchical form, some other issues might have caught the attention of the public. This may be due to the realities they are encountering on a daily basis. A public agenda, which is defined as 'the public's hierarchy of issues at a certain point in time', is thus crystallised. There is every chance for occurrence of similarities and differences in media agenda and public agenda.

Elections to legislative positions are the time when the public identifies, evaluates and concludes certain issues which affect them in daily lives. Media identifies certain issues and presents them as important ones for the public during the same period through a standard operating procedure and consistent observation of the audience. The media and public agenda may be identical or different according to the salience of issues. This study aims to measure the change, if any, of salience of issues in media agenda and public agenda during an election period in a geographical area where media has high degree of saturation.

The study was conducted in Aruvikkara Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC) in Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala state during the by-election (2015) campaign period (27th June to 30th July). A post-election study was conceived to meet the objectives of the study, as the population has clearly stated their salience of issues by casting their franchise. Thus, the study was designed to measure the change if any, from stated public agenda with the media agenda.

Significance of the Study

The 'satellite invasion' in India since 90's has redrawn the canvass of Indian media, particularly News Television, with its volume of foot print, diversity in content and way of presentation. The spontaneous growth of Indian News Television has invited new practices in broadcast journalism such as extreme aggression, campaigns with single objective, sensationalism, debating etc. Nalin Mehta, for instance, stated that (241-242) News Television has provided a mass platform to extend the Indian propensity for argumentation and political debate by taking cues mainly from Amartya Sen's works. State which addresses the issues of socio-economic development of its citizens is the end-product of the political process in a democratic system. Mass Media in India assumes a significant space in the political process, development debates and in the process of encountering social problems and thereby asserting its role in the formation of a democratic state. In this process, media -at times unconsciously- set an agenda for the people. During an election period, the media agenda is solidified as some issues have climbed up in the hierarchy of events.

The public agenda during an election period in a democratic society is expected to be reflected in the agenda set by the media. In such cases, as a corollary, one can say that media could guarantee the fulfillment of its functions. Here the study attempts to reveal the set of issues perceived as important by the people of Aruvikkara LAC when they made their decision to cast their votes in by-elections for the candidates. The study further aims to label the issues that were appeared in media during the same period in a hierarchical manner. In other words, it explores the agenda of Malayalam News Television Channels during the Aruvikkara by-elections. A study on the relation between the media and public agendas in the context of by-elections in Kerala may establish the role of media in reflecting the issues important for the people.

Review of Literature

Sucheta Nair, in her thesis titled 'Agenda Setting Function of the India Press with Specific Relevance to the Press in Kerala',(115-121) sought the correlation between media agenda and public agenda by estimating the salience of issues in the content of four Indian dailies, their readership and the rank of order of issues in media agenda by the sample readers. The study established a positive correlation between media and public agenda issues. The study pointed out the mismatch between rank order in both media and public agendas.

Ranbir Singh studied the issues covered by Indian dailies(1-33) for one week and found that some important issues which have direct bearing on the lives of people such as development and health failed to occupy prominent position in the media agenda whereas crime stories climbed up in the salience. Politics is not the foundational- pillar of media agenda according to this study.

Roy L.Behr and Shanto Iyengar pointed out, in their research paper titled 'Television News, real World Cues and Changes in the Public Agenda"(38-56), that public concern or agenda does not influence Television news. They also argued that lead stories in television news have a powerful role in shaping public agenda. A longitudinal data analysis was conducted for three issues inflation, energy and unemployment' by quantitative estimation of TV News content in US TV Channels in a stipulated period.

Objectives of the Study

General:

The general objective of the study was to distinguish the agenda setting functions of Malayalam News Television Channels in a specific period. By outlining the set of issues according to the priority given by Malayalam News Television Channels, the study aimed to define the media agenda during the campaign period of by-elections (2015) at Aruvikkara LAC, Kerala. The study further aimed to identify the most important issues of the people of Aruvikkara to describe the public agenda. Analysis through statistical methods to demonstrate the relation between the media and public agendasrelevant for the area of study was the final objective of this research project.

Specific:

- To identify the issues appeared in Malayalam News Television Channels during the by-election campaign at Aruvikkara LAC, Kerala in 2015.
- To point out the importance attributed to the issues by Malayalam News TelevisionChannels during the by-election campaign at Aruvikkara LAC, Kerala in 2015.
- To determine the media agenda by combining the aspects revealed from objectives 1 and 2.
- To identify the issues perceived as important by the voting public of Aruvikkara LAC with respect to demographic variables during the by-election campaign period

and

- To compare the media agenda and public agenda during the Aruvikkara LAC by-election campaign and to find out the relation between the two variables.

Limitations of the Study

The study was confined to Malayalam TV News Channels alone. Other mass media such as Newspapers and social media which have a role in agenda setting functions was not accounted for in this study. Very strong inter personal communication channels might also have strong influence on the population of the study area while considering the formation of public agenda. The study was confined to just one LAC of 140 others in the state. Thus, even with the application of scientific data collection methods, any attempt to generalise the results to a vast population of the state is immature.

Research Design

a. Media Agenda:

In-depth interviews with two senior broadcast journalists of two Malayalam TV Channels who monitored the news flow and reported the news events from Aruvikkara LAC revealed the issues dealt with during the election campaign (26.05.2015(election declaration) to 25.06.2015(last date of public campaign)).

Analysis of 19 special election bulletins of two Malayalam TV Channels(Asianet News and Manorama News) by quantifying and categorising the number of headlines which falls under various issues was performed to know the importance attributed by the channels to each issue.

b. Public Agenda:

A field study was conducted among the electorate of Aruvikkara LAC on 03.07.2015 ie., after the declaration of poll results, by employing the survey method to describe and prioritise the issues which shaped up the media agenda as observed by the respondents and the public agenda. As the survey was conducted immediately after the by- poll, the remembrance of issues by the respondents was high. Further, as they cast their franchise, they have already expressed their opinion firmly according to the issues that are relevant for them.

Sampling

The population of the study was the enlisted voters of Aruvikkara LAC. By-elections were held on 27.06.2015 and the results were declared on 30.06.2015. The decision to cast vote for a particular candidate and the subsequent action taken by the voters may or may not have been the result of any of the variables under study. By taking cue from the actual results, the samples were drawn for the study purpose.

Aruvikkara LAC was constituted by eight Panchayaths (Poovachal, Aruvikkara, Vellanad, Vithura, Tholicode, Uzhamalakkal, Aryanadu and Kuttichal) with a total of 1,85,216 voters out of which 87,396(47.19%) were males and 97,820(52.81%) were females. 1,43,218(77.3%) voters cast their franchise in the by-election. The three main contestants were ruling Congress (I) led UDF, opposition CPI (M) led LDF and the BJP which is in power at the centre. The demise of G. Karthikeyan, former speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly and MLA of Aruvikara LAC was the reason for the by-elections. The ruling front fielded his son K S Sabarinathan as their candidate and the LDF deputed M Vijayakumar, former speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly as the opponent. Veteran BJP leader O Rajagopal, who garnered maximum votes for their party in various elections, was also entered into the fray. The final results were in favour of ruling front with a margin of 10,128 votes.

A clustered random sampling method was adopted to draw samples for the study. Three clusters, Vellanad Panchayath, Aruvikkara Panchayath and Poovachal Panchayath were identified for the study according to the political character exhibited in the by-elections. Aruvikkara was the sole cluster which had given majority for opposition LDF among the eight panchayaths. Poovachal Panchayath was considered as cluster for the study as the BJP acquired maximum number of votes from this area. Although Poovachal Panchayath had given maximum majority for the ruling UDF among seven others, Vellanad Panchayath was taken as the third cluster for study, as it has given the second largest majority for the ruling front. Thus the three major political contestants were represented in the selection of clusters. To further ensure the political representation of each cluster, samples were selected from the booths where the respective party has yielded maximum number of votes.

Every fifth household which falls in the vicinity of the polling booths considered was approached for the study. Samples who have exposure to Malayalam News Channel content on Aruvikkara LAC by-

elections and those who cast their franchise were selected for the study. Further, according to the demographic profile of the LAC, proportionate representation of males and females was ensured during this process. Duplication of samples from a single house hold was avoided.In the cases of absence of valid samples in the fifth household, next house was visited. After establishing rapport with the respondent, the researcher obtained responses from the selected samples and the respondents have not found any difficulty in filling up the questionnaire.A chart showing the sample selection is shown below.

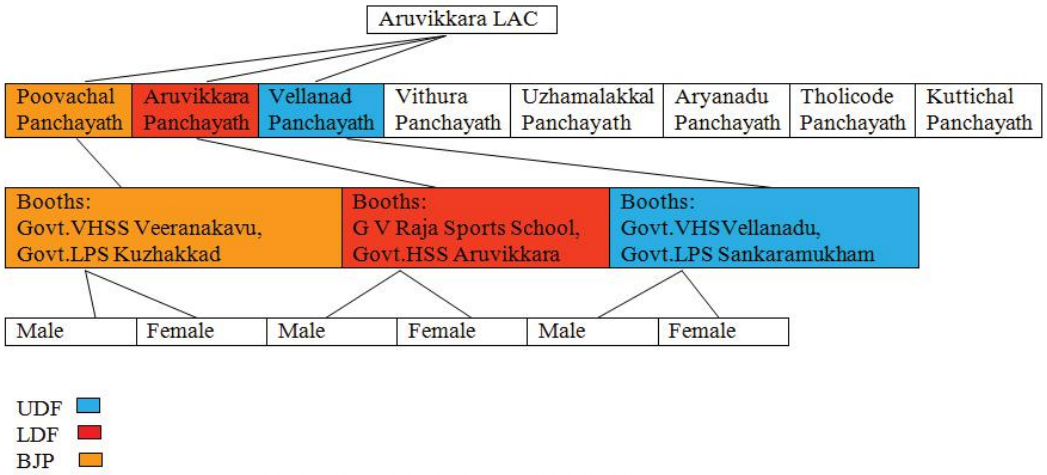

Chart 1 Showing the Sampling Procedure

Data were collected from 225 respondents by dividing them as 75 each from three clusters. After eliminating the erroneous and doubtful data from 25 respondents, 200 samples were selected for the study. The final sample figures are given below.

Table 1.0 Sample figures

Cluster	Male	Female	Total
Vellanad	34	34	68
Aruvikkara	29	31	60
Poovachal	33	39	72
Total	96 (48%)	104 (52%)	200 (100%)

As the concentration of respondents who favour BJP and Congress is more in Poovachal Panchayath, more samples were drawn from this cluster. The final data was coded into an SPSS version 16.0 data sheet.

Tools of Data Collection - Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was prepared with a total of 13 questions with 9 independent and 21 dependent variables. The last question was an open-ended one to include any other variable relevant for the study as observed by the respondents.

The first part of the questionnaire has sought the personal details, Television viewing habit and political bias of the respondents.

The second part enquired about the Malayalam News Television content on issues which were relevant to Aruvikkara LAC as observed by the respondents. The issues presented by the TV channels were identified earlier through interviews with the broadcast journalists and through content study of headlines of special election bulletins of two TV News channels.

The respondents were asked to rank these issues according to the importance attributed by TV Channels. Thus the media agenda as perceived by the respondents were obtained.

The last part of the questionnaire consisted of the six above mentioned issues and its influence on voting decision of the respondents. The respondents were asked to rank these issues according to the order of influence of each one on their voting decision. The second last question enquired about the influence of campaign by prominent leaders.

Analysis and Findings

Sample Profile:

Table 2.0 Demographic Profile of the Respondents (Total N=200)

Variable	Divisions	Frequency N	percent
Sex	Male	96	48
	Female	104	52
Age Group	18-22	21	10.5
	23-35	44	22
	36-55	85	42.5
	56 and above	50	25
Education	Up to High school	50	25
	SSLC	59	29.5
	+2	36	18
	Graduation	42	21
	Post Graduation	3	1.5
	Professional	10	5
Income	BPL	63	31.5
	APL	133	66.5

Continued...

Religion	Hindu	167	83.5
	Muslim	10	5
	Christian	23	11.5
Caste	General	121	60.5
	OBC	61	32.1
	SC	11	5.6
	ST	1	0.5

Malayalam News Television Viewing Habits:

Table 2.1 Malayalam News Television Viewing Habits of the Respondents		
Duration of Malayalam News Television Watching	**Frequency N**	**Percent**
Less than half an hour	36	18
1/2 hr- 1 hr	80	40
1hr-2hrs	49	24.5
More than 2 hrs	35	17.5
	200	100

Political bias of the respondents:

Table 2.2 Political bias of the respondents		
Party/Front	Frequency N	Percent
LDF	45	22.5
UDF	38	19
BJP	34	17
Unbiased	83	41.5

Media Agenda During the By-election Campaign

In depth interviews with senior broadcast journalists revealed the following issues.

Corruption: The news related to alleged corruption and misuse of power by the ruling party in the implementation of liquor policy announced by the Government of Kerala, alleged involvement of elected representatives belonging to ruling front in a financial fraud, which was widely termed as 'solar scam' in media were the major issues related to this variable.

Development: The development issues of many backward areas in the Aruvikkara LAC and the issues related to the development projects mooted by the ruling front across the state was discussed in the media. The overall performance of the ruling front in terms of good governance was also analysed by the media during the campaign.

Sympathy factor: The personality of Late Mr. G Karthikeyan, who was the elected representative of Aruvikkara LAC for five consecutive terms, has strong influence on the electorate according to the media.

Communal equations: Apart from development and governance, which have direct bearing on the lives of the people, considerations such as caste, community and religion was also influenced the voting people during elections in the state. Thus such equations assumed importance in media space during the campaign.

Prominent leaders: Eminent political leaders of the state campaigned extensively for their respective candidates in Aruviakkara LAC. Some of them are Oommen Chandy, Chief Minister of Kerala, V.S Achuthannandan, Opposition Leader of Kerala and O.Rajagopal, the candidate of the BJP. The ability to draw non-partisan votes of Rajagopal was exhibited in previous elections. Thus, apart from being a candidate, his personality has an independent stature in the election arena.

Media Agenda by Headline Content Study

The order of importance to these issues attributed by Malayalam TV News Channels was determined by analysing the content of the election bulletin headlines. 19 bulletins were selected and 76 headlines were considered for the study.

Table 2.3 Analysis of Election Bulletin headlines (No. of bulletins - 19; No. of Headlines - 76)

Headline content (Issues)	First Position	Second Position	Third Position	Fourth Position	Total no. of appearance in headlines	Percent	Order of importance
General	9	10	5	11	35	46.05	Not accounted
Prominent leaders	9	3	3	2	17	22.37	1
Development	-	1	9	5	15	19.74	2
Corruption	1	4	1	-	6	7.9	3
Sympathy factor	1	-	1	-	2	2.78	4
Communal equations	-	-	1	-	1	1.32	5
Total					76	100	

General news stories which depicted the progress of campaign, basic information about the constituency, routine events such as candidate declaration, news on electoral process etc. was found occupied in the top position. However for the purpose of the study, these were eliminated while determining the rank order.

Both channels had given four headlines according to the order of importance in each election bulletins. Table 2.3 showed the issues and their position in the headlines. The computation of total number of appearance of the respective issue in headlines yielded the order of importance.

Thus the media agenda of Malayalam News TV Channels during the by election campaign of Aruvikkara LAC was labeled. The campaign by prominent leaders occupied the most important position in quantitative terms. The successive positions in the media agenda were development, corruption, sympathy factor and communal equations. However, a qualitative search proved that issues such as development and corruption were also featured in the campaign of prominent leaders. Thus it is important to recognise the fact that issues are overlapping in these headline types.

Media Agenda as Observed by the Respondents

Table 2.4 given below showed that, the rank order of issues appeared in Malayalam TV News Channels were altered as per the observation of the respondents. According to them, corruption was the most important issue highlighted by the Malayalam TV Channels. The next important issue for Malayalam TV News was development and the successive ranks were given to sympathy factor, prominent leaders and communal equations.

Table 2.4: Distribution of Respondents by their observation on Malayalam TV News Content N=200

Issues featured in Mal.TV News	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank according to the order of importance
Corruption	2.83	1.886	1
Development	2.87	1.481	2
Sympathy Factor	3.02	1.577	3
Prominent Leaders	3.62	1.447	4
Communal Equations	4.96	1.287	5

Change in Rank Order of Media Agenda Obtained from Headline Content Study and Observation of Respondents

The change in rank order of media agenda issues as observed by the respondents from the rank order obtained from headline content study may be due to the inherent bias of respondents towards issues which was born out of several socio-economic and political factors.

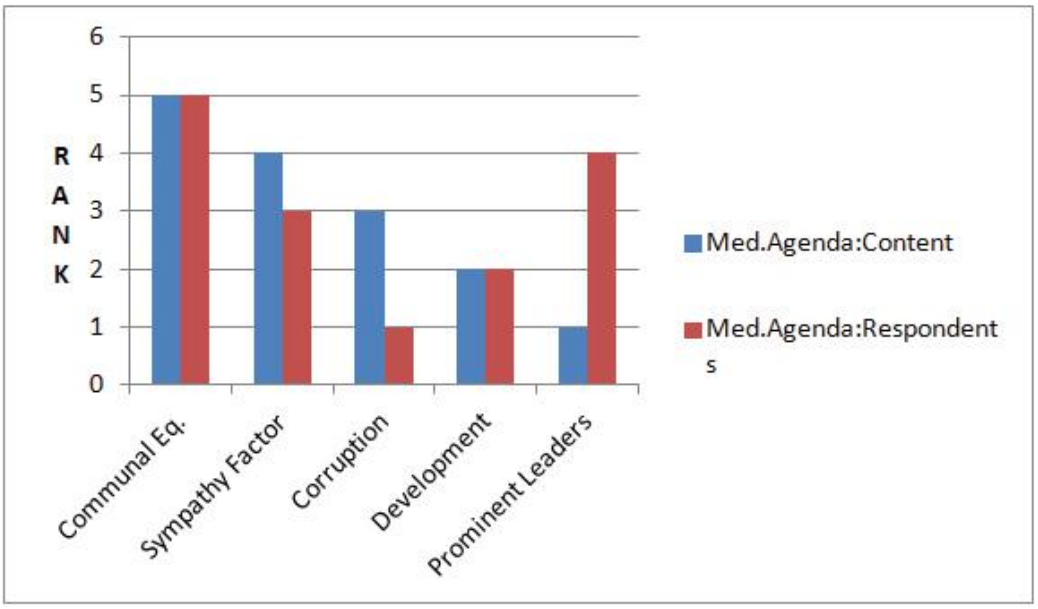

Chart 2: Change in rank order (Media Agenda)

For example, the campaign by prominent leaders attained first rank in the headline content study and fourth rank in the observation of media agenda by the respondents. But the respondents had given first rank for the issue, corruption. Corruption was featured in the campaign of leaders. The overlapping of issues might have a role in the identification and ranking of issues by the respondents. They also might have selectively retained the media content according to their own bias towards issues. It was further deduced that, if the corruption issues featured in the campaign by prominent leaders were isolated, both the headline content study and media agenda analysis among the respondents would have given the same rank order for corruption issues.

The ranks for communal equations and development were the same in both media agenda analysis. A close proximity in the rank order for the issue, sympathy factor, was also observed. Hence, for further analysis, the rank order given by the respondents (as shown in table 2.4) for issues which shaped up the media agenda was considered.

To firm up this finding, the following analysis was conducted.

Table 2.5: Distribution of Respondents by their Political bias on Malayalam TV News Content								
Issues featured in Mal.TV News	**UDF N=38**		**LDF N=45**		**BJP N= 34**		**Unbiased N=82**	
	Mean	**Rank**	**Mean**	**Rank**	**Mean**	**Rank**	**Mean**	**Rank**
Corruption	4.18	4	2.11	1	2.21	1	2.83	2
Development	2.61	1	3.24	3	2.91	2	2.79	1
Sympathy Factor	2.74	2	3.56	4	3.12	3	2.79	1
Prominent Leaders	3.68	3	3.22	2	3.91	4	3.68	3
Communal Equations	4.79	5	5.02	5	4.49	5	5.20	4

As per the analysis given in table 2.5, the unbiased respondents (41.5%) observed two factors in Malayalam TV News Channels as most important issues and they were development and sympathy factor. UDF respondents had also given the same priority for these issues. The opposition LDF and BJP respondents were of the view that corruption was the most important factor highlighted in Malayalam TV News. However, communal equations reported by Malayalam TV News Channels were figured with least importance in two types of analysis.

Table 2.6: Distribution of Respondents by Gender on Malayalam TV News Content				
Issues featured in Mal.TV News	**Male**		**Female**	
	Mean	**Rank**	**Mean**	**Rank**
Corruption	2.85	1	2.82	2
Development	3.01	2	2.74	1
Sympathy Factor	3.09	3	2.94	3
Prominent Leaders	3.60	4	3.64	4
Communal Equations	4.87	5	5.04	5

Table 2.6 showed that corruption was considered as the Most Important Problem (MIP) presented by TV channels according to the male respondents whereas female respondents found the issue, 'development' in this position. Males attributed second rank to development. Corruption was ranked second by the females. The ranking for the rest of the issues by both groups was identical.

The unbiased respondents and female respondents have ranked 'development' as the MIP. Corruption issue was found in the second position. Sympathy factor occupied the third position for females and it was even more important (Rank=1) for the 'unbiased' group. Campaign by prominent leaders and communal equations have obtained identical pattern of ranking by these groups.

Unbiased and female respondents in this study were found less active in political exchanges and thus their estimation of media agenda issues can be considered as more impartial. Thus a realistic picture of media agenda was synthesised from the observation of the respondents. See the chart below.

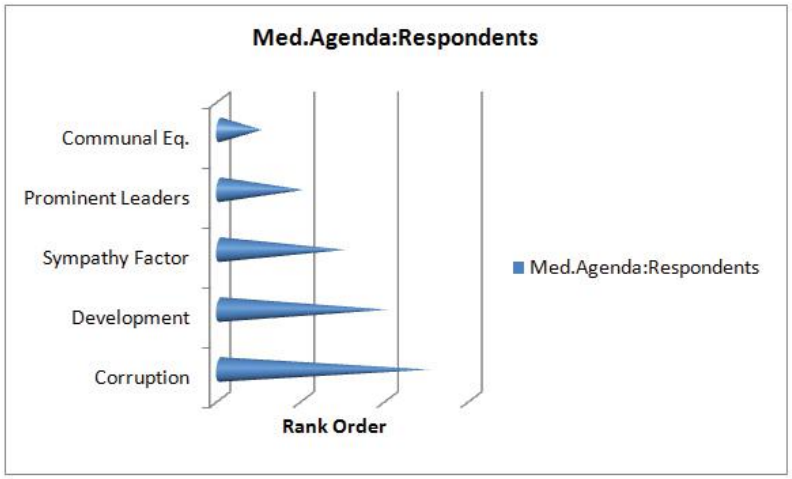

Chart 3: Media agenda considered for the purpose of the study

Public Agenda During the By-election campaign

The issues identified and ranked from the above analysis were listed and the respondents were asked to rank these issues in the order of importance on their voting decision. Table 3.0 showed the results.

Table 3.0 Distribution of respondents by their degree of influence of issues on voting decision Total N=200

Issues which affected the voting decision	Mean	Rank
Development	2.47	1
Sympathy Factor	3.16	2
Corruption	3.39	3
Communal Equations	3.89	4
Prominent Leaders	4.10	5

The respondents clearly stated that development issues were the most influenced factor for them while they cast their franchise in the by elections. Personality of late Mr. G Karthikeyan who was the representative of the constituency for 24 years and his close relation with the electorate was also influenced the respondents and they ranked this factor as the second most important one. Allegation of corruption against the ruling front, campaign of prominent leaders and communal equations were the next successive ranks given by the respondents.

Table 3.1: Distribution of Respondents by their Political bias on their degree of influence on voting decision Total N = 200

Issues featured in Mal.TV News	UDF N=38		LDF N=45		BJP N= 34		Unbiased N=82	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Development	2.16	2	2.69	2	3.03	2	2.26	1
Sympathy Factor	2.05	1	3.91	4	3.62	4	3.10	2
Corruption	5.34	5	2.31	1	2.18	1	3.56	3
Communal Equations	4.24	3	3.98	5	3.38	3	3.94	4
Prominent leaders	4.29	4	3.80	3	3.91	5	4.23	5

A similar pattern was emerged among opposition LDF and BJP respondents for the top two ranks. Corruption and development were the first and second ranks respectively given by these groups. Sympathy factor and development were the top two ranks for UDF respondents. However the unbiased respondents had given first rank for development issues and second rank for sympathy factor. Corruption featured only in third position among this group. Campaigns by prominent leaders influenced least among the BJP and unbiased respondents. It was in fourth position among the UDF respondents and in last position among the decisive unbiased respondents.

Analysis of Media Agenda and Public Agenda

The rank order of issues in Media Agenda and Public Agenda was tabulated and graphically represented below.

Table 4.0 Comparison between Media Agenda and Public Agenda

Issues	Media Agenda as observed by the respondents: Rank Order	Public agenda which influenced the voting decision: Rank Order
Prominent leaders	4	5
Development	2	1
Corruption	1	3
Sympathy factor	3	2
Communal equations	5	4

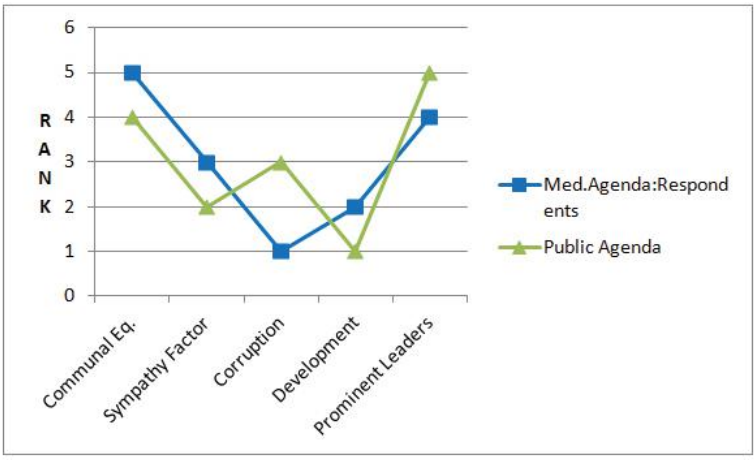

Chart 4: Comparison between Media Agenda and Public Agenda

From chart 4, it was evident that the public agenda varies from media agenda. However four issues (prominent leaders' campaign, development, sympathy factor and communal equations) have found proximity with a single unit difference in both media and public agendas. Development issues were ranked one by the public when it featured in second position in media agenda. Sympathy factor and communal equations were ranked second and fourth respectively in public agenda whereas these were found in third and fifth positions in the media agenda. Corruption issues obtained only third rank in public agenda whereas it featured as the most important issue with rank 1 in media agenda. Campaign by prominent leaders occupied only in the last position among the public agenda issues whereas it climbed up just one rank above in media agenda.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analyses were performed between five variables in media and public agendas.

Table 4.1 Correlation analysis between Media Agenda-Respondents and Public Agenda

Issues	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)	Significant level(2-tailed)
Prominent leaders	+0.303	0.01
Development	+0.160	0.05
Corruption	+0.489	0.01
Sympathy factor	+0.378	0.01
Communal equations	+0.247	0.01

All the issues in media agenda as observed by the respondents have positive correlation with the voting decision of the public or public agenda. Thus it can be stated that issues in media agenda have an

influence on voting decision. A closer look at the values of 'r' showed that corruption, sympathy factor and the campaign of the prominent leaders have high degree of positive correlation. Least among them was development. It can also be stated that the inherent bias of the respondents towards issues led them to attend and assimilate issues in media that are dear for them.

Table 4.2 Correlation analysis of the respondents by their political bias: Media Agenda and Public Agenda

Issues	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)				Significant level
	UDF	LDF	BJP	Unbiased	
Prominent leaders	0.090	0.298	0.226	0.414 (significant at the 0.01 level)	0.05
Development	0.296	0.230	0.013	0.091	0.01
Corruption	0.196	0.465	0.165	0.418	0.01
Sympathy factor	0.239	0.427	0.407	0.317	0.01
Communal equations	0.271	-0.042	0.288	0.300	0.01

The above correlation analysis made it clear that all the issues appeared in media agenda and public agenda have positive correlation except 'communal equations' among the LDF respondents. The voting decision of LDF respondents were not driven by the communal equations according to this analysis. The higher values of 'r' among the unbiased respondents might have relatively stronger role in the final outcome of the poll results.

Table 4.3 Correlation analysis of the respondents by gender: Media Agenda and Public Agenda

Issues	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)			
	Male	Significant level(2-tailed)	Female	Significant level(2-tailed)
Development	0.112	0.01	0.212	0.05
Corruption	0.600	0.01	0.387	0.01
Sympathy factor	0.474	0.01	0.281	0.01
Communal equations	0.245	0.05	0.261	0.01
Prominent leaders	0.247	0.05	0.353	0.01

A gender-wise correlation analysis had also given the same pattern of 'r' values which showed positive correlation with the variables. However higher values of 'r' for corruption and sympathy factor among males was noteworthy. Strong positive relation was observed among females on the varaible, campaign by prominent leaders.

Conclusion

Even with the presence of positive correlation on the issues in media agenda and public agenda, the priorities were different for the media and the public. Corruption issues alleged against the ruling front which occupied the media space throughout this campaign by stand- alone news stories, sound bytes, debates and in the campaigns of prominent leaders as binary-opposites could find third position only in the public agenda. Development issues in a backward LAC, which was featured in media agenda in the second position, had strong bearing on the voting decision on the voting decision by the public as they have observed it as the Most Important Problem (MIP). Two other issues -sympathy factor which favoured the ruling front and communal equations operated in the constituency- have obtained higher ranks in the public agenda than the media agenda by single unit difference. The importance given to the campaigns of prominent leaders by the media was not received as such by the public as they had given one rank below than the media agenda rank for this factor.

A gap was visible in the identification of issues which are important for the people by the media during this by election campaign. People tend to stick to the indigenous factors such as local development and sympathy towards the former representative than the issues with political content. Orientation of issues with personalities as appeared in media was also not received in the same degree. It is to be noted that communal equations among the electorate have slowly started climbing up in public agenda.

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Science Popularization through Folk Art Forms: Reception Analysis of Sasthra Kala Jathas

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ABSTRACT

The present study seeks to determine the role of traditional media in popularising science in rural areas of Kerala. To get a better understanding of the problems and issues, the work was conceived as a case study of 'Sasthra Kala Jathas', a perfect mix of folk art forms, initiated by Kerala Sahitya Parishath (KSSP), the largest and the eldest surviving peoples' science movement that strives to create a scientific temper among the people of the State. The result shows how various demographic variables interact with the science messages disseminated by KSSP through its Jathas.

Keywords : ***Science popularization, Traditional Media, Folk art form, KSSP***

Introduction

Popularisation of science and technology plays a vital role in all-round development of societies. In particular, science popularisation stimulates intellectual accomplishments, catalyses technological advancement, promotes creativity, produces proficient human resources, prevents environmental degradation and strengthens educational systems. (Adiyodi, (1982). Recognizing such potential of science popularisation, vigorous efforts have been made in both developing

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and developed nations over the last fifty years to increase the level of public understanding of science. But, the results have been less than satisfactory. Why did the science popularisation programmes failed to achieve the desired outcome?

To seek answers to this question, many studies have been carried out by academia as well as governmental agencies. Most of the studies however, approached the problem from sociological or educational perspective, overlooking the significance of 'communication' in science popularisation process Epskamp,(2006), Devan (1986) and Gravengaard (2003) . And, the limited number of studies conducted from communication perspective have tended to focus on the issues like coverage of science in popular media, public perception of science and so on, ignoring the need to examine the scope of public science movements and traditional media. Moreover, science communication in most of the developing nations has remained unexplored. It is in this context that the present study was carried out.

The study sought to examine the rural people's reception of science messages disseminated through folk art forms through a case study of *Sasthra Kala Jathas* of *Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishath* (KSSP), a non-formal public science movement of Kerala State in India. KSSP communicates its ideas and philosophy of science through a variety of print and traditional media. In the print media sector, it brings out three regular publications: *Sasthragathi*', a monthly for general public; *Sasthra Keralam*, a monthly for college students, and Eureka, a biweekly for school children. In addition, it periodically issues pamphlets and books on a wide variety of science subjects. Besides print media, KSSP employs, *Sasthra Kala Jatha*, a novel cultural program with innovative theatrical experiments and participatory communication approach using traditional art forms of Kerala. The art forms used by KSSP in *Sasthra Kala Jathas* range from *Ottanthullal* to *Mappilapattu* and *Kakkarissi Natakam* to *Villupattu*, which are an integral part of rural Kerala. Being indigenous art forms born and nurtured in rural areas, they are attended to by the village communities without any reservations (Balakrishnan,K., 2007). That being the potential, KSSP has been employing them to communicate science messages. How people receive science messages through *Sasthra Kala Jathas*? This question is being explored in this article.

Data Analysis and Findings

To collect data for the study a multi-stage random sampling technique was used taking geographical units of the State such as

districts, blocks and village panchayats into consideration. From the village panchayats which represent the rural areas of the State, a quota sample of 480 users of KSSP channels was arrived at. However, data of 30 respondents was incomplete. Thus, the final sample for the study was 450 users of KSSP channels. The following table details a comparison of the use frequency of the various science popularization media employed by KSSP.

Table 1: Regularity of the Use of KSSP Channels

KSSP Channels	Regularity Nature				Total
	Regular	Quite Often	Sometimes	Rare	
Sasthra Kala Jatha	207 (46.00)	229 (50.89)	0 (0.00)	14 (3.11)	450 (100.00)
Sasthragathi	26 (5.78)	124 (27.56)	205 (45.56)	95 (21.10)	450 (100.00)
Pamphlets	12 (2.67)	332 (73.78)	83 (18.44)	23 (5.11)	450 (100.00)
Science Books	2 (0.44)	69 (15.33)	243 (54.00)	136 (30.22)	450 (100.00)

As many as 207 (46 per cent) of the 450 respondents indicated that they regularly attended the annual SasthraKala Jathas. Another 229 (50.89 per cent) respondents reported to attending Jathas quite often, ie. once in two years. Those who attended rarely constituted a minority of 3.11 per cent of the respondents.

While noting the popularity of SasthraKala Jathas it is important to keep in view that it is an annual affair, whereas the other KSSP media such as pamphlets, science books and *Sasthragathi* are brought out more frequently. For instance, *Sasthragathi* is a monthly publication, pamphlets are issued several times a year and around 40 new or revised editions of books are published annually. Hence, the regularity of the use of SasthraKala Jatha and other KSSP media may appear to be incomparable. In view of such a possibility, the regularity categories of 'regular', 'quite often', 'sometimes' and 'rare' have been appropriately defined taking the periodicity of each publication into consideration.

In contrast to such a popularity of SasthraKala Jathas, the traditional communication channels used by KSSP to advance scientific information and knowledge among rural audiences, the popularity of other three print media was dismal. Among the three, *Sasthragathi*, whichwas regularly read by only 5.78 per cent respondents was followed by pamphlets (2.67 per cent). Science books were the least regularly read print media. In the 'quite often'-read category, the first place (73.78 per cent) belonged to pamphlets. Books on science subjects issued by

KSSP were being read 'sometimes' by 54 per cent of the respondents. In addition, over 30 per cent of the respondents read books rarely.

From such a distribution, it clearly emerges that *Sasthra Kala Jathas*, the traditional medium remains the most popular science communication vehicle of KSSP, followed by *Sasthragathi*, pamphlets and science books in that order. This finding certainly assigns importance to the role of traditional media in popularising science in contemporary rural Kerala. It validates the assumption that the traditional art forms employed in *Sasthra Kala Jathas* have immense potential to increase people's participation and hopefully initiate social change because they are compatible with the cultural values of the audience and are more persuasive, persistent, and personal. In addition, they are participatory in nature with ample scope for people to play an active role in their production and performance. Such an involvement often erases the distinction between the performer and the audience. Moreover, they are inexpensive and affordable. They require no elaborated stage arrangements, excessive accompaniments and intricate microphysical movements as in the case of classical art forms. With such unique features, these art forms provide for easy interpersonal communication with a potential for greater impact in rural communities than the impersonal mediated channels of electronic and print media. Their cultural proximity and traditional belongingness permit them to match well with the cognitive competence of rural masses. Naturally, it is assumed that all these characteristics of the traditional art forms used in the Jathas positively contribute to their popularity.

Regularity of Attending *Sasthra Kala Jatha* by Gender

The analysis reported in Table 2 revealed that male and female did not differ much in the frequency of attending *Sasthra Kala Jathas*. The large majority of both male and female respondents attended *Sasthra Kala Jathas* either 'regularly' or 'quite often'.

Table 2: Regularity of Attending *Sasthra Kala Jatha* by Gender

Gender Groups	Regularity Nature				Total
	Regular	Quite often	Sometimes	Rare	
Male	114 (46.72)	120 (49.18)	0 (0.00)	10 (4.10)	244 (100.00)
Female	93 (45.15)	109 (52.91)	0 (0.00)	4 (1.94)	206 (100.00)
Total	207 (46.00)	229 (50.89)	0 (0.00)	14 (3.11)	450 (100.00)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage
Pearson Chi-square: 2.03588, df=2, p=.361351

Regularity of Attending *Sasthra Kala Jatha* by Age

In terms of the four age groups, there were statistically significant differences in the way the *Sasthra Kala Jathas* were attended to. The incidence of attending *Sasthra Kala Jathas* 'rarely' (8.33 per cent) and 'quite often' (63.33 per cent) was dominant in the elderly age group of 50-59 years (See Table 3). The tendency of attending *Sasthra Kala Jathas* 'rarely' was found to decreases with an increase in age of the respondents. Such a distribution which was found statistically significant (p=.000337) suggests that middle and younger age groups attended *Sasthra Kala Jathas* more frequently than the elderly in rural Kerala.

Table 3: Regularity of Attending *Sasthra Kala Jatha* by Age

Age Groups	Regularity Nature				Total
	Regular	Quite often	Sometimes	Rare	
20-29 years	58 (40.56)	84 (58.74)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.70)	143 (100.00)
30-39 years	69 (53.08)	59 (45.38)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.54)	130 (100.00)
40-49 years	63 (53.85)	48 (41.03)	0 (0.00)	6 (5.13)	117 (100.00)
50-59 years	17 (28.33)	38 (63.33)	0 (0.00)	5 (8.33)	60 (100.00)
Total	207 (46.00)	229 (50.89)	0 (0.00)	14 (3.11)	450 (100.00)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage
Pearson Chi-square: 25.0383, df=6, p=.000337

Regularity of Attending *Sasthra Kala Jatha* by Education

As noted in Table 4, those with Plus-Two education (56.06 per cent) were the most regular in attending *Sasthra Kala Jathas* as compared to those with PG and above (54.55 per cent), below SSLC (38.89 per cent) and SSLC (37.19 per cent) educational qualifications. In contrast to such high regular attendance by those educational groups, less than 7 per cent graduates attended *Sasthra Kala Jathas* regularly. They also constituted the largest majority of those who rarely attended the Sastha Kala Jathas. The incidence of attending *Sasthra Kala Jathas* 'quite often' was the highest among 'below SSLC' respondents followed by SSLC, Degree, Plus-Two and PG and above educational groups. Such an education-wise distribution of respondents in terms of their frequency of the use of *Sasthra Kala Jathas* was found to be statistically significant at a probability level of .01044

Table 4: Regularity of Attending *Sasthra Kala Jatha* by Education

Education Groups	Regularity Nature				Total
	Regular	Quite often	Sometimes	Rare	
Below SSLC	28 (38.89)	44 (61.11)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	72 (100.00)
SSLC	45 (37.19)	72 (59.50)	0 (0.00)	4 (3.31)	121 (100.00)
Plus-Two	74 (56.06)	56 (42.42)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.52)	132 (100.00)
Degree	7 (6.80)	48 (46.60)	0 (0.00)	48 (46.60)	103 (100.00)
PG and above	12 (54.55)	9 (40.91)	0 (0.00)	1 (4.54)	22 (100.00)
Total	207 (46.00)	229 (50.89)	0 (0.00)	14 (3.11)	450 (100.00)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage
Pearson Chi-square: 19.9758, df=8, p=.010444

From the above analysis of the regularity of attending *Sasthra Kala Jathas* by respondents belonging to various demographic variables, it emerges that the variable of gender had no bearing on their attendance in *Sasthra Kala Jathas* organized annually by KSSP in rural Kerala. However, the demographic variables of age and education appeared to have some influence on the regularity of attending *Sasthra Kala Jathas*.

Conclusions

The first objective of the study was to identify the use of KSSP's print (*Sasthragathi*, Pamphlets and Science Books) and traditional (*Sasthra Kala Jathas*) media of KSSP as science information sources. The analysis revealed that *Sasthra Kala Jatha*, the omnibus traditional media used by KSSP as an annual feature was far more popular than other media. This finding clearly assigns importance to the role of traditional media in popularising science in contemporary rural Kerala. It also indicates that the traditional art forms employed in *Sasthra Kala Jathas* have immense potential to increase people's participation because of their cultural proximity, entertaining content and traditional belongingness that go well with the cognitive competence of rural masses.

In contrast to such a popularity of *Sasthra Kala Jathas*, the popularity of other three print media such as *Sasthagathi*, science books and pamphlets was found to be less prominent. In terms of the nature of the regularity of the use of print channels, *Sasthragathi* is followed by pamphlets and science books in that order. The habit of regular reading

of science books was low among the rural people. This tendency assumes importance in view of the fact that KSSP claims it to be the single largest science publisher in Kerala with about 30 to 40 new titles and reprints per year.

The study revealed the higher popularity of *Sasthra Kala Jatha*, KSSP's traditional media as compared to its print media among the rural folk. The impressive popularity of traditional media emanates from their special features like cultural proximity, traditional belongingness, infotainment capability and cost-effectiveness.

The finding that traditional media are quite popular among the lower income groups and lower educational categories reaffirms the suitability of such channels for popularising science among rural population that is most often characterized by poverty and illiteracy.

It is also to be noted that the rural audiences assessed the traditional media used by KSSP as more satisfactory in respect of their form and content parameters as compared to that of KSSP print media. Such an assessment owes largely to the fact that KSSP does not modify the original format of traditional art forms when it incorporates new science content into them. Instead, it develops science content for traditional media imbibing the linguistic simplicity and textual comprehensibility of the folk art forms. This method helps the rural audiences to easily recognize and enjoy their familiar art forms and to comprehend the message presented through them.

For instance, KSSP in one of its presentations illustrated the life story of well-known scientist Galileo Galilei through the traditional art form of *Villupattu* (*Villadichanpattu*). *Villupattu* is a folk skit performed in connection with temple festivals. Bows (villu) adorned with small musical devices are used to produce tunes to which artists perform their skits with satiric folk songs. KSSP kept all these features and paraphernalia of *Villupattu* while telling the story of Galileo. At the same time, it utilized the potential of the art form to satirically present the stupidity of the clergy which tried to swaddle the scientific truth by killing the scientist.

Using similar technique, KSSP presents many science related issues through arts forms like *Komaramthullal*, *Mappilapattu*, *Oppana*, *Chakyarkoothu* and the like.

The most remarkable aspect of *Sasthra Kala Jatha* of KSSP is that it facilitated the confluence of traditional media representing

diverse cultural and ethnic groups of Kerala. Before the introduction of *Sasthra Kala Jatha*, KSSP used to perform individual traditional art forms enriched with science messages as individual programmes. The confluence of art forms began with the innovation of *Sasthra Kala Jatha*. Folk art forms ranging from Ottanthullal to Nadanpattu are perfectly mixed in the Jathas. Each year the Jathas focus on a particular theme and the art forms featured in it are conceived to present each aspect of the theme. Moreover, the Jatha as one complete programme is set in a particular theatrical method like arena theatre (as in 2005) or pure street theatre model (as in 2007). Thus, KSSP preserves the identity of *Sasthra Kala Jatha* as a complete theatrical experience even when various traditional art forms are blended together without losing their original format.

Such a model of traditional media confluence introduced by KSSP through *Sasthra Kala Jatha* has the potential to satisfy different cultural and ethnic groups in the audience. At the same time, the confluence model provides for all segments of the audience to enjoy the programme as a unique single theatrical experience focusing on a particular theme. Thus, to a certain extent, the model transcends the limitations of selective-exposure tendency of the audiences.

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Media Impact on Culture: The Need to Demolish Popular Myths

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ABSTRACT

The culture of every society is a flowing river. It can never be a solid boulder which can be preserved or passed on from generation to generation. Any culture critic who holds views contrary to this fact could only be swimming in a pool of delusionary myths.

Keywords : ***Culture, Media Impact, Faulty Criticism, Preservation of Culture***

Introduction

Media has often been blamed for everything ranging from upsetting the traditions of the society to corrupting or destroying cultures of all kinds. Indeed, critics often take delight in a sort of media bashing accusing our media of everything from "corrupting our ancient values" to destruction of local cultures. Very often, we tend to swallow such "criticisms" without salt.

But, do such moral judgments that we generally admit to be "true" stand on any scientific foundations? Are the vociferous arguments of the self-styled media critics really based on facts? Or, are many of such criticisms just meaningless chatter that simply rely on erroneous concepts, faulty assumptions, and inadequate data?

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Faulty Foundations of Criticism

Many of those criticisms, traditionally passed as *facts* are questioned here. The following discussion suggests that many of those sweeping remarks that we hear on themes like *cultural imperialism, stereotyped culture, global culture, cultural lag and mass culture* themselves are often riddled with illogical, unscientific, and irrational factors.

Many often the media/culture critics themselves appear to be suffering from the various maladies that the critics often accuse the mass media of: exaggeration, oversimplification, faulty reasoning, bias, incompleteness, lack of fairness, unjustified generalisation, lack of inadequate data, and so on.

Indeed, the mountains of literature---theories, speculations, and concepts---concerning the *undesirable* and dangerous impact of mass media on culture are growing, and growing fast. Few could resist the temptation to join the great stream of media critics who apparently enjoy the media bashing, often *without making any conscious effort to see where they themselves stand.*

Well, it is time to brandish a few spears of sensible questions to confront the ever-enlarging balloons those media critics are enthusiastically blowing. Yes, it is time to watch the watchers.

The Flowing River of Culture

Many media critics, as evident from their views, appear to consider *culture* as a static rather than a dynamic phenomenon which has to be *preserved* (Suroor, 1994). They argue that culture has to be *protected from corruption and invasions* (Dasgupta, 1992). Obviously, their assumption is that *culture* is something that *could be preserved and transmitted* from generation to generation.

Let us stay away from the temptation to continue the never ending process of *defining* the term culture. Instead, let us permit ourselves to be rational enough to admit that *constant change* is a distinctive characteristic of culture.

Indeed, *evolution or change* need not be always perceived as a *threat* : it could also be viewed as *improvement or enrichment.*

To a mind devoid of bias and intolerance, contact with any

different culture is a tremendous opportunity for enrichment and improvement. Such a liberated mind considers all the hue and cry *like cultural invasion, arrival of mass culture and disappearance of subcultures* (Baumann, 1976) as nothing more than the faulty perception based on unrealistic thinking.

Many often, critics are not willing to look closely, indeed with a reasonable attitude, at the fact that *culture cannot be preserved in its pristine form for long.* Perhaps, this sometimes shocking remark may be countered: Then what about our *heritage*, our *timeless* museum items, statues, and paintings? Are they not really being preserved all over the world?

The answer to such panicky questions could be given in a flash: *No! Culture cannot be preserved and transmitted in its pristine form*. But the arrival of its adequate understanding may sometimes require the curing of certain diseases that have struck many critics: a failure to admit and accept change as a fact.

Culture could not be Preserved in its Pristine Form

It is not simply a question of casually nodding to the well known saying, *you cannot step into the same river twice.* What is required is the *willingness to understand and admit that culture, essentially, is dynamic which evolves from moment to moment.* Some new elements are always added to what culture constitutes while others eventually may get vanished. Indeed, those vanished aspects may, sometimes, reappear after a period of time.

Everything that constitutes what could be called culture changes---including the participants and beholders. So, there it is: culture evolves, ceaselessly. It cannot be preserved. There is only "Cultural Evolution". Any culture which claims to destroy another culture is *itself* another culture.

Alas! Culture is a river that flows. *Often called by the same name but different!*

The very process of cultural evolution incorporates what is usually---and enthusiastically---called as p*reservation, isolation, invasion, subversion, and domination.* To the mind, less infected by the fallacies that many media/culture critics make, it is not hard to comprehend that all such phenomena are *part of culture itself.*

None of those dynamic processes are *apart from culture*. On the contrary, they constitute and contribute to what could be called *culture*.

Media Impact on Culture

The widely held concerns on *the impact of mass media on Indian Culture* need to be understood in the perspective just indicated above. Strangely, many of our media and culture critics tend to view the media and culture as solid---and separate---entities. But the reality is that all sorts of media and cultures are seamlessly blended as a single river flowing on.

Those who worry about *the impact of mass media on Indian Culture* have to realise that the very induction and evolution of mass media in India happened along with the evolution of culture. What is now fondly termed as Indian Culture is something that is evolved through centuries, changing all the time. Indeed, India is a unique kaleidoscope containing countless variety of cultural elements which can hardly be claimed as the culture of any section of its people.

Any idea of an *ancient culture* that has been *preserved uncorrupted t*hrough centuries is only an extreme case of delusion with no scientific foundations. Those who take pride in our ancient culture have to realise that, whatever they fondly hold is no longer the very same ancient one---instead, what they embrace now has been drastically changed and evolved over a long period of time.

Those who believe that they can *preserve* a pristine ancient culture are only deceiving themselves. If those who had lived even in the recent centuries were to reappear in this century, they would hardly be able understand most of what is going on around them these days.

Culture is Temporal and Experiential

Fundamentally, the culture of any society is temporal and experiential: it is an all-embracing phenomenon involving individuals as well as the environment and all those elements together *can never be recreated for future.*

Even what one could preserve would be totally incomprehensible to our future generations. Cultural evolution is characterised by multidimensional change: physical, physiological psychological, and so on. Any talk of a *preserved, pristine, uncorrupted ancient culture* is nothing less than illusory reasoning.

Baseless Media Bashing

Criticisms, unmindful of fallacies like these, appear to have whipped up a sort of *general cynicism* among the people. There is no difficulty in understanding the fact that all useful things could be potentially harmful if they were misused. However, it is unfair to accuse the mass media as the major culprit for all the undesirable changes in our common culture without even presenting adequate and convincing scientific data.

Most of our criticism about the dangers of the mass media destroying our culture is thus largely based on our own unrealistic, unscientific, and irrational thinking and perception regarding society, mass media, and culture. It is unfortunate such a cynicism is not very uncommon even among many of our so called expert media/culture critics. The contents of our news media provide adequate material in support of this unapologetically rude conclusion.

The arguments of many of such critics go unquestioned and their *conclusions* are often accepted almost at the face value. This is so primarily because such critics often have an authoritative feel about them: they sound impressive.

It is time to look consciously enough at the premise, we all including the critics stand and try to understand and overcome the fallacies in our own thinking, perception, and reasoning. Indeed, this unacceptable delusion about a *dangerous mass media gnawing at our pristine culture* has to be erased by a realistic awakening to a world of scientific and rational understanding.

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Local News Going Global: An Evaluation of the e-newspapers of National Dailies

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a brief analysis of the e-newspaper versions of the major national dailies in English and Malayalam languages. Reader preferences and editorial programming practices are also evaluated to understand the current trends in news consumption in the global scenario. The study advocates innovative reforms in the design and style of the e-newspapers and for more region specific and user friendly contents.

Keywords : ***e-Newspaper, Content programming, Navigational support, Instant interactivity***

Introduction

The electronic newspaper or e-newspaper is a self contained, reusable and refreshable version of a traditional newspaper that acquires and holds information electronically. Electronic newspapers retrieve information electronically from online databases; process it electronically with word processors, desktop publishing packages and a variety of more technical hardware and software and transmit it electronically to the end-users. In terms of development and use the e-papers can be divided into the following categories

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- Online newspaper/web newspaper- Online editions of the newspapers available on the web, with special characteristics such as navigation support, advertisement and style of presenting the news. e.g., *The Hindu, The Times of India and The New Indian Express.*

- PDF Newspaper – Electronic replicas of the traditional newspapers printed from multiple editions providing varying content across their pages. e.g., *The Mathrubhumi, Malayala Manorama and Deccan Chronicle*

- e-news via e-devices- is an electronic newspaper service supported by e-paper technology (i.e. an e-reader, such as Amazone Kindle), e.g., *Hindusthan Times* on Kindle.

The advent of electronic newspapers has really offered a great opportunity for readers to make a swift review of day to day events and things happening around globally almost at a wink. The overseas or expatriate readers too benefitted on account of the regional and local news content from their homeland in the e-papers. There are many other advantages in switching the content into electronic format; online versions offer fast access and more updates compared to the print versions (Li 2006). It is also possible to utilize different technologies such as audio, graphics, video and interactive element that are not possible in a print version. Interactive elements mean freedom for the reader to filter news according to their own preferences and the opportunity to give feedback on the contents, which creates a feeling of empowerment (Spyridou & Veglis 2008). However, there has also been a concern regarding the lowering quality of editing a news story and its credibility (Salaverria 2005). The PDF Newspaper of the original printed version is an answer to these defects, though the interactive and refreshing elements are lacking in them. Majority of the national and regional newspapers in India have made available these PDF versions a part of their online news portals.

Literature Review

Some of the experimental studies conducted on the viability and gratifications of the Electronic newspapers across the globe are worth to mention. Dimmick et al in their study noted that internet has a competitive displacement effect on traditional media in the daily news domain with the largest displacements occurring for television and newspapers. Baines too discussed the development of electronic news production and predicted the replacement of print by electronic news but suggested only when something better than a PC screen comes into

widespread news. Ola and Oja clearly pointed channelization of online PDF newspapers instead of traditional ones. Svensson and Hakerod in their paper explored how the navigational support in an e-newspaper should be designed to support the users' task oriented reading behavior and the study subsequently generated six guidelines which covered information structure, hyperlinks, and feedback and visual clues. Panda and Swain in their study argue that the e-newspapers of Indian origin have enriched the horizon of newspaper reading by all class of people at a much faster pace which no other medium can address. However there have not been many studies regarding the newspaper reader preferences and gratification on e-newspaper content in the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the study was to form an understanding of the reader perceptions of e-newspapers of selected national dailies of English and Malayalam published from South of India.

The specific objectives were,

1. to explore the views of overseas readers on the contents of Indian e-newspapers that they regularly read
2. to find out the reading preferences and patterns of readers of e-newspapers
3. to compare and contrast the content and format of the selected e-newspapers

Methodology

The study objectives called for a content analysis of the e-newspaper versions of national dailies. The first part of the study concentrated on analyzing the contents of selected e-newspapers namely, *The Times of India*, *The Hindu*, *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*. Contents of the selected e-newspapers during a period of 30 days in November 2014 were analyzed systematically to understand the preference the editors assigned to the various categories of news contents. The second part of the study constituted a questionnaire survey among the Non-resident Indians for ascertaining their reading preferences and patterns of the selected e-newspapers. The readership data was gathered in the month of December 2014 through an online survey. Questionnaires were sent online to around 500 individuals of Kerala origin who are settled in the Middle East Asian countries for their employment. These individuals personal mail addresses were

purposively chosen from the NORKA's data bank on overseas profiles. The selected Middle East nations were Kuwait, Saudi-Arabia and UAE. 162 respondents filled out the questionnaires of which 150 were selected for the empirical study. The questionnaire was pre-tested to eradicate sampling errors by sending it to 50 respondents prior to the real survey. 36 of these questionnaires were returned by the respondents and minor modifications were done in the questionnaire to eliminate defects.

Trends in content programming of the e-newspapers

Popularity of mobile gadgets such as smart phones, net-books and e-readers provide an ample opportunity for publishers of major newspapers to produce e-news contents in various forms. Apart from the well resources news portals, they are now more and rely on mobile applications to reach to a wider spectrum of readers. The multimedia facility in the e-format allows much value to the reader and the dynamic web interface provides him an instant interactive chance with the source.

All the selected dailies have well maintained and up-seconded e-newspaper portals with many features. Major common features of them were found to be,

1. e-newspapers offer multimedia content and most news stories guide the readers to other supplementary information details through hyper links.
2. crolling news placed at the top portion of the home page is an attraction for the readers to know about the latest events.
3. The PDF form e-paper of the print versions from multiple editions allows the reader to scan through the preferred edition of his or her locality.
4. The archives maintained are a good resource for accessing the background material of a specific item of news.
5. Various subject matter categories of news such as health, sports, economics, crime etc. are found to be prominently displayed in the folders of the Home page.
6. The space is not a hurdle for news portals which in turn facilitates them to give as many number of news items on and about various categories of news.
7. Live news desk, links to sister periodical publications, apps and RSS options are available in e-newspapers of the selected dailies.

8. Instant interactivity allows the reader to react to each and every news story through the comment section. *Times of India* has even provided the personal e-mail ids of the reporters along with each of the major news stories.
9. There is not much difference in the writing style or approach to content published in e-format and print editions of the selected dailies. Most of the items were published as such in the next day's print papers.

Regional and Local news at the top

The content analysis of the Geographic matter categories of news items by selected e-newspapers has shown that both regional and local news are given much preference by the editors. Average number of news items for a day was measured from counting the total number of items for a consecutive 30 days for all the selected dailies. Local news was the favorite category for both *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* while *The Times of India and The Hindu* preferred Regional news from across the nation in their e-newspapers.

When subject matter categories of news items were analyzed it was found that *The Times of India* in their e-newspaper was providing major space for news on and about Entertainment and films followed by Political news. *The Hindu* had given more number of items on politics followed by economics and sports. Both *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* had provided more number of news items on regional politics in their e-newspapers followed by news on entertainment and economics.

The PDF versions of the print editions of the selected dailies offered much variety of geographic matter categories of news to the readers. Local news originating from district headquarters and taluk –panchayath areas add much flavor to the reader who is away from home land. Obituaries from across the districts of the state of Kerala are a special feature for both *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* which cater to the Malayali population inside and outside the country.

Various options to sign-in via the social media platforms of the selected dailies are also an added feature. Hyper links to all forms of music, art and film repositories is an open invitation for the segmented reader.

Reader Preferences for the e-newspaper contents

Analysis of the readership data has shown that 95 percent of the total respondents surveyed turn to e-newspaper on a daily basis. Four

percent of them read the e-newspapers of the selected dailies atleast thrice a week while one percent of them read only a day in a week.

The most preferred PDF form of e-paper was that of *Mathrubhumi* daily (52 percent) while the least preferred was that of *The Hindu* (21). Majority of readers (51 percent) have reported that navigation through *Malayala Manorama* e-newspaper as the most ease one and navigation through *Hindu* the most difficult. However e-newspaper of The Hindu is the most preferred destination for readers (54 percent) to know on and about the international affairs. Readers preferred local news followed by regional news as their most preferred content categories. Stories with multimedia content were found to be the darlings of the readers. 76 percent of the respondents have opined that they prefer such contents over others. The obituaries from local destinations were also found to be highly consumable among the overseas reader. Majority of them (56 percent) scan through the district obit folders provided by the Malayalam dailies for information regarding demises of their relatives, murders and accidents from their native places.

Most number of respondents (67 percent) reported that they use smart phone as the preferred gadget to access the e-newspaper versions of the dailies. 21 percent of them accessed it via net connected computer at home and 10percent through PC at the workplace. Only a minority (2 percent) of the respondents have used e-readers like Amazon kindle to access the e-newspapers.

Conclusion

The advent of electronic newspapers has offered a great opportunity for making a swift review of news of the day that is happening all around the world. It has indeed enriched the horizon of newspaper reading by all class of people at a much faster pace which no other medium can provide. The local and regional news content has now reached a global platform which of course is of much relief and benefit to the global citizen. Though people are gradually adopting e-newspapers and e-news services, they have not been able to fulfill some of the other advantages of the printed newspaper. Absence of continuity of the news contents, interruptions in reading, popping up of advertisements are some of the issues need to be tackled by the providers of the e-news content. Social norms could also play an important role in the adoption of technology in the future. The readers' affinity to a particular print newspaper may not be a valid reason for them to follow their e- newspaper versions unless they provide anything qualitatively different.

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ICT Utilisation in Rural Kerala: The Social Dimensions

Case Study of a Kerala Village

■ **K. S. RAGINI***

ABSTRACT

It is universally accepted that Information Communication Technologies (ICT) offer immense opportunities for the comprehensive social and economic development of the people all over the world. Research on ICT and development (ICTD) involves assumptions concerning the nature of ICT innovation and the way such innovations contribute to development. There has been a lot of interest during the last two decades in employing information and communication technologies (ICTs) for achieving development, especially in rural empowerment. The present study seeks to analyze the crucial role played by ICT in rural communication. It also tries to explore the ICT exposure of the people of that area and focuses on how they make use of ICTs in empowering themselves. The study assumes significance as it traces the efforts that the developing country governments should undertake in order to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords : ***ICT, Development, Participatory communication, Empowerment***

Introduction

The advent of new information and communication technologies is contributing to the rapid transformation of the world into a "Global market place". In the current information age, the capacity of a society to effectively position itself as a consumer and producer of knowledge is crucial to its socio-economic development. Today the core relation between knowledge and development appears to be well established. Increasingly, social, economic and political progress is linked with the

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ability of countries to make informed decisions and knowledge based choices.

During the past three decades, the role of communication has undergone a dramatic change from a one-way, top-down transfer of messages to a social process of sharing and participation. This approach known as Participatory communication highlights the importance of cultural identity, dialogues, concerted action and participation at all levels, international, local and individual where ICT acts as a catalyst. The contribution of information and knowledge in bringing about social, cultural and economic development has been well recognized globally.

ICTs generally refer to an expanding assembly of technologies that are used to handle information and aid communication. These include hardware, software, media for collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information in any format, computers, internet, radio,television etc. The new ICTs are commonly referred to evolving applications or technologies that rely on the internet, telecommunication networks, mobile phones. personal computers and data bases. These new ICTs have the potential of getting vast amounts of information to rural population in a more timely, comprehensive, cost effective and interactive manner.

Participatory communication aims to facilitate the expression of people's needs and priorities through effective communication process where ICT has a vital role to perform. The internet has revolutionized our society, people and their lives. In today's global economy, where computers and internet are so fundamental to production and participation, it is clear that if the right to development is to be taken seriously, that right must encompass the development of ICT infrastructure.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It generally refers to the process by which people enhances their power to take control over decisions that shake their lives, including in relation to access to resources, participation decision making and control over distribution of benefits. ICTs play a crucial role in the economic, social and political empowerment of people.

Despite the potential role and contribution of ICTs in development, there is a growing voice raising serious concerns about the socio cultural dimensions of their applications and use. Issues such as; who benefits and who loses from the introduction of these technologies; how can ICTs be made useful and meaningful to the developing countries

who are struggling to meet their basic needs; what are the social and cultural opportunities and risks they present and how can developing countries meaningfully adopt these technologies while lessening their undesirable social and cultural consequences, are some of the questions that emerge when looking at the potential development impacts of ICTs. These issues are pertinent in assessing the real contribution of the ICTs to sustainable human development and therefore merit a close examination.

Theoretical Base

The ICTs rests on two theoretical approaches: Participatory approach and Diffusion of innovation approach.

Participatory Approach

Participatory approach tries to exhibit the democratization of information through ICTs and the way information is consumed i.e. New media. New media through dissemination potentially affects the development and helps in shifting the monopoly centers to go down to the grassroot level.

Diffusion of Innovation

Diffusion of innovation theory considers the role on ICTs in the light of Roger‘s (1962) explanations of inculcating awareness and enthusiasm for technical innovations. The concern of diffusion of innovation is to explain the rate and the direction of the adoption of new technologies. This viewpoint is closely related to the need for generating communicative contexts which are akin to the people of that area, which will ultimately result in changing the behaviour and attitudes of people and hence ultimately in development.

In the light of above observations, the present study seeks to analyze the utilization of information technologies for development in rural areas and its social dimensions.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in the research involved the systematic analysis of primary and secondary data .The primary data is collected through survey with the help of questionnaire and personal interviews from FRIENDS (Fast Reliable Instant Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services) offices, Akshaya project offices and centres.

Questionnaire was used to understand the ICT consumption among the desired target audience. The questionnaire was fine tuned to meet the set objectives. Besides demographic data, the survey questions focused on their choice of ICTs, their access to ICTs and other socio-cultural factors affecting their preference of ICTs. The secondary data were collected from websites, books, magazines, newspapers, Akshaya sites etc. To test the probability level of significance of association between variables Chi-Square test was also used.

Area of Study and Sample Size

250 samples were collected from Maranchery panchayath in Malappuram District, out of which 238 were successfully coded and analyzed. Simple random sampling was used in the survey as it provides a sample that is highly representative of the population.Here each individual has the same probability of being chosen at any stage during sampling process thus offering an unbiased surveying technique. The sample involved people from different walks of life including women, students, agricultural labourers, the youth, the employed and unemployed who belonged to the age group of 20-35 years and with educational background from a minimum of primary level. The rationale behind the selection of respondents of age group 20-35 years was that in India the youth population in this age group is projected to increase to nearly 64 percent by 2016 who are the major actors of the ICT development initiatives in our country .

Analysis and Findings

The study focuses on ICT diffusion in rural areas and the social dimensions -A Case Study of a Kerala Village". A detailed account of the sample in terms of various demographic variables is given below.

Table 1: Sample description by gender and age

Gender	Age Group			Total
	20-25 Years	26-30 Years	31-35 Years	
Male	42	52	8	102
Female	50	76	10	136
Total	92	128	18	238

Table 2: Sample description by education

Education	Number	Percentage
Primary	112	47.05
Secondary	88	36.97
UG & above	38	15.98
Total	238	100

Table 3 Sample description of income

Level of income	Number of persons
Up to 5000	124 (52.10%)
5000-10000	82(34.45%)
Above 10000	32(13.45%)
TOTAL	238 (100%)

(Note: Figures in parenthesis denotes percentage)

ICT Exposure

To understand what role ICTs can play in rural communication, we have to understand media scenario in all its dimensions, we have to understand scope, reach and impact of media on society as well as the functions it is supposed to perform. The study also tried to find out the peoples' exposure to different types of media. See table 4.

Table 4 Media exposure

Type of Media	Usage Strength
Mobile	218
Radio	104
TV	238
Computer/Internet	154

The Issue of Access

The potential impact of ICTs rests on the factors facilitating or impeding their accessibility and use. Study shows that access to ICT and ICT based technologies is open to a large fraction of population. It is really heartening to see that people are having a good exposure to different types of ICTs which further indicates their access to these technologies. Thus, issues determining access to the ICTs and to their benefits need to be examined carefully if these technologies are to be applied meaningfully for the betterment of society.

The Issue of Cost

Cost raises similar concerns. The Akshaya centres and other government knowledge centres provide ICT infrastructure and facilities to people at a lower rate or at an affordable rate that makes them active

users of ICTs. The issue of cost and affordability need to be put into the broader perceptive for the optimum utilization of ICTs especially in developing countries. Rate of internet usage is very commendable although it is a rural area. The data revealed that the unique characteristics of new media such as interactivity, speed, efficiency etc made the respondents attracted towards internet. The majority of the participants had access to ICTs especially through mobile phones and internet. Mobile connections have outnumbered landline connections in these areas.

Income and Media Preference

Table 5: Income and Respondents First preference of Media

Income	Type of Media			Total
	Mobile	Radio/TV	Computer/Internet	
Up to 5000	5(44.35)	0(32.26)	29(23.39)	124
5000-10000	20(24.39)	20(24.39)	42(51.22)	82
Above 10000	13(40.63)	10(31.25)	9(28.12)	32
Total	88(36.97)	70(29.41)	80(33.62)	238

Pearson Chi-Square:.981445, df=4, p=0.912594
(Note: Figures in Parenthesis Denotes Percentage)

The above findings show that majority of the people of the category up to 5000 selected mobile as their most preferred medium.(44.35%). The majority of the 5000-10000 category selected computer/ internet as their top preference (51.22%)) while majority above 10000 rupees category again opted mobile as their top preference (40.63%).

As the probability value of 0.9 is greater than 0.05, it is evident that the association between income and preference of media is not significant. In other words, income has no significant role in determining the preference of media.

ICTs and Education

In recent times, ICTs have become an important part of our professional and personal lives. It has been found that the emerging ICTs have changed the thought process, communication skills, developmental process, means of entertainment and education. Quality teaching integrated with ICTs really benefitted the students and educational sector. It has been observed that to increase ICT use in schools, computer labs have been set up in primary, secondary and higher education institutions.

Education and Respondents First preference of Media

Table 6: Education and respondents first preference of media

Education	Type of Media			Total
	Mobile	Radio/TV	Computer/ Internet	
Primary	50(44.64)	49(43.75)	13(11.61)	112
Secondary	31(35.23)	12(13.64)	45(51.13)	88
UG and above	7(18.42)	9(23.68)	22(57.90)	38
Total	88(36.97)	70(29.41)	80(33.62)	238

Pearson Chi-Square:1.55229,df=4,p=0.817338
(Note: Figures in Parenthesis Denotes Percentage)

The above findings show that majority of the primary group selected mobile as their most preferred medium. (44.64%). The majority of the secondary category (51.13%)) and UG and above category (57.90%) opted computer/internet as their top media preference

As the probability value of 0.8 is greater than 0.05, it is evident that the association between education and preference of media is not significant.

ICTs and Gender

Gender and Respondents First Preference of Media

Table 5 Gender and respondent first preference of Media

Gender	Type of Media			Total
	Mobile	Radio/TV	Computer/Internet	
Male	32(31.38)	20(19.61)	50 (49.01)	102
Female	56 (41.18)	50(36.76)	30 (22.06)	136
Total	88 (36.97)	70(29.41)	80 (33.62)	238

Pearson Chi-Square:9.23971,df=4,p=0.055403
(Note: Figures in Parenthesis Denotes Percentage)

From the above table, it can be observed that majority of the male population preferred computer/internet medium. (49.01%) While majority of female population (41.18%) considered mobile as their top preference. From the above data, it can be observed that all media gains somewhat equal relevance among the respondents.

As the probability value of 0.055 is greater than 0.05, it is evident that the association between gender and preference of media is not significant. In other words, gender has no significant role in determining the preference of media.

Female access to technologies has increased dramatically The study indicated the active presence of women in programmes conducted by Akshaya and other government initiatives which further proves an equal access for them to ICTs there by promoting gender equality. Here ICT acts as a powerful catalyst for social, political and economic empowerment of women. The most important and positive factor favouring women's entry in to IT industry has been the support from Kudumbasree officials in the form of financial, technical and managerial aid. It enabled the rural women to access a wide range of information such as farm technology, health, nutrition, government schemes and to gain technical know-how empowering themselves.

The Issue of Culture

Culturally, ICTs also pose major challenges. Technology is developed within a specific social, cultural and economic context which it carries with it when transferred into new setting. The ICT programmes were successful in this area as the policies implemented for ICT diffusion were in match with their culture and norms without posing any threat or harm to them .The programs indented not only to ensure that the users gain skills to technology but also to access information that are relevant to their culture and life. Priority was given to local culture that made people to adopt these technologies easily and without dissonance. Use of ICTs as a form of cultural expression has increased awareness of own cultural identity.

Language is one of the pillars of culture. Content creation in local language and the application softwares providing access to information in their own language (Malayalam) has further made them the active users of technology as language reflects not only the ways in which reality is captured and communicated but also the ways in which its meaning is understood and appropriated.

Conclusions and Recommendations

ICTs present a wide array of opportunities for facilitating development process. To be true participants and beneficiaries of ICTs, it's a must to assess the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of the technologies and their impacts. It can be concluded that the best long term development investments that can be made using ICTs is to apply them to the training and education of new generation, to move towards strategic and better integrated national information, communication and educational policies, social , economic and cultural development and women empowerment. The findings lead to the conclusion that

the connectivity provision, core technology creations, community participation and commitment to deprived and disadvantaged would definitely help in meeting socio economic aspirations of rural communities. For the technological development to be favoured in the internal regions of rural areas, it is necessary that a desire for their use exists. Such a desire can be moulded only through awareness programs and educational endeavors. The study identifies and recommends best practices for initiating necessary changes including communication, new media usage and also to adopt people friendly techniques so that they become active participants of new media. Kerala model ICT development can put forward ICT development initiatives to other states where most people have a little opportunity to access ICTs. It can also offer solutions to overcome the factors that derail their ICT initiatives. The IT policy of the state and the wide mass base the media enjoy in the state have been able to create definite advantages in making the state of Kerala an information Society.

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Media Fragmenting Environmental Issues

■ **MAGGIE J.***

ABSTRACT

The role of Malayalam newspapers in Environmental communication is limited to very few reports occasionally appearing without providing proper insight into the real issues confronted by the society. Lack of in depth reports, follow up stories or research on various environmental issues has in real shifted the focus from informing the public about the consequences of the real problems.

Keywords : ***Environmental Communication, Climate Change***

Introduction

Come June and World Environment Day is observed with great enthusiasm across the world and a call on humanity to respect nature reassuring the need for the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources for a progressive future. The media gives wide coverage for various programmes observed throughout the state and creates the impression that it is raising its voice for a noble cause. The role of the media in this context is to be assessed. How far our media is successful in educating the public on the damage people inflict upon nature and the consequent threat humanity is bound to face.

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Kerala and Climate Change

To start with, Kerala with the tradition of monsoon which starts from the mid of May and which continues till July, has witnessed a major change in this for the past few years. This year as we complete July, there is shortage in the rainfall all over Kerala. On the other hand northern parts of India have witnessed heavy rainfall. The media have not bothered to research this shift in climate which is going to affect Kerala on a large scale.

Scientific explanations are limited to 'climate change'. But what is this phenomena, how did this happen, and if this is going to continue what are the solutions, and the remedial measures to be adopted by the world, or the models to be globally followed to face the challenges of climate change. No concrete solutions has been put forward by experts but limited themselves to warnings .Perhaps this is an area where media can perform its function of conveying the messages objectively on how a state like Kerala which depends on rainfall for agriculture and electricity can thrive in future. Are the public aware of this grave situation? The national as well as the Malayalam dailies have failed to raise this as well as many other environmental issues and initiate a critical understanding to the public . The immediate need of the hour is to find alternate sources of energy such as solar and wind which other states have already experimented successfully. But apart from certain magazine articles no honest attempt has been made by the media in this area.

Environmental Communication and Media

Environmental Communication is an area often neglected by the mainstream media with its main focus on politics, entertainment and sports. Often we find environmental issues are kept under wraps. Taking into account the umpteen number of political issues often covered by the print media on a daily basis, environmental issues is limited to a three or four column news once in a week or so. No follow up stories or information regarding the environmental hazards created by man for economic growth and his own wellbeing are published. A situation must be created by the media where immediate Government interventions and collective efforts from the public to combat the deteriorating environmental balance are called for.

It is here the media can educate people on the immediate need to face the obstacles on their path of development by the scientific

management of natural resources. Often scientists have warned about the depleting ground water at an alarming level. Kerala in the coming few years is to face a serious water shortage for domestic as well as industrial purpose. When the media took a small initiative on the importance of rainwater harvesting the public started noticing its relevance. The Government too reacted positively, by introducing strict regulations on the need to store rainwater to face the challenge of water shortage. But the role of the media is restricted to a limited level. Can we ever imagine a vigilant media placing equal importance to environmental news as in the case of Politics or entertainment?

Public Awareness on Environmental Issues

Let's take a few examples. How many of us are aware of the Koodamkulam movement and its present status. The reports appearing in the media are vague. But here again the role of the magazines are to be hailed. In Malayalam, 'Mathrubhumi', 'Kalakaumudi' and 'Malayalam' weeklies have extensively covered major environmental issues giving clear picture of the issues at various stages of their reporting. Last year renowned environmental Journalist Claude Alvarius in an elaborate article in the 'Media' has highlighted the pathetic nature how media gives only partial truths to the public on major environmental problems. Citing many incidents, he clearly points out how media remains a passive observer when the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of the various projects get affected, displaced or lose their rights when development projects are carried out without their consent. He argues that it is those people who earn their livelihood from the land which is acquired by the Government and other agencies, who have a right to speak about the developmental activities to be carried out there, instead of the experts, Scientists, Engineers or Politicians.

Recently the Wayanad District Collector made it clear that there will be restrictions for the construction of buildings considering the area as an ecologically sensitive one. The media reported it in a negative manner, as if the collector had some ulterior motives. Immediately the visual as well as the print media gave various versions of political leaders voicing their opposition to the decision of the collector. The media never tries to project the merits of a plan and endorse it before the public to garner their support. The corporate culture which is deep rooted in our society has exercised its power on the media too. As a result very serious and sensitive environment issues are neglected or does not find place in our newspapers. The over politicization of a problem itself kills its merit for solution and review at higher levels.

Malayalam newspapers which are on a war for circulation, sensationalise trivial matters and deviate from the role of educating people on the need to protect and preserve environment. Environment communication till date in regional newspapers has not developed into a special area that is to be focused and is still at an infancy stage. The National dailies to some extent give more attention to environmental issues as in the case of 'The Hindu' which published an article on July 7, 2015 on climate change as one of the reasons for sea erosion. This article also states that apart from the rise in sea level, surface temperature due to global warming is also a contributing factor for soil erosion. The article also warns that unless an "integrated coastal zone management plan" is formulated the sea would be at our doorstep and it could further lead to a situation of 'environmental refugees.'

In another article published on the 2nd of July 13, 2015 under the title 'Perumatty' says goodbye to industrialization" which was published by Malayalam dailies also stand apart for its content. The Panchayat president has assured that the local body would remain vigil against contamination of its water resources apart from protecting its farm lands. Remember the collective protest from the part of the people against Coca- cola on the excessive exploitation of groundwater at Plachimada which received worldwide media attention. The major Malayalam newspapers tried to cover up the Plachimada issue. But a five column news in 'The Hindu' provides a glimpse of the determination of the local bodies which gain popular support.

When the Malayalam newspapers do not pay much importance to the environmental issues of the state, it is an attempt to thwart the rights of the people. With the social media gaining an upper hand among the youngsters to express solidarity with various social issues, it's the duty of the newspapers to go deep into a problem, research it and put forward suggestions which urge the Government to take necessary actions. Also the responsibility of the public in maintaining positive attitude towards environmental problems in finding a solution should be the agenda of the media.

The Malayalam newspapers in the transitional period may be forced to consider environmental communication as an area to be recognized and focus their attention, as we find in the case of Business Journalism, Automobile, Technology, Fashion and Entertainment in the past few years. In the coming years environment must be an area which should be dealt with more seriousness.

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Standardisation of Scales for Media Research

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ABSTRACT

Measurement of attitudes and perceptions in communication research can be reliably carried out through interval scales. Scales with multiple items meant to generate accurate data have to pass through various stages of standardisation. The method of developing interval scales for media research is dealt with in this study in systematic manner. The study deals with the standardisation process which passes through the stages of formulating the items for measurement, pilot testing, item analysis, validity and reliability testing.

Keywords : ***Standardisation, Item Analysis, Internal Consistency, Reliability Testing***

Introduction

Interval scales are preferred by media researchers, especially when they study complex issues as they are more reliable and precise than dichotomous questions which restrict measurement of attitudes and perceptions only at two levels. Scales with multiple items can generate better data regarding the different levels or degrees of perceptions people have towards media content or function, seasoned researchers feel.

"Perhaps ,the most commonly used scale in mass media research is the Likert scale, also called the summated rating approach"(Wimmer

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and Dominick,1944). Renis Likert is credited with the development of the first summated rating scale, which measures an attitude ,value or opinion. The word summated denotes the use of multiple items which are summed or combined. Respondents have to indicate their ratings for each statement or item in the scale, the value of which can be calculated. However, most of the scales for media research are standardised based on the perceptions of media consumers in western cultural context. Hence, media researchers in non-western culture are often sceptical in using the available standardised western scales.

Stages of Standardisation

The standardisation of a scale for media research pass through several stages of development ,the major being formulating the items to be used for measurement, designing the scale, pilot testing ,item analysis, validity testing and reliability testing.

Designing the Scale

As part of formulating the items, a pool of items has to be developed first to select the statements to be included in the scale. Researcher's own perceptions, discussions with experts, interviews with media consumers and study of relevant literature help in codifying the concepts which generate a pool of items .Delineating the dimensions based on the perceptions of media consumers can lead to the identification of cultural specific scale items. The academic and professional perceptions ascertained through discussions with experts can be corroborated with the researcher's perceptions. All these can lead to an initial pooling of items. At the same time care has to be taken to avoid duplication of items as well as irrelevant ones.

At the first stage of designing the scale, the items have to be converted into statements which should be clear and unambiguous so that respondents can understand them easily and each statement can have only one item or one idea.

Experts in scale construction have the opinion that bias in respondent's scoring can be minimised by using items written in opposite direction. If all items are written in one direction, respondents will exhibit the tendency of acquiescence, that is, will agree or disagree with all items regardless of how they really feel. This will adversely affect the estimate of mean and the results of the statistical tests used to analyse the data. To overcome this problem, about equal number of both positively and negatively worded statements have to be made.

If the instrument is a 5-point scale, the response choices can be assigned numerical values of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively and the total score is found out by adding these values .Negatively worded items require reverse scoring. In other words, for positively worded items the scales ranges from 5 to 1 and for negatively worded items from 1 to 5. Next is the stage of pilot testing of the 3-point or 5-point or 7-point scale by administering it to a purposively selected sample of respondents. The respondents have to be asked to point out ambiguous and incomprehensible items to make any changes if required. After obtaining the feedback of the pilot respondents, the scale is fit for Item analysis which is an important stage of scale development.

Item Analysis

Item analysis is carried out to select those items which make an internally consistent scale and to eliminate those items that do not. Internal consistency means that the items in the scale measure the same construct and this measurable property shows the extent to which they inter-correlate with each other. If the items in the scale fail to inter-correlate with each other, then they do not represent the same construct.

How far each item relates to the other items is indicated by the 'item-remainder' coefficient. This is also treated as 'part-whole' or 'item-whole' coefficient. In actual terms, the item- remainder coefficient is the correlation of one item with the sum of the remaining items.

Item analysis comes up with the item –remainder for each item in the scale. Then, those items having higher item remainder coefficients are retained and the rest are removed. The retained items with higher coefficients represent a common construct or they share a common property. To carry out item analysis, the scale has to be administered to a sample of 100-150 respondents .Then, the data collected from the sample have to be analysed to find out the item-remainder coefficients.

Reliability Testing

The next step in scale construction is validation. By definition a test is valid if it measures what it intends to measure. The items in the scale intended to be standardised can be administered to a panel of experts formed for the purpose. The members of the panel should be given specific directions for making independent judgements regarding the validity of the items. They have to scrutinise whether each item in the scale is having high content validity or is capable of measuring the construct it is intended to measure.

The final step in scale construction is reliability testing. Reliability of a tool refers to the degree of consistency and accuracy with which it measures what it intends to measure.

"Reliability is the relative absence of errors of measurement in a measuring instrument", remarks Raymond Mark, a renowned social science researcher.

For reliability testing of a newly constructed scale, firstly, internal consistency has to be assessed. Cronbach's alpha (coefficient alpha) has to be found out to assess the internal consistency.

Cronbach's alpha can make a comparison of the variance of the total score(sum of all items) with the variances of the individual items. When the items become more and more inter-correlated, the variance of the total score goes up. The formula applied for this is,

$$a = \frac{k}{k\text{-}1} \text{ x } S_T^2 - \frac{\Sigma S_1^2}{S_T^2}$$

where S_T^2 is the total variance of the sum of the items, S_1^2 is the variance of an individual item, and $\boldsymbol{k}$ is the number of items.

The numerator of the equation has the difference between the total scale variance and the sum of the item variances. The ratio of this difference to the total score variance has to be calculated. The result has to be multiplied by the number of items.

Alpha is not a correlation ,though it reflects internal consistency reliability .It is often positive, taking on values from 0 to just under 1.0.A higher value indicates higher level of internal consistency. As per Nunnally's ' Psychometric Theory' ,alpha should be at least 0.70 for a scale to demonstrate internal consistency.

After verifying the internal consistency, the intended scale has to be subjected to test-retest calculation. The test-retest reliability of a measurement tool can reflect its consistency over time.

To find out the test-retest reliability of the scale, a sample of 100 respondents can be used. The scale under standardisation can be administered to this sample to calculate the scores given by the respondents. After three weeks the scale has to be read ministered to

the same sample for retest and the scores have to be obtained. Then, the correlation between the scores at both occasions has to be found out. If a high correlation coefficient is established between the scores of the first test and the retest , the scale is reliable.

By passing through the above described stages of standardisation, the scale becomes fit for application as a measurement tool in media research.

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