
Exploring Pattern of Preference in Content Selection : A Brief Study of Local Dailies

Sangeeta Keisham

T K Chakrabarty

Abstract

Local dailies play an important role in disseminating information pertaining to the various communities of the society at the regional or state level. The present paper aims at examining the contents and coverage of news items in some selected local dailies published in the state of Manipur. With the help of 'statistical tools' an attempt has been made to explore and identify the pattern of the contents selected for the accommodation in some of the columns like Headline, Article and Letter to Editor.

Keywords : Local Dailies, Content Analysis, Newspapers, Manipur.

0. Introduction

Like national or international newspapers, the functions of the local dailies are also to (i) convey government policies to the public; (ii) keep government informed of public needs; (iii) keep government informed of public reactions to government policies; and (iv) keep the government and public informed of events taken place in and around. In fact, the 'local dailies' is a medium which is supposed to (i) reflect local aspiration; (ii) highlight local grievances; (iii) expose local corruption and evils; (iv) record social-political-economical-scientific-cultural activities and development of the region; (v) predict trend of local growth and development; (vi) examine and monitor the current occurrences as local guardian. Besides, it should be an 'organ' for consolidating and guiding public opinion at local level, a 'forum' for exchange of views of local people and a 'mirror' of the society. In brief, the 'local-dailies' is a 'local chronicle' in the backdrop of the regional, national and international flavour. As such, the importance of the local newspaper is very great. If government wish correct news to circulate in the villages/locality, they must use the vernacular press as organ¹. Therefore, in order to examine the quality of information provided by the local dailies, it is sometimes necessary to examine the coverage and contents included in the local dailies which are normally published under the different columns like editorials, special articles, readers column, letters to editor, correspondence, commercial news, advertisements, sports etc. It is now well known fact that 'content analysis' in social sciences is a means of studying communication- its nature, its underlying meaning, its dynamic processes and of the people who are engaged in writing or conveying messages to others. This technique is very much used in the process of investigation and in analysing the records of human experience and of knowledge. The objective of the present paper is to identify the pattern of preferences in selecting the contents at some particular column published in the local dailies of Manipur. The work is based on a Ph.D programme currently completed².

1. Methodology

In order to determine the pattern for attaching preferences to the issues under various columns of local dailies of Manipur, some of the local dailies were selected for scanning for consecutive three years(1999,2000 and 2001).The local dailies which are to be scanned item wise are Poknapham (Vernacular), Huiyen Lanpao(Vernacular), Prajatantra (Vernacular), Imphal Free Press (English), Manipur Mail (English), Freedom (English) and Sangai Express (English) (Table 1).

Table-1
Some Facts of Local Dailies Selected

Title of the local dailies	Place of publication	Year of first publication	Size of circulation		Columns to be Studied	
			1999	2000	2001	
Poknapham	Keishampat, Imphal	1 st Feb 1980	23,886	25,371	24,094	Top headline of first page, editorial, article, letter to editor, advertisement and Sports.
Huiyen Lanpao	Meino Leirak, Imphal	3 rd March 1975	16,768	13,230	15,497	– do –
Prajatantra	Thangal Bazar, Imphal	10 th Aug. 1951	7,613	7,717	7,703	– do –
Imphal Free Press	Palace Gate, Imphal	8 th May 1996	7,600	7,565	8,016	– do –
Sangai Express	Sega Road, Imphal	11 th Sept. 1999	—	—	9,987	– do –
Manipur Mail	Uripok, Imphal	3 rd Nov. 1980	9,961	9,635	—	– do –
Freedom	Yaikul, Imphal	12 th Dec. 1992	12,092	—	—	–do–

Source: Questionnaire

The columns in the local dailies selected for scanning are top headline of first page, editorial, article and letters to editor. The issues normally published in the local dailies have been broadly grouped under thirteen subjects for convenience to carry out the present work. The issues/events under consideration for the present study are State Politics/Administration, National Politics, International Politics, Law & Order, Sports, Environment, and Contemporary social issues, Economics, Education, Culture/History, Local Press / Media, Health/Science and Religion.

3. Statistical Method for Analysis of Data

Chi-Square test is used to analyse the statistical data incorporated in the present study. The Chi-square test was calculated for each of the column (such as Headline, Editorial, Article and Letter to Editor) by using the formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(f_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}} = \frac{(f_{11} - E_{11})^2}{E_{11}} + \frac{(f_{12} - E_{12})^2}{E_{12}} + \dots + \frac{(f_{rc} - E_{rc})^2}{E_{rc}}$$

Where, f = observed frequency, E = Expected frequency

The expected frequency (E) for each issue in each of the selected local-dailies for consecutive three years was calculated using the relation,

$$E_{ij} = \frac{f_i \cdot f_j}{n}, i = 1, 2, \dots, r \text{ \& } j = 1, 2, \dots, c$$

Where, r stands for number of issues and c stands for number of local dailies and n stands for total frequency.

It is known that the statistic χ^2 follows a chi-square distribution with $(r-1)(c-1)$ degrees of freedom. The theoretical values of this distribution at a particular significance level are found from a standard book of statistics. To draw a conclusion about the row and column relationship, the value of χ^2 calculated from the data is compared with the value obtained from the table.

According to chi square test, if calculated value of χ^2 (from data) is greater than the table value, then there is a significant relation between the local-dailies (columns) and the type of the events/issues (rows). In other words, there is a statistically valid pattern in attaching preferences among the issues/events by the local dailies of Manipur at the particular column.

4. Manifestation

4.1 Determining pattern for attaching preferences to the issues under particular column

Information disseminated on different issues at different columns by the selected local dailies were tabulated for the consecutive three years. As we have considered four columns, there were altogether twelve cross-classified tables. For lake of space, we provide a sample table for 2000 (headline column) in appendix I. The calculated and the table values of χ^2 for all these cross-classified tables is shown in table 2.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Degrees of freedom (for 1999 \& 2000)} &= (r-1)(c-1) \\ &= 12 \times 5 &= 60 \\ \text{Table value of } \chi^2_{60} \text{ at 5\% level of significance} &= 79.082 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{And degrees of freedom (for 2001)} &= (r-1)(c-1) \\ &= 12 \times 4 &= 48 \\ \text{Table value of } \chi^2_{48} \text{ at 5\% level of significance} &= 65.17 \end{aligned}$$

Table-2 : Calculated Values of Chi-Square (χ^2)

Columns	Chi-square value			Degrees of freedom			Table value		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
Headline	661.66	413.17	258.62	60	60	48	79.082	79.082	65.17
Editorial	441.15	139.16	205.79	60	60	48	79.082	79.082	65.17
Article	1079.35	915.56	1653.18	60	60	48	79.082	79.082	65.17
Letter to Editor	885.08	85.22	197.63	60	60	48	79.082	79.082	65.17

It is observed from the above table that the respective value of χ^2 for each of the column during 1999-2001 is greater than their respective table values. Therefore, there is a significant pattern or relation in attaching preferences among the events/issues by the selected local-dailies in each of the column while the pattern/relation that exists in the data has been found to be statistically valid. The ranking of the issues can determine the actual pattern followed in attaching preferences among the issues by the dailies. Among the thirteen issues the first three most preferred issues ranked as first, second and third in the ranking column by each of the local dailies are shown in appendix II, III&IV. However, the variation in the pattern of attaching preferences over the three years under observation is insignificant. The headline and editorial columns

contain issues like state administration/state politics, contemporary social issues and law and order in most of the selected local Vernacular and English dailies, while the article columns are related to the issues like culture/ history, economics, health/science and social issues. The letter to editor column is found missing in some of the dailies published in the state. However, major feedbacks received from the readers by other dailies are mainly concerned on social issues, state administration/state politics and educational matters which have appeared in letter to editor column.

5. Conclusion

In a community/society, the local dailies play a very important role in disseminating information thereby making the people aware about the happenings around them. However, the popularity and success of a newspaper greatly depends upon the contents, coverage and the type of information they disseminate on all issues. The views and stand of the newspaper are reflected on its 'editorial column' particularly and partially through articles. 'Letter to editor column' is normally used for feedback purposes. And also the wordings of the 'headline' are selected very carefully so that it can attract the reading community. The present analysis of the contents of local dailies have confirmed that the local dailies in the state have a significant pattern or relation in attaching preferences among the events/issues and are able to satisfy the information needs of the local people to some extent. The improvement of the quality and coverage of contents of the local dailies will only be able to reduce the dependence of the local people on widely circulated newspaper (known as National newspaper).

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7. References

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About Authors



Dr. Tapan K Chakrabarty is an Assistant Professor (Sr. Scale) in the Department of Statistics, Manipur University since 1991. He received his Ph. D degree in statistics from Manipur University. His research interests lie in applied and computational statistics. He has several publications in the national journals in the field of applied statistics.



Keisham Sangeeta is a research scholar in the Department of Library and Information Science, Manipur University. She has submitted her Ph. D thesis to the Mnaipur University in Jan. 2004. She received her M.L.I.Sc from NEHU, Shillong.

Appendix- I

Information disseminated on different issues in the Headline Column by six selected local Vernacular & English dailies during 2000 (The daily Freedom was not published in 2000)

Events/issues	IFP	Sangai Express	Manipur Mail	Poknapham	Huiyen Lanpao	Prajantra	Total
State Admn. & politics	192(140.67)	140(141.02)	117(244.96)	245(199.46)	188(178.82)	207(184.07)	1089
National/Intn. Politics	06(18.86)	24(18.91)	48(32.84)	05(26.74)	15(23.98)	48(24.68)	146
Law and Order	118(122.33)	136(122.64)	181(213.01)	227(173.45)	169(155.50)	116(160.07)	947
Sports	08(7.62)	10(7.64)	24(13.27)	02(10.81)	04(9.69)	11(9.97)	59
Environment/Health/ Science	03(6.33)	02(6.35)	31(11.02)	05(8.98)	04(8.04)	04(8.28)	49
Contem. social issues	29(65.75)	55(65.92)	203(114.49)	54(93.23)	82(83.58)	86(86.03)	509
Economics	13(13.18)	12(13.21)	22(22.94)	15(18.68)	18(16.75)	22(17.24)	102
Education	21(14.60)	13(14.63)	36(25.42)	10(20.70)	17(18.56)	16(19.10)	113
Culture/History/ Religion	02(5.95)	04(5.96)	22(10.35)	03(8.43)	06(7.55)	09(7.78)	46
Local press/Media	10(6.72)	07(6.73)	16(11.70)	04(9.52)	08(8.54)	07(8.79)	52
Total	402	403	700	570	511	526	3112

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the expected frequencies.

Appendix- II

Ranking of issues on different columns by six selected local Vernacular and English dailies during 1999

(The daily Sangai Express was not published in 1999)

Name of the daily	Ranking of issues for each Column											
	Headline			Article			Letter to the editor					
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3			
Imphal Free Press	Law and Order	State Admn./ Politics	Contemp. social issues	State Admn./ politics	Law and order	Contemp. p. social issues	Contemp. p. social issue	Law and order	Economics	Contemp. Social issues	Education	State Admn./ Politics
Manipur Mail	State Admn./ Politics	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	State Admn./ politics	Contemp. Social issues	Sports	Contemp. p. Social issues	Economics	Culture/ history	-	-	-
Faedom	Law and order	Intl. politics	State Admn./ politics	State Admn./ politics	National politics	Sports	Contemp. p. Social issues	Health/ Science	Economics	-	-	-
Poknapham	Law and order	State Admn./ Politics	Contemp. Social issues	Contemp. Social issues	State Admn./ Politics	Economics	Culture/ History	Contemp. Social issues	Health/ Science	Contemp. Social issues	Education	Culture/ history
Huyen Lampao	Law and order	State Admn./ Politics	Contemp. Social issues	Contemp. Social issues	State Admn./ Politics	Law and order	Culture/ History	Contemp. Social issues	State Admn./ Politics	Contemp. Social issues	Culture/ History	Education
Prjatantra	State Admn./ Politics	Law & order	Contemp. Social issues	Contemp. Social issues	State Admn./ Politics	Law and order	Health/ Science	Contemp. Social issues	Economics	-	-	-

Note: Contemp. = Contemporary, Admn. = Administration.

Appendix-III

Ranking of issues on different columns by six selected local Vernacular and English dailies during 2000
(The daily Freedom was not published in 2000)

Name of the daily	Headline			Editorial			Article			Letter to the editor			
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
Imphal Free Press	State Admin/ Politics	Law and order	Contemp. social issues	State Admin/ politics	Contemp. social issues	Law and order	Contemp. social issue	Culture/ History	Contemp. social issues	Economics	State Admin/ Politics	Contemp. social issues	Education
Manipur Mail	Contemp. Social issues	Law and order	State Admin/ Politics	State Admin/ politics	Contemp. Social issues	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	Economics	Contemp. Social issues	Culture/ history	-	-	-
Sangai Express	State Admin/ Politics	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ politics	Contemp. Social issues	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	Culture/ History	Contemp. Social issues	Health/ Science	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ politics	Education
Pokhrajam	State Admin/ Politics	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ politics	Contemp. Social issues	Law and order	Culture/ History	Contemp. Social issues	Contemp. Social issues	Health/ Science	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ politics	Education
Hridayan	State Admin/ Politics	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ politics	Contemp. Social issues	Law and order	Culture/ History	Contemp. Social issues	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ politics	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ politics	Law and order
Prajatantra	State Admin/ Politics	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	Contemp. Social issues	State Admin/ Politics	Law and order	Contemp. Social issues	Culture/ History	Contemp. Social issues	Environment	-	-	-

Note: Contemp. = Contemporary, Admn. = Administration.

Appendix- IV

Ranking of issues on different columns by five selected local Vernacular and English dailies during 2001
(The daily Prajatantra was not published in 2001)

Name of the Daily	Ranking of issues for each Column											
	Headline			Editorial			Article			Letter to the editor		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Imphal Free Press	State Admn./ Politics	National politics	Law and order	State Admn./ politics	Contem p. Social issues	National politics	National politics	Contem p. social issues	International politics	Contem p. social issues	State Admn. / Politics	National politics
Manipur Mail	State Admn./ Politics	National politics	Contem p. social issues	State Admn./ politics	National politics	Law & order	Economics	Contem p. social issues	Culture/ History	--	--	--
Sangai Express	State Admn./ Politics	Law and order	National politics	State Admn./ politics	National politics	Contem p. Social issues	National politics	Contem p. social issues	State Admn./ politics	State Admn./ politics	Contemp. Social issues	Education
Poknaptha	Law and order	State Admn./ Politics	Contem p. Social issues	State Admn./ politics	Contem p. Social issues	Law & order	Culture/ History	Contem p. Social issues	Health/ Science	Contem p. Social issues	State Admn. / politics	Culture/ History
Huiyan Lempao	State Admn./ Politics	Law and order	National politics	State Admn./ politics	Contem p. Social issues	National politics	Contem p. Social issues	Culture/ History	State Admn./ politics	Contem p. Social issues	State Admn. / politics	Culture/ History

Note: Contemp. = Contemporary, Admn. = Administration.