

Road Accidents Coverage in Leading Hindi Dailies in Haryana

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Abstract

The present study lays focus on the accident covered news in leading Hindi national dailies in Haryana. The main objective of the study is to determine the space generally given to accident news in newspapers and to know the formats being used to disseminate the news pertaining to road accidents. Another important objective of the study is to ascertain whether reporters try to highlight causes of accidents while writing such news stories to generate awareness among the people against such delinquencies are also dissected and dwelt upon at length. To conduct this study the researchers carried out a content analysis of two leading Hindi dailies-Dainik Bhaskar and Dainik Jagran. The research reveals that both the Dainik Jagran and the Dainik Bhaskar newspapers give inadequate coverage to the news of the accident.

Keywords: Accident news, Road Crashes, Accidental information.

Introduction

In India, road accidents cause umpteen numbers of fatalities, cutting short the life of people in general and the youth in particular. The number of fatal accidents and road fatalities has spurted rapidly the number over the years. Approximately 400 people lose their precious lives every day in road accidents in India, which is a staggering number showcasing the enormity of the problem (Pal Ranbir, 2019).

The United Nations is also seized by the gravity of the problem that is why it has declared the years 2011 to 2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety. The objective of declaring a decade long action plan is to generate awareness among the people about observing traffic rules scrupulously to minimize the incidence of road fatalities since some time road accidents are so ghastly and gruesome that many people are horribly disabled and die in the very heart-wrenching way (United Nations, 2011).

In developing countries, an increase in the number of motor vehicles signifies the pace of economic growth. The unprecedented spurt in the number of vehicles has caused so much crowdedness on roads that accidents become common and frequent occurrence.

According to Professor Dinesh Mohan at Shiv Nadar University, Noida, among developing countries, India has fallen behind 20 years in ensuring the life security of the people and it could majorly be attributed to road fatalities (Sanjai, 2018). It is but natural to raise this question of how much space is being provided by the news media to address the problem emanating from the violation of traffic rules. Apart from mentioning the cause of accidents, the gender of the victim's newspapers should also specify the place and time of the occurrence of the accidents because such incidents give knowledge about the accident-prone areas and it also helps the policymakers to take special preventive measure in such areas (Daniel, 2010).

According to a report by World Health Organization, in 2002 alone more than 1.2 million died and 50 million sustained grievous injuries in road accidents around the globe, which entailed the loss of 518 billion US dollars. There is a small surprise that 90% of such deaths occurred in the developing countries due to deplorable conditions of roads and inadequate traffic rules and their very shoddy and poor implementation.

Sensitizing the public about observing the traffic rules scrupulously and rigidly is need of the hour to minimize these accidents. Public consciousness about road safety depends considerably on the extent and effectiveness of the coverage made in the media. According to Stijn Daniels et. al. "A correct reporting of crashes is believed to be of utmost importance since many policy measures and evaluation studies largely rely on the quality of the underlying crash counts" (Daniels, Brija & Keunen, 2010).

Media coverage has a direct and tangible impact on their alertness and about the risk on-road and also on inducing them to be wary of traffic rules to escape road accidents. That is why, the presentation of the accident story, investigation to gather all related information, the causes of the accident are of paramount importance to sound the wake call among the readers. But unfortunately, most of the newspapers cover accidents to sensualize and sentimentalize the readers about the happening to target the government for its failure to prevent such occurrences. Newspapers cover accident stories from their individual perspective rather than projecting them as a major life hazard (Connor & Wesolwski, 2004).

This study is an attempt to analyze how the accident news in leading Hindi dailies are covered. In pursuit of this objective, content analysis of two newspapers - Dainik Jagran and Dainik Bhaskar is carried out.

Research Objectives

The researchers are motivated to undertake this study to engage with the media to induce it to discharge its responsibility regarding this sensitive issue more efficiently to help lessen the fatalities, following road accidents. The main objectives of the study are:

1. To focus upon the quantity of total coverage of road accident stories in leading national Hindi dailies.
2. To know how much prominence to accident news stories is given in newspapers.
3. To analyze whether newspapers publish research-based accident stories in order to generate awareness among the readers.

Review of Literature

Numerous studies have been conducted on the analysis of accident news coverage from different perspectives. However, such studies conducted in India so far are absolutely low. Despite the fact that India is affected by road accidents the most. In this chapter, an attempt is made to analyze such studies to discover the research gap so that efforts could be made to plug them.

Beullens et al. (2008), investigated television news framing of motor-vehicle crashes. They indicated that media seem to personalize and emotionalize traffic crashes, which might stress some aspects of crashes while neglecting others such as protective measures like seat belt wearing. The researchers found that in 67% of the cases no causes for the crash were mentioned.

Stijn Daniels, Tom Brijs and Dries Keunen (2010), in their study "Official Reporting and Newspaper Coverage of Road Crashes: A Case Study" evaluate the road crashes reported in Belgium. To conduct this case study the researchers compared the data from official crash data, data from the insurance company and newspaper articles of road crashes. The researchers found that Newspapers covered about 50% of those accidents which involved severe injuries. The media coverage rate was found substantially higher for the most severe crashes in the study. Researchers argue that the seriousness of the accidents should not

necessarily be a determining factor. Consequently, it is possible that people have a wrong or biased perception of the risk in traffic.

Chandran Poornima (2016), in her paper titled “Reading between the lines: an analysis of media reports on road accidents” argues that newspapers give very less information about the road accidents in their reports which consequently is not able to sensitize readers about the road safety. According to the author, news reports give information only about the vehicle involved in the accident and how people were killed, but news reports seldom give the causes of accidents. And some reports which give the causes of accidents give causes in a perfunctory manner such as ‘loss of control’ or ‘reckless driving’ which seems a vague concept. To sensitize the readers the news reports should also cover the causes of the loss of control such as whether the driver was busy on a telephone call, whether the road condition was bad or whether he was over-speeding or whether the breaks were faulty.

Hezron Mogambi and Florence Nyakeri (2015), in their paper “Media Priming of Road Traffic Accidents in Kenya: Praxis, Pattern and Issues” examine how the print media in Kenya report the road accidents. To conduct this study the researcher selected two leading newspapers of Kenya-Daily Nation and Standard Newspapers and conducted a content analysis. The content of 251 articles of road accidents was reviewed in this study. And it was found that both the newspapers were not giving adequate space to the road accidents in their coverage despite the importance of the issue. The articles on road accidents are also given space on the inside pages, not on the front pages. Another major finding of the research was that the focus of articles was on reporting accidents rather than on issues pertaining to policy and educating the public.

Isaac Kofi Yankson et. al. (2012), conducted a study on “Reporting on road traffic injury: a content analysis of injuries and prevention opportunities in Ghanaian newspapers”. To conduct this study the researchers performed a content analysis of three Ghanaian newspapers namely Graphic (Publicly owned), Guide and Chronicle (Privately owned). The study was conducted between the period of 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2006. The study found that the news related to injuries was widely reported. The accidents involving pedestrians were given more space than road accidents. The study also found that the road accident news provided only basic information, giving no information related to the causes of accidents, which could be useful in preventing similar accidents in the future.

Methodology

Hindi newspapers were found to have the highest circulation in the country. The Hindi newspapers have a circulation of 15.09 million followed by English newspapers having a circulation of 9.09 million (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2012). The two most popular Hindi newspapers in Haryana i.e. Dainik Jagran and Dainik Bhaskar have been included in the study. In India, road accidents are a major cause of countless deaths and particularly of young individuals. Coverage of accident news provides an opportunity to inform the public about the causes and fatal and grave consequences of road accidents, entailing the loss of precious lives. All the issues of these 2 newspapers i.e. Dainik Jagran, and Dainik Bhaskar from 1st June 2019 to 30 June 2019 were selected for the study. Newspapers published from Panipat were included in the study. Data were collected to conduct an analysis of the stories related to road accidents at the mentioned newspaper. The content of 80 covered stories on road accidents was reviewed.

Data Analysis & Presentation

Table 1. Distribution of Space under news and advertisements

Newspapers Categories	Dainik Jagran space in cm² (%)	Dainik Bhaskar space in cm² (%)	Total space in cm² (%)
News Content	516005 (62.61)	587882 (68.79)	1103887 (65.76)
Advertisement	308176 (37.39)	266720 (31.21)	574896 (34.24)
Total	824181 (100)	854602 (100)	1678783 (100)

The Dainik Bhaskar newspaper provided the maximum content space i.e., 854602sq. cm followed by Dainik Jagran 824181 sq. cm. On average Dainik Jagran provided 27472 sq. cm space per day and Dainik Bhaskar provided 28486 sq. cm. per day. Of the total published space of the two newspapers, about 65.76% was meant for news content and about 34.24% for advertisements. Of the two newspapers, Dainik Bhaskar devoted more space to the news content i.e. 68.79 percent and less to advertisements i.e. 31.2 percent.

Table 2.Number of accident news stories

Newspapers Categories	Dainik Jagran Frequency (%)	Dainik Bhaskar Frequency (%)	Total Frequency (%)
Accident stories in national pages	20 (51.28)	30 (73.17)	50 (62.5)
Accident stories in local pullout	19 (48.72)	11 (26.83)	30 (37.5)
Total	39 (100)	41 (100)	80 (100)

The above-given table shows the total number of stories published in the newspapers under study. It was found that Dainik Bhaskar published a total of 41 stories related to accidents whereas Dainik Jagran published 39 stories on accidents. Dainik Bhaskar published 73.17 percent stories on National or state page whereas 26.83 percent of stories were published in the local pullout. Dainik Jagran gave space to 51.28 percent of stories on national or state page whereas 48.72 percent of stories were published in the local pullout in Dainik Jagran newspaper. The research revealed that if calculate together, both newspapers gave more space to news pertaining to accidents on national or state pages being 62.5 percent.

Table 3.Space devoted to accident news stories

Newspapers Categories	Dainik Jagran space in cm² (%)	Dainik Bhaskar space in cm² (%)	Total space in cm² (%)
Space given in national/state page	1650 (52.67)	2492 (73.73)	4142 (63.60)
Space in local pullout	1483 (47.33)	888 (26.27)	2371 (36.40)
Total	3133 (100)	3380 (100)	6513 (100)

The table given above shows the space devoted to the accident news stories. Dainik Bhaskar gave slightly more space to the accident stories than Dainik Bhaskar. 3380 square cm space was given to accident news stories in Dainik Bhaskar newspaper whereas accident stories in Dainik Jagran were 3133 square cm.

Table 4.News published with the causes of the accident

Newspapers Categories	Dainik Jagran Frequency (%)	Dainik Bhaskar Frequency (%)	Total Frequency (%)
News published with cause	9 (23.08)	12 (29.27)	21 (26.25)
News published without cause	30 (76.92)	29 (70.73)	59 (73.75)
Grand Total	39 (100)	41 (100)	80 (100)

Mentioning the cause of the accident in news stories is of great relevance and essence to make the readers sensitive about traffic risk. The research yields a startling revelation that very few stories by stating the causes of accidents were published in both the selected newspapers. Only 23.08 percent of stories published in Dainik Jagran newspaper explained the main cause of the accident whereas, Dainik Bhaskar published 29.27 percent such stories giving the causes of accident in detail. A total of 26.25 percent of stories published mentioned the cause of accidents while 73.75 percent of stories were silent about the causes of accidents.

Table 5. Classification of accidents

Newspapers Categories	Dainik Jagran Frequency (%)	Dainik Bhaskar Frequency (%)	Total Frequency (%)
Between four wheelers	13 (33.34)	16 (39.02)	29 (36.25)
Between four and two-wheeler	8 (20.51)	8 (19.51)	16 (20)
Between four and three wheeler	1 (2.56)	1 (2.44)	2 (2.50)
Between two wheelers	3 (7.70)	2 (4.88)	5 (6.25)
With pedestrian	8 (20.51)	7 (17.03)	15 (18.75)
Issue based stories	6 (15.38)	7 (17.03)	13 (16.25)
Total	39 (100)	41 (100)	80 (100)

Table 5 given above shows the classification of accidents according to the forms of the vehicle involved in accidents. The data reveals that a majority of the accident occurred between four-wheelers, their number being 36.25 percent out of total stories published on accidents.

20 percent of news items dealing with the stories where accidents took place between four-wheeler and two-wheeler. It is worth mentioning here, that two-wheelers considered as the highly risky vehicle in India and not wearing helmets, high speed and rush driving and poor qualities of roads are some reasons for the majority of accidents but the majority of the accidents news items belongs to the four-wheeler to four-wheeler accidents. Pedestrians also have a high risk on the roadsides in as 18.75 percent of news items were based on the incidents of accidents of a four-wheeler to the pedestrians. 6.25 percent of stories were reported where the accident occurred between two-wheeler. 2.50 percent of stories related to

a four-wheeler to three-wheeler accident was also reported. 16.25 percent of stories of accidents that were issue-based also published in the newspapers. It is worth mentioning here, that both the newspapers are giving more or less equal space to the accidental news stories and both newspapers give a reasonable amount of space to issue-based stories that have more potential to aware of the readers.

Issue-based stories comprise such stories as are not based upon any particular accident rather they focus upon the seriousness of the issue of a road accident and shed light upon all its aspects and the policies needed to be formulated to address this issue. The analysis of such stories leads one to believe that of the various causes; over speeding is the leading cause of road accidents. Moreover, according to these news items, stray animals roaming on the roads also pose a serious threat to road safety. Road accidents occurring due to gross negligence are given prominent space to create awareness among the readers against such misadventures.

Table 6. Classification of accidents according to the locality

Newspapers Categories	Dainik Jagran Frequency (%)	Dainik Bhaskar Frequency (%)	Total Frequency (%)
Accidents in urban area	20 (51.28)	15 (36.59)	35 (43.75)
Accidents in rural area	19 (48.72)	26 (63.41)	45 (56.25)
Total	39 (100)	41 (100)	80 (100)

The table given above reveals that rural areas have a higher probability of road accidents than urban areas of the 80 accident news reports covered in these newspapers 56.25 percent accidents happened in rural areas whereas, 43.75 percent accidents happened in urban areas. According to the 2015 report of the Transport and highway ministry, India also, rural areas are more prone to accidents. The main reason for it is the deplorable condition of roads in villages. For instance, there is no traffic police, no red light, no street light, no divider, and no provision for reflectors on rural roads. Dainik Bhaskar newspaper has covered more rural road accidents while the Dainik Jagran newspaper has covered more urban road accidents.

Discussion & Conclusion

This study reveals that both the Dainik Jagran and the Dainik Bhaskar newspapers give inadequate coverage to the news of the accident, but the Dainik Bhaskar gives slightly more space to the accident news. In terms of numbers also, the Dainik Bhaskar has covered more

accidental news stories than the Dainik Jagran. It is also discovered that the Dainik Bhaskar gives coverage to the accident news items on the national or state page. Dainik Jagran published 51.28 percent news stories on national and state page and 48.72 percent such stories in the local pullout whereas the Dainik Bhaskar published 73.17 news stories on national or state page and 26.83 stories in the local pullouts, which shows that Dainik Bhaskar gives more prominence to the news of the accident. The study also discovered that both the newspapers have not published any article on road accidents despite the seriousness of the problem. Only news has been published dealing with an accident.

An attempt was made to know whether the newspaper awakens the public about the causes leading to accidents on the roads. By states the causes of the accidents, newspapers can create an awakening among people against traffic hazards, because readers when come to know about the causes of a particular accident they would be more careful about such causes. But it is surprising to know that both newspapers published very few stories explaining the causes of accidents. Dainik Bhaskar published 29.27 percent of such stories and Dainik Jagran published only 23.08 percent stories incorporating the cause of accidents. Despite writing about the causes the news stories try to give an emotive twist to such stories. An attempt has also been made to know whether the accident stories deal with the gravity of the situation arising from road accidents. During the course of the study, it was also learned that in about 25% of road accident cases drivers abscond from the spot of the accident. If the driver does not run away and tries to help the victims by rushing them to the hospital, many lives can be saved.

The minute analysis of the news stories also unfolds that among the numerous causes of the accidents over speeding and drowsiness are the major causes. Road accidents are a very leading cause of deaths in India and the violation of traffic rules precipitates road accidents. Although safety drives are launched by the government from time to time to ensure the enforcement of traffic rules, yet-spreading awareness by the media is of utmost significance. If people are conscious and sensitive about traffic rules, they themselves adhere to them. The study reveals that road accidents are given insufficient coverage in the newspapers and whatever coverage is given, that is also not so instructive and not enlightening, as to spread awareness.

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