Agenda Setting Role of Hindi Dailies on Women's Issues: Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The gender biasness is a matter of serious concern. Media is considered to be one of the most effective tools in the contemporary world has to take all such gender issues and matters in front of the masses. The paper makes an attempt to estimate the agenda of news media on women's issues and its gender sensitivity in covering those stories. In order to ascertain the media agenda on women two national mainstream Hindi dailies, Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran were purposively chosen and analysed their contents related to women's issues over a period of one month and also assessed their gender sensitivity in presenting news by applying framing analysis technique.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, mass media is believed to be reliable source of information and a tool which can raise the issues of unsung heroes of the society. It not only imparts information to the masses but also brings changes in the existing stereotypes. Media is also expected to report the issues which remain unseen and unnoticed without any prejudice. Reporting issues in the media does not mean the solution of any problem. It can only elevate the issues and create awareness about the happenings in the society. The policy makers still have to come with effective solutions in this regard. Sometimes policy makers do not pay much attention to the issues which are not covered or raised by the media, even if the issue is extremely critical. It is the need of the hour to think about each and every issue of both sexes for bringing changes in this bipolar world.

Media is an essential part of the tools of change because it has credibility and capability of reporting issues without any fear. Media, especially newspapers have enlarged their campaign in each field like social, cultural, political, educational and economic sectors. Hindi press has played a vital role in the pre as well as post independent India. They are widely circulated newspapers as compared to other regional language newspapers. Hindi newspapers seem to be more enthusiastic in covering local issues because of their circulation in the regional base. Masses generally prefer to read those stories which are related to their own area or vicinity. Besides covering national or international issues, these newspapers pay special attention in covering local issues. Feminists argue that women and their issues are usually kept away from news covering agenda because of their marginalised status in the society, poverty, illiteracy and patriarchal system. All the decisions about, what to cover and where to report the issue, are taken by the male employees of the media organisations. It is just because these organisations are owned or headed by the male. This patriarchal hegemony is the harshest barrier for bringing equality in the society.

Though McCombs and Shaw introduced the agenda-setting theory through their Chapel Hill, North Carolina study in1972, the genesis of the idea behind this theory goes back to Walter Lippmann's 1922 book, Public Opinion. According to Lippmann the thought process of the public and the pictures they are drawing in their heads about the outside world largely influenced by the mass media. It is not possible for the general public to have a firsthand experience about world outside there. Here mass media come to their rescue and become a primary source of information. Lippmann had claimed that the media acts as a mediator between people and the outside.

Benard Cohen further expanded the idea of Lippmann. According to him the role of the press not necessarily restricted to dissemination information. As he noted: "The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, 13). The agenda-setting function of mass media basically based on this idea of Cohen. McCombs and Shaw further expanded Cohen's theory by presenting their more thorough study in 1968. The media sets people's agenda. It is also a good platform for making discussions on people's issues. The agenda-setting function of the mass media implies a potentially massive influence whose full dimensions and consequences have yet to be investigated and appreciated (Shaw, 1979:101). The salience of objects in the mass media is linked to the formation of opinions by the audience.

Objectives & Methodology

The media sets people's agenda and is also a good platform for making discussions on people's issues. The salience of objects in the mass media is linked to the formation of opinions by the audience. The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To assess the importance given to women's issues by two national Hindi dailies
- To find the difference in the space given to the women's issues in the two national dailies.
- To find out the source of news related to women's issues.
- To examine the frames newspapers used in covering different women's issues.

The content analysis method was adopted to carry out the study. For the purpose two major Hindi newspapers namely, Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran were purposively selected for analysis. These two regional language newspapers were selected because of their wide circulation in Uttar Pradesh. For the purpose of content analysis women's issues of the selected two Hindi dailies (Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran) between July 1, 2012 and July 31, 2012 were selected. All the stories related to women's issues in these 31 issues were counted and analyzed. Content categories were identified and operational definitions of units of analysis were prepared. The unit of analysis was a story/ item that referred to women's issues. A coding sheet was prepared with content categories and units of analysis.

Results & Discussion

Both the newspapers did not given adequate importance to women's issues. Although the issues have been covered by both the newspapers, most of the times they are related to violence against women. Both the newspapers have focused upon covering sensational issues rather than giving much importance to women empowerment. The selected newspapers were also seen less interested in publishing the stories which might be

deemed as a toll of women empowerment or gender equality. Amar Ujala published stories more in numbers while Dainik Jagran published such stories more in area. It might be said that Amar Ujala covered more stories but it was failed to provide detailed background or information of the issues. Dainik Jagran gave detailed information of the cases even by publishing stories lesser in number, because it was in the lead of giving more space. Nevertheless, the space was found to be more in Dainik Jagran. There were some such cases which got more space in Amar Ujala as compared to Dainik Jagran. For instance honour killing, kidnapping/ abduction, domestic violence, matrimonial dispute, rape, police harassment, property, murder, molestation/ eve teasing, sexual harassment issues got more space in Amar Ujala as compared to Dainik Jagran. Miscellaneous issues were given more space in case of Dainik Jagran. The stories covered in Amar Ujala by reporters/ correspondents were found to be more in number but less in area as compared to Dainik Jagran. Both the newspapers also got some stories from the news agencies. In this case, Amar Ujala was leading in both the cases, be it number of stories or area covered in comparison with its counterpart Dainik Jagran. Men employees got more bylines in Amar Ujala as compared to women. But in Dainik Jagran women were marginally ahead in getting more by-lines as that of men. Together men and women did not share even single by-lines in both the newspapers. It might be because organizations do not assign the same beat or case to go with each other. They are given different tasks. The stories in which sources were not mentioned were equally in both the newspapers but differed in area as more area was occupies in Amar Ujala.

Conclusion

The newspapers under study did not provide adequate attention to cover women's issues. Above all Amar Ujala was more conscious towards highlighting women's issues in its agenda as compared to Dainik Jagran in case of total stories covered as well as front page stories. However it was lagged far behind Dainik Jagran in case of area covered. Both the newspapers gave more importance to the issues of nearby area rather than the issue of outside vicinity. They also did not given proper coverage to women's achievements rather than focussing on stories related to violence against women. Hardly a day passed when no story is published about violence against women. Newspapers also do not keep follow up of any issue that means that they are not gender sensitive. They publish news stories because of occurrence of the incident. They merely provide temporary solutions to the serious issue. It is the need of hour for media to be gender sensitive. Gender equality is only possible with the sensitivity of media towards it. It is none but the media which moulds our thoughts. Media should come forward in ensuring gender equality. It should not discriminate on grounds of sex, neither in case of reporting or assigning the beats for coverage. Both the newspapers focussed only on reporting the events of violence rather than ascertaining the root cause of such events and solutions to such menace in the society. The newspapers especially vernacular press will have to change its agenda of covering women's issues. These issues are to be covered seriously and without any prejudice.

Tables
Table 1: Newspaper Content Categories

Category	Amar Ujala	Dainik Jagran
Article	08	02
Special Story	03	00
Editorial	02	03
Letter to Editor	01	09
Ear Panel Photo	00	00
Report	03	05
Interview	01	00
Cartoon	00	00
Photo Caption	06	00
Opinion	00	03
News Stories	189	145
Total Stories	213	167

Table 2: Placement of News

Newspaper	Front Page	Inside Pages	Total
Amar Ujala	17	196	213
Dainik Jagran	15	152	167

Table: 3 Gender Issues and their Coverage: A Comparative Analysis

Category of the Issues	Amar Ujala Number of Items (Space allocated) percentage	Dainik Jagran Number of Items (Space allocated in cm²) Percentage
Divorce	00	01 (55.8) 0.11
Honour Killing	02 (188) 0.92	00
Dowry Death	00	00
Female Infanticide	00	00
Female Foeticide	05 (698.56) 3.43	10 (1034.1) 2.18
Kidnapping / Abduction	06 (518.6) 2.54	02 (105.75) 0.22
Maintenance	00	00
Domestic Violence	08 (798.65) 3.92	07 (403) 0.84
Matrimonial Dispute	01 (46.25) 0.22	00
Rape	13 (656.24) 3.22	06 (325.77) 0.68
Police Harassment	07 (631) 3.09	00
Property	05 (711.6) 3.49	03 (330.25) 0.69
Murder	32 (3013.74) 14.79	23 (2007.4) 4.23
Attempt to Murder	01 (38) 0.18	04 (364.5) 0.76
Molestation / Eve Teasing	16 (1448.65) 7.11	11 (589.59) 1.24
Sexual Harassment	23 (1726.18) 8.47	13 (1152.8) 2.43
Acid Attack	00	00
Miscellaneous	94 (9888.34) 48.56	87 (41056.86) 86.57
Total coverage	213 (20361.87)	167 (47425.82)

Table 4: Sources of News

Newspaper	Reporter / correspondent No. of stories (Space Covered in cm²)	Agencies No. of stories (Space Covered in cm²)	By-lines Male No. of stories (Space Covered in cm²)	Female No. of stories (Space Covered in cm²)	Both (Male and Female) No. of stories (Space Covered in cm²)	No Source Mentioned No. of stories (Space Covered in cm²)
Amar Ujala	106 (10807.97)	21 (1808.65)	12 (2423.35)	08 (1619.05)	00	66 (3702.85)
Dainik Jagran	77 (42050)	05 (555.34)	09 (1121.90)	10 (613.65)	00	66 (3085.93)

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