

Sourcing Pattern of National Security News in Indian Newspapers

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Abstract

The present study that seeks to explore the sourcing pattern followed by Indian newspaper reporters in their stories on national security issues is premised on the concept that sourcing patterns of mass media reflect the power structure that determines the normative media practices in a society. This reciprocity between media and the power structure is proved by research and indicated how it led to the lack of diversity of news sources, credibility of content and associated problems of organizational and official bias in news stories. Set as quantitative content analysis the study finds out the varying patterns in citing governmental, non-governmental and unspecified sources and in the distribution of factual, opinionated and framed contents in sourced news stories published in the major English and Malayalam newspapers in India. The study concludes that sourcing pattern followed by Indian media in the case of national security news serves as one of the five news filters identified by Herman and Chomsky in their Propaganda Model.

Keywords: News Sourcing, Credibility, Propaganda Model, Security News, Indian Newspapers

Introduction

News reporting is impossible without journalists' interaction with information sources in their socio cultural environment. It is through these constant and intense relationships with various sources that social realities are mediated to media users. Tiffen (1982) observes that news mediates the wider socio-political environment to its audience, but in turn its content has been mediated by its reliance on how other institutions make information available. He further considers news as a parasitic institution with its product is the deeds and words of others, and its quality depends at least partly on the quality of the information environment in which it is operating. News content, therefore, always needs to be understood not only in the context of what information is considered newsworthy, but of what information becomes available to the news media. (Tiffen, 2013). The simple reason behind it is that journalists cite those whom they value and in return, citation offers the cited sources with chances of gaining more power by getting their opinions published. Therefore, news sources and related citations if used objectively serve as credibility boosters, especially in the reports on security issues that attract much public attention and are potential to create social panic. For this very reason professional journalists are keen to refer to the governmental or expert

sources in their national security related stories. National security issues in the contemporary political contexts of war on terror and cross border terrorism are considered as very sensitive by journalists across the world. Citing governmental or official sources in such issues reduces the professional burden of reporters and the media's chances for litigation. In addition, it is an easy method to authenticate stories as the audiences traditionally attach enhanced credibility to government sources. At the same time, in doing so, these journalists bestow a level of legitimacy and credibility to sources associated with political administrations.

Reporters use varied methods for sourcing and reporting stories of security concerns considering the values of news and their salience in diverse geographical, cultural and political contexts. Sometimes, they stay away from citing sources of the stories putting the audience in dark and compromising on the credibility of news. Total absence of credible sources of the story lead to confusion and chaos in the society and it places the media under the shadow of doubt. ISRO spy case is the best example of this uncited reportage where newspapers sourced news from 'anonymous' sources were forced to report without citations. At the end, the case was proved to be false by the courts of justice and media was put under the fire of criticism for their absence of accountability and ethics.

In short, presence and absence of sources in news stories is a critical factor in defining the credibility of the story. Who is quoted is as important as who is not quoted or why nobody is quoted in the stories, especially those related to governmental affairs including national security since the fundamental duty of governments is to ensure sense of security in the public mind through transparent approach. In that sense, sourcing and citation pattern in the news stories takes a political turn as famously observed by Herman and Chomsky (1998) in their critical analysis of the mass media in the United States of America. According to them, in the countries led by state bureaucracy, media fulfills the aims of dominant elite by official censorship, plantation of stories and selective sourcing and citations and pose threats to responsible journalism.

Literature Review

Several studies have established the fact that government officials and elite voices dominated news sources over decades (Althaus et al. 1996; Brown et al. 1987; Entman and Page 1994; Hallin, Manoff, and Weddle 1993; Lacy and Coulson 2001). Hallin et.al (1993) revealed that 76 percent of sources of news stories related to national security in major newspapers in the US. These newspapers include The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Los Angeles Times. Entman and Page (1994) observed that the Gulf War reporters cited heavily government officials and military sources for their reports to enhance credibility. Even a study of the sourcing patterns of environmental beat reporters found that government sources dominated, and these journalists tended to marginalize consumers and environmentalists (Lacy and Coulson 2001). Most of the studies on sourcing pattern observe a lack of civil or nongovernmental sources in traditional news media. In turn, sourcing national security and terror related news stories in the mass media most often end up as public relations content for governmental version rather than being best available version of truth. Hallin and colleagues reported only 5.8 percent civil sources in coverage by national security reporters (Hallin, Manoff, and Weddle 1993). Interestingly, even a study of an alternative newspaper in the U.K. found very few non-elite sources (Atton and Wickenden 2005). Soloski (1980) found that majority of sources cited in local news media were government officials followed by non-governmental sources like political leaders, businesspersons, activists and social workers. By following these sourcing patterns news media reinforce the dominant knowledge structure, assigning authority, credibility, and legitimacy to government officials while simultaneously pushing civilians and their views

and concerns to the margins. Taking cues from the body of research literature in the domain source studies, the present study tries to explore the nature of sourcing pattern in Indian newspapers.

Study Objectives

How reporters in Indian newspapers source their news stories related to national security issues is the central theme of this study. To materialize this investigation the researcher set two specific objectives:

- 1) To find out the frequency of citation of various types of sources (governmental, non-governmental and unspecified) in the news reports on national security issues published in Malayalam and English newspapers
- 2) To examine the distribution of the types of content (factual, opinioned and framed) offered by sources cited in the news reports on national security issues published in Malayalam and English newspapers

Hypotheses

The researcher has formulated the following hypotheses to guide the study in its in-depth analysis.

- H1 Types of sources of news on national security are likely to differ among newspapers in India
- H2 The distribution of the types of knowledge offered by sources cited in the news reports on national security issues are likely to vary among newspapers in India

Theoretical Framework

The researcher imbibed the framework of this study from the theoretical perspective of source studies presented by Herman and Chomsky in their Propaganda Model. The Propaganda Model (PM), which sought to explain the behavior of the mass media in the United States, was developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky and published in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* in 1988 was firmly rooted in the critical-Marxist, more specifically the political economy, tradition of media and communication studies. They observe that the powerful are able to fix the premises of discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear and think about, and to 'manage' public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns, the standard [liberal-pluralist] view of how the media system works is at serious odds with reality (Herman and Chomsky (1998). Tuchman's (1978) study observed that journalists tend to cite official and non-official sources in a central point or geographically near to them. 'By identifying centralized sources of information as legitimated social institutions, news organizations and news workers wed themselves to specific beats and bureaus. Those sites are then objectified as the appropriate sites at which information should be gathered. Additionally, those sites of newsgathering are objectified as the legitimate and legitimating sources of both information and governance'. (Tuchman 1978). This tendency points at the filter concept in the Propaganda Model proposed by Herman and Chomsky.

In Propaganda Model, Herman and Chomsky identified five ingredients of news "filters" such as the size, ownership, owner affluence, and profit of the dominant mass media firms; advertising as the main revenue source of the mass media; the dependence of the media on information provided by government, business, and experts supplied and accepted by these primary sources and agents of power; informal criticism or flak as a means of disciplining

the media; anti-communism as a general belief and management machinery. The graphic representation of the model is given below.

Figure 1.: Flow chart of Propaganda Model introduced by Herman and Chomsky



The content of news must pass through successive filters, remaining only the filtered residue fit to print. These filters process naturally, so that the system can convince the journalists operating with complete integrity and they choose the news objectively on the basis of professional news values. It requires a macro along with a micro i.e. story-by-story view of media operations to see the pattern of handling and systematic bias.

Data Collection

Qualitative content analysis was the method used for data collection and the data was collected from four widely circulated newspapers in Kerala, a southern state of India taking news stories on national security issues as unit of analysis. As the study was set in a comparative perspective based on the language of newspapers, two English newspapers (Times of India and The Hindu) and two Malayalam newspapers (Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi) were selected for data collection as they are largest circulated dailies in the state. News stories were retrieved from the issues of newspapers published in January 2016. For analytical purpose sources were classified as Governmental, Non-Governmental and Unspecified while the types of sourced contents were categorized into Factual (content based on facts and figures and supported with official records) Opinionated (content that reflects views and opinions of the source either explicitly or implicitly) and Framed (content that contains cognitive bias).

Data Analysis

The total number of news stories taken for analysis is 241 sourced out of 30 issues of newspapers from The Hindu, The Times of India, Mathrubhumi and Malayala Manorama in January 2016. The data regarding distribution of sample stories is given in Table 1.

Table1: Distribution of Sampled News Stories on National Security

Newspapers	News Stories	
	Frequency	Percentage
The Hindu	68	28.22
The Times of India	72	29.88
Mathrubhumi	48	19.92
Malayala Manorama	53	21.99
Total	241	100.00

The Times of India published most number of stories (72) followed by The Hindu (68), Malayala Manorama (53) and Mathrubhumi (48) respectively. It is to be noted that The Times of India is the largest circulated newspaper and its circulation is widespread all over the nation unlike the Hindu, circulation of which is concentrated in south Indian states. More so, The Times of India has larger news hole compared to other newspapers. In that sense, its number of stories is not proportionate to its news hole size. There is a glaring difference among English and Malayalam newspapers in publishing the number of news stories on national security issues. The reason for this difference can be attributed to English newspapers' wider audience reach and larger spectrum of news collection.

As mentioned, the unit of analysis in the study is news sources in stories on national security issues published in the sampled issues of four newspapers selected. In 241 stories appeared 404 sourced content and their details are given in the Table 2. Most number of sources are seen in the Hindu (114) followed by The Times of India (110), Mathrubhumi (94) and Malayala Manorama (86). While the Hindu carries on average 1.67 source in each story, Times of India carried 1.52 story.

Table 2: Distribution of News Sources in Sampled Newspapers..

Newspapers	News Sources	
	Frequency	Percentage
The Hindu	114	28.22
The Times of India	110	27.23
Mathrubhumi	94	23.27
Malayala Manorama	86	21.29
Total	404	100.00

But, the average sourced stories are higher in Mathrubhumi (1.95) and Malayala Manorama (1.62). In this case higher level of sourcing is visible in Malayalam newspapers compared to their English counterparts.

The way these sources are distributed among their three categories is detailed in Table 3. In a democracy, governmental sources are considered to be more credible than any other sources, particularly in the case of stories related to national security issues, as they are most often to be sourced from classified documents. More so the level of the challenges to

national security can be assessed accurately only by government with authentic data at its disposal which is not accessible to non-governmental sources.

Table 3 : Distribution of Types of Sources in Newspapers

Newspapers	Types of Sources			Total
	Governmental	Non-governmental	Unspecified	
The Hindu	29 (7.18)	30 (7.43)	50 (12.38)	114(28.22)
The Times of India	21(5.20)	40(9.90)	49(12.13)	110(27.33)
Mathrubhumi	24 (5.94)	34(8.42)	36(8.91)	94(23.27)
Malayala Manorama	20 (4.95)	32(7.92)	34(8.42)	86(21.29)
Total	94 (23.27)	136(33.66)	169(41.83)	404(100)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage

$X^2 = 5.9855$. $df=3$, p value .42.

The data show that The Hindu carried highest percentage of governmental sources (7.18) compared to other newspapers while The Times of India carried highest percentage (9.90) of non-governmental sources and the both of these newspapers had higher and somewhat equal percentages (12.38, 12.13 respectively.) of unspecified sources compared to their Malayalam counterparts. Of all the sampled sources, highest percentage (41.83) goes to unspecified category followed by non-governmental (33.66) and governmental sources (23.27). The common trend in all newspapers is that unspecified sources are higher compared to other types of sources. Unspecified sources are those whose identities are disclosed and most often reported with wordings like ‘according to official sources’ or ‘sources said’, or ‘according to information from confidential sources’ etc.

However, the differences in the distribution of various types of news sources among newspapers are not statistically significant as the probability value was found to be .42. In short, sourcing trend is same in all newspapers irrespective of their language, reach and spectrum of reportage. This finding invalidates the first hypothesis (H1): Types of sources of news on national security are likely to differ among newspapers in India.

Yet another dimension sought be explored in the study was the nature of the distribution of various types sourced content among different newspapers. While the Hindu stood up with highest percentage (13.37) of factual content The Times of India was credited with highest percentage of (12.88) framed content. Opinionated content was found to be higher in Malayalam newspapers – Mathrubhumi (10.40%), Malayala Manorama (19.40%). The percentage of factual content is lower in Times of India (6.44) and Malayala Manorama (6.94).

Table 4: Types of Sourced Information in Newspapers

Newspapers	Type of Sourced Content			
	Factual	Opinionated	Framed	Total
The Hindu	54 (13.37)	35(8.66)	25 (6.20)	114(28.22)
The Times of India	26 (6.44)	32 (7.93)	52 (12.88)	110(27.33)
Mathrubhumi	30 (7.43)	42(10.40)	22 (5.45)	94(23.27)
Malayala Manorama	28 (6.94)	38 (9.40)	20 (4.96)	86(21.29)
Total	138 (34.15)	147 (36.39)	119(29.46)	404 (100)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage

$\chi^2: 31.7667. df=3, P=.00.$

The differences in the distribution of various types of sourced content in the sampled news stories were found to be statistically significant at a p level of .05. It means pattern of developing content from sourced information varies according to the newspaper policy on various national security issues. The finding supported the second hypothesis (H2): The distribution of the types of knowledge offered by sources cited in the news reports on national security issues are likely to vary among newspapers in India.

Discussion and Conclusions

From the data, it is clear that citing specified sources is not rooted as a professional practice in both English and Malayalam newspapers in India. Official sources are considered to be essential elements of news production and main sources of information on issues related to national importance since official sources have authority to comment on the issue and have access to authentic official sources. More so they are the formally assigned gateways through which governmental information has to pass to the public. (McNair 1998; Ericson et al 1989; Gans 1979; Altheide and Snow 1979; Tuchman 1978; Sigal 1973). However, Indian newspapers do not consider this parameters of credibility attached to official/governmental sources when reporting national security issues. There are two possible reasons for this trend: either governmental sources are not ready to disclose their identity due to official constraints, or media persons are not bothered about the verification of information on national security issues with the government sources as both audiences and governments are not concerned about the credibility of news. Whatever be the reason, this less professional approach leads to erosion of media credibility and spread of misinformation about sensitive issues related to the security of nation.

The level of citation of non-governmental sources in the sampled newspapers is at an average level. Such sources are most often cited for their comments based on their political or communal perspectives and their dominance over the government sources clearly indicates the Indian media's temptation to politicize national security issues. Politicization of national security issues consequently sensationalizes news of serious concern and end up as a market product that woo more audience. This is how immature sourcing practice functions as 'filters' mentioned by Herman and Chomsky in their Propaganda Model.

The notable finding was of the higher frequency of unspecified sources that inevitably lacks credibility. In both national and regional newspapers, citing unspecified sources is a common practice. While resorting unspecified sources, reporters and at large the media

itself are not ready to shoulder the responsibility of news and creates doubt and some times panic among the audience.

When looked at the types of sourced content in a comparative perspective, framed or opinionated contents are more prevalent than factual content in all newspapers except for The Hindu, which is known for serious journalism in India. However, The Hindu's sourcing pattern in terms of the types of sources is in line with other newspapers. And, it indicates that The Hindu filters content received from news sources according to their editorial policy to ensure credibility and demarcate facts from comments and views. This type of rigorous filtering mechanism is not found in the pattern of content selection followed by other three newspapers. Framing is an established practice in The Times of India given their higher frequency of framed stories.

The results indicate that sourcing functions as one of the five filters of propaganda as suggested by Herman and Chomsky in their famous model. Lack of professional editorial policy, vested interests of media corporates, lack of matured political vision and dearth of credibility concerns on the part of the audience collectively contribute to this situation where news ends up as a media product for content industry. Indian journalism has to go far to reach professionalism in basic journalistic practices like sourcing, citation and content editing. The way Indian reporters source national security related information unquestionably points at the existence of the elements of irresponsible editorial practices in India media sector and warrants serious attention for healthy future of democracy, media freedom and informed citizenry.

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