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**EXPLORING THE STRATEGIES OF INDIAN RURAL NEWSPAPER DURING THE DIGITAL ERA****HEZEKIAH****RESEARCH SCHOLAR****DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES  
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KARAIKAL****ABSTRACT**

*Not only that of the urban but also of the rural the face of media has change and so is the operation. The preferences and taste of information seeking people has change too. And all the credit goes to the innovation of new technology. Selling hard news alone doesn't suffice the readers thirst for information, so major newspapers start taking innovative steps and created a new trend which will provide news in an entertainment form. The format and contents of the newspapers have to be change drastically as of to stay in the market and to overcome the overwhelming competition posed such by the new electronic media. This paper discussed the strategies to tackle such threat and competition faced by the rural newspaper.*

**KEYWORDS**

media strategy, newspaper, rural press.

**INTRODUCTION**

**R**ecent studies have pointed out that the print newspaper market is blooming whereas the international market have seen the impeccable impact of the internet and other new media. In India the print media enjoys better circulation and readership especially in the language sector. According to The National Readership Survey (2006) it was reported that there were an estimated 204 million readers of daily newspapers and 222 million readers of all publications in India and by the year 2013 the number has increases to 281 million which is a very significant growth. The situation is still quite promising for the Indian print media also since the number of publications is constantly increasing even though the print media literacy has not increased substantially in the country.

The factors that have been driving the growth of print media in India have been the dominant field of research over the last decade. Most of the studies have pointed out that the ability of the print media to provide more space towards the issue of the general public, and their of setting better agenda, and the print media has the highest credibility among the readers, many readers believed that the information required will be provided to them and trust the print media to make decision on their behalves, print newspaper has higher accuracy and better written in comparison to its substitute which is online news, the tremendous growth of economy and the peoples purchasing power, and escalation of the literacy status. Will the development trends in circulation and readership particularly in the Indian language hold their ground as there emerge the new media?

Although a lot of studies have shown the print media looks strong and viable but, the inner core values of newspaper marketing has been shaken by the new media tools. The biggest challenge for the print media is to find the solution and tackle the problem before bowing down to the new media. The very economic foundation of the Indian press has been traumatized to its root due to the revolution of new media technology like the computer, mobile phone, websites such as social media and other newer interactive digital tools. The traditional flow of newspaper has been interrupted by the digital communication medium, to retain readers as a counter measures modern newspapers began to create websites that offer information in a rich variety and multimedia contents.

**THE NEW MEDIA**

The innovation of new technology has always been considered to be the extinction of the old existing media. Regardless of the nature of the new technology innovation always have been a major threat to the traditional media. And the survival of the print media has, since the inception of a strong technological presence, been threatened by the prevalence of on-line publications and other substitutes, such as radio, television, the Internet, electronic media and outdoor advertising and the cell phone over the past two decades. With the innovation of radio, newspaper was expected to cease from existing likewise in the later stage when television was invented people believes that the newspaper and the radio production would extinct. Although the subscription of print media and listeners for the radio broadcast has highly been effected by the innovation of television but far from extinction both the media remains a worthy competitor for the television. And this we can expect to continue in the long term. But the competition has never been tougher, so as to stay in the market a healthy strategy must be developed. With the introduction of internet and the birth of much more mobile technology the print media has been losing a lot reader. Our technology has never been more mobile which enables us to access any information from any part of the world. Accessing our favorite news comes in a different ways and form like video clips, audio or the visual online newspapers. Although, the media's ability to connect and sustain networks, has certainly increased with the digital development (Andersson & Jansson 2010), the challenge still lies with the rural print media industry where there are no high speed internet and the people doesn't have the latest technology to access or the necessary skills to use such complicated mobile machines.

**RURAL MEDIA SCENARIO**

Rural newspaper has been defined as one that is primarily publishes from a rural area devoting at least 50 per cent of its contents to the problems relating to the rural community, in a language akin to the ideas of the rural readers (Raja 2011). In our society today 70% of the population still lives in the rural area, but the urban bias is clearly reflected in the contents of the newspapers wherein the news regarding rural areas hardly comprise of 25% of the total media exposure. Khan & Khan (2012) has describe in their research that rural markets in India has the potential to generate bigger revenues in the country, as the rural areas encompass of the maximum buyers in this country. Based on the society and the surroundings that we lived in people need different information. The Rural Press is a link between the policy makers, development bureaucracy and farmers. It is a second line of conversion of scientific knowledge into information for utilization in the field situations. Its importance as a vehicle for reinforcing the literacy habit and for promoting social awareness and development is being increasingly recognized. The rural press is a promising medium for disseminating information and knowledge about nutrition, health, hygiene, improved farm practices, family planning measures and development plans to those sections of society where the information is mostly needed (Raja 2011). Although there's been a vast and free information available on the internet many people in the rural have no access to the internet. In the meantime, that internet information provided by those players couldn't really meets the desired audience and the information requirement of the rural news reader. For instance, people in the rural needs information about their society or community and also information related to agriculture as most of the population in rural are engage in farming. News about celebrities and mega

events happening in urban areas were of no much important to the village people. Village life starts early and exhausted from their day labor they retired early at night, the amount of time spends on reading and listening to radio or watching television were relatively much lower comparing to the urban population. And this short amount of time people spend on news media could be utilized in a proper and affective way. It could be almost regarded as a habit that most of the people during their free time would grab a newspaper if it is lying around.

Rural press is one of the most important, viable and effective means of communication for reaching out to the vast majority of rural population. The role of rural press has been universally recognized by all those who are interested in development (Justice G.N. Ray 2009). The local print newspapers have little source of revenue as compared to urban newspaper where the expenses were met by the advertising column. Rural newspapers also rely heavily on advertising revenues rather than the relatively meagre subscriptions fees and newsstand sales to stay in the competition. The rising disposable income has increased the purchasing powers of consumers in India's villages a phenomenon that certainly will encourage consumer goods companies to penetrate the market hoping to increase the appeal of their products or services through ads adapted to local languages and cultures. Khan & Khan (2012), Firms operating in industries are currently employing innovative marketing practices for their survival which is advertising as well as to increase their market share. For all this reason the rural newspaper market has the potential to rise beyond an average growth. However, rural areas have their own limitations in terms of large number of villages with thin population density, accessibility, infrastructure, telecommunication network, illiteracy, social and cultural backwardness and low disposable income (Khan & Khan 2012). In the backdrop most of the local papers were run by a family with limited employee and of course limited knowledge of expansion and without proper management skills. And the information has highly been influence by their personal perception and opinion. But, with more amount of investment of time and money they could probably do small miracles.

The problem has been exacerbated by a reduction in consumers' demand, and a change in consumers' preferences on account of the increased presence of both social media, which have been circulating gratis, and on-line publications. Another threat of the Internet is that information is delivered speedily and it is updated frequently throughout the day. The printed word is only available when the next edition is published. The cost of reaching to the customers sitting or located in rural and remote areas requires a lot of investment especially in case of unconventional modes. Only 57 percent of rural households have any type of mass media connections. Of these, 23 percent have access to print media and 36 percent are the viewers of televisions.

The number of languages and dialects vary from state to state and region to region. The distribution of scattered population warrants proper strategies to decide the extent of coverage of rural market. It becomes a real challenge to reach out a large number of people at an affordable cost. At the same time people do not adapt to new practices as life in rural areas is based very strongly on tradition and customs.

### MEDIA STRATEGIES

Many people can have great ideas so the real challenge is learning how to manage ideas. The basis of media strategies should highlight the localness of approach and dissemination of culturally appropriate information. The strategies would have to be innovative, realistic, chiseled and shaped to fine-tune the aspirations of the people and preferably be adopted by the local resource persons. The general use of print media is to provide information, to sensitize, reach and stabilize groups of rural people. Until recently, the print media has the advantage of being relatively cheap, as well as convenient to read because of the fact that written words or pictures on a paper medium becomes highly portable and available to a wide range of people. But the recent trends in technology has reshape the overall media platform. There are six factors that every rural newspaper manager need to analyze seriously as to tackle the internet effect.

### ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

The first and fore most important thing to do before taking a huge leap is to study the environment thoroughly so as to determine preferences and taste of the targeted audience. The media industry is experiencing extreme environmental change, arising from contiguous but unrelated changes in technology, regulation, and consumer behavior (kung 2007). The aim of the environmental scan is to research and compare how different jurisdictions use media. The research shall explore implications of media usage arising from convergent administrative and social trends by examining the environmental impact of news reading habit. Environmental scanning seeks out both potential opportunities and challenges by surveying different public sector experiences.

- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** It is a term that is used to describe the involvement of the public with knowledge of reading or listening, developing their understanding of, and interacting with, non-specialists. Participatory engagement is an ideal that many media organization aspire to and the emergence of new ICTs, particularly social media has transform this ambition more reachable.
- **NEW TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGES:** The invention of the telegraph was believed to disrupt print news industry, the same happen with radio and television but, print newspapers have confronted challenges over the decades and yet publishers have each time adapted and endured. But, the Internet over a few years of its existence has shaken the traditional newspaper model and prove to be a fierce foe. Small and large newspapers alike may have no choice but to abandon their traditional methods for a more innovative approach when faced with such an adversary.
- **COMPETITORS:** The local newspapers are not without competition, there has been an imminent threat from the national dailies and free community newspapers let alone the internet. The advent of the Internet has meant increased competition for news service provider as the internet provides vast amount of information for free. Such trends in combination with additional factors have left many newspapers in risk of closing down or being forced to undertake drastic cost cutting.
- **POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT:** Non-market forces are as important as market factors for not only newspaper firms but as well as for many businesses. The collaboration between government organizations, elected bureaucrats, policy-oriented activists and NGOs shape the legal environment for newspaper firms in ways that have direct implications for their bottom line. The rules and regulations were created by the politicians and it have a very significant impact on the cost of running a business and the way it can market products and services.

**BUILDING SKILLED/EFFECTIVE TEAM:** Team building is a process that helps a group of workers to become into a unified unit. Whether it be a local community, place of work or professional sports, building team always requires deep understanding of their strengths and motivating them to get excited to work along others. Team building requires the administration of personalities and their consistent for consideration. Team building is considered both as an art and a science and the leader who can consistently build high performance teams will always monitor their progress and effectiveness. In order for an organization to thrive, it is essential to figure out how to shape a team that works well together which may prove be a difficult task. Building a team means elaborating people with different skillsets and personal qualities to work towards a common complex goal. Likewise, employing the right person for the right job save you from unexpected blunders and hiring a person with the necessary skill save you time and money. When the team consist of a right proportionate amount of evenly distributed skilled worker having required knowledge, the work flow faster and the training time can be reduced.

**CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION:** Do the traditional news operations really need innovation are they ready? The ability of firms to innovate is a primary factor in gaining and sustaining competitive advantage (Nelson and Winter, 1985). Allocate more budget on research and innovation, as this will be the growth driver in the future. To meet the desired requirements of the reader it is always necessary to be creative as readers seeks not only news but infotainment in the present era. Technology represents both a new platform that facilitates innovation in terms of the distribution of existing products and services, and a platform for publishing which enables innovations in journalism and user interaction, (Krumsvik, Skogerbø & Storsul 2013). Without doubt, like every other organization to excel print media requires creativity as much to stay in the competitive market. This strategic relevance of creativity for organizational performance in the media industry is without doubt to be highly prioritize. The approach was design to liberate and provide autonomy to journalists in pursuing their jobs within the bounds of journalistic values and ethics. Creativity and innovation will transpire only when such freedom is granted to the various level of workers and journalists. At the same time, it is as much important that higher authorities to recognize the talent and cultivate their employees' creativity into actual performance.

**RISK TAKING:** Creativity and innovation always leads to an uncertain outcome which may or may not always be desirable. When it comes to risk journalists are known to take a lot of risk in their jobs, of course it's done in the course of reporting a story. But there is also other risk involved in starting or operating and

running of business, or taking critical decision of changes on how the existing business is run. Few of the examples are whether or not to introduce paywalls for online news, or trying to build up community coverage and re-establish a connection with readers by spending more money to penetrate the intense local markets. There is a huge difference between survival and success and one needs to really understand the concept as to gain competitive advantage and their risk is always involved. The truth is that the success of the media industry is extremely unpredictable, you can't be sure that you will succeed even if you have the right strategy to deal with. Especially, during the internet age where everyone uses their laptop, tablet and cellular phones to access their favorite news online. The failure to oversee danger can highly be disastrous for progress activities and the marketing environments are increasingly complex as they strive to position for changing consumer behavior, channel proliferation and the demands of innovation.

**VALUE CREATION:** Organizations have seen the daily paper as the essential product of value created by the organization and did not adjust the newsroom schedules that had been made through the decades for creating that item productively. The advance of the Internet is leading to significant disruptions in the newspaper industry value chain. Network size is a fundamental driver of value in network externalities. It is important that to strengthen the newspaper's network, series of strategic alliances should be established with bigger national or international newspapers and media. To confront such a challenge, organizations must have a clear objective that clarify how the changes will not only address economic actualities but similarly endure the professional values that journalists consider important to their professionalism.

**ADAPTING TO CHANGES/ CHANGE CAPACITY:** Consumers increasingly embrace online newspapers (Kaye and Johnson 2004). Every business should always be dynamic as always a new challenges or competitors always appears from nowhere to ruin your business. As also for the rural newspaper it is strategically viable to move along with the new technology as to widen the readership base community. Companies assumed the Internet was "cannibalizing" contents that used to be more profitable than websites. But usage grew faster than expected and when traditional companies wanted to come back, it was too late (Pérez-Latre, 2003). The internet has converted the world into global village (Mohanty and Parhi 2011).

Since the introduction of internet there has been many newspaper firms that offer free information on their websites. This has been the measure taken by the big media player as to retain their loyal readers using the latest technology. There are blogs and which are completely free and easy to access, these becomes the most important tools for the rural print managers to retain their readers during the era of new information technology where readers seek their information online. The internet enables higher and better interaction between the news provider and their reader which would lead to the exchange of information where the writer provides news and the reader provide opinions, suggestion and comment. These information proves to be highly important as they represent the preference of the reader.

## CONCLUSION

Newspapers have faced a series of challenges for many years, not always successfully. Newspaper publishing companies will have to find their way in the information and communications landscape. This information and communications landscape is a playing field larger than the traditional publishing environment. In order to survive and prosper in the today's changing industry structure and competitive situation, newspapers publishing companies clearly require a viable competitive strategy.

For newspaper publishing companies to maintain or create a sustainable competitive advantage, it is important to identify specific industry environments within which the cost advantage and differentiation strategy are likely to succeed. A publisher's ability to change its organizational structure and existing activities and businesses along the evolution of technology in the industry can be seen as a major source of failure or success. The strategic choices pursue by individual newspaper publishing companies will be influenced by a variety of local market conditions and internal organizational and operational factors. Although the strategies will differ among companies, they must continually emphasize and improve on their strength in news, context, and analysis.

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