



Assessment of newspapers' adherence to PCI codes: A special reference to the times of India and Hindustan times' reportage of Covid 19 pandemic

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Abstract

PCI is a statutory body formed in 1976 by the parliament, government of India. This is the official watchdog of the press that gets its power from the PCI act of 1948. This body is a well-represented council which formally has the then Supreme Court president as its head and 28 members from the world of media.

Furthermore, PCI has laid down formal norms for journalists as well as a guiding map for the press in India. It is one of the bodies saddled with the responsibility of regulating the activities of print media in India.

According to Kumari (2015) [8], PCI is a mechanism by means of which Indian Press is being supervised and observed maintaining height of possible levels of professional journalistic decorum and conduct. It is as well worthy of note that one of the reasons behind the establishment of this noble institution is rooted in the concept that in a democratic society, the press needs at once to be free and non-interfering. Kumari further posits that the council has ever since been reduced to a toothless dog, incapacitated and hence can no longer perform its statutory obligations.

This he said accounts for the reason behind the loss of professionalism and drastic reduction in the level of adherence to the ethics that guide the operations of media professionals in the industry especially those in the print media notwithstanding the well outlined sets of codes provided by the Council which are expected to guide the operations of practitioners in this field.

It is against this backdrop that this study sets out to examine whether Times of India and Hindustan Times which according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) are the most circulated and third circulated newspapers with 3.029 million and 1.132 million daily circulations respectively are adhering to the codes of PCI making special reference to the two papers' reportage of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Keywords: PCI, media, print media, pandemic, covid 19

Introduction

Press Council of India is a statutory body formed in 1976 by an act of parliament, government of India. Just as the fact remains that for every profession, there exists various monitoring bodies and agencies that guide and oversee the activities of professionals in such a field, for the press in India, PCI has been saddled with this responsibility. The council which gets its power from the PCI act of 1948 is expected to serve as the official watchdog of the press. Kumari (2015) [8] defines PCI as a mechanism by means of which Indian Press is being supervised and observed.

Despite the fact that there are well outlined and well spelt out codes of professional standard for practitioners in the field of journalism, there has been outcries over the years that so called professionals operating in the field not only in India but across the globe had failed to live up to the standards as stipulated by the various monitoring agencies. This as a matter of fact could not be said to be unconnected with the level of effectiveness of the various monitoring agencies of the media just as Kumari said the Press Council of India has been reduced to a toothless tiger, incapacitated and hence can no longer perform its statutory obligations.

It is against this backdrop that the researchers examined the extent at which the Press Council of India is effective in carrying out its responsibilities over the Indian Press and as well understand if the press in India has lived up to the spirit

of professionalism in the discharge of their journalistic activities using *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times newspapers* which according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) are the most circulated and third circulated newspapers in India's reportage of the COVID 19 pandemic as the focus of the study.

Objectives of PCI

The Press Council of India wasn't just established to serve as a figure head or without a specific purpose and objective. As a matter of fact, the major objective of PCI is to ensure the freedom of the press as well as apply some checks and balances so that the freedom granted will not be misused and in case of any violation or misuse, the commission is as well saddled with the responsibility of enforcing sanction.

The following are some of the objectives of PCI according to information available on the website of the council and cited in the Bharati Law Review, April-June 2015:

- To ensure Press Freedom.
- To help in maintaining newspapers' independence.
- To build up a code of conduct for newspapers and journalists in accordance with high professional standards.
- To ensure on the part of newspapers and journalists the maintenance of high standards.
- To foster a due sense of both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

- To ensure that the press is socially responsible.
- To put under check any factor with the tendency of restricting dissemination of content deemed to be of public interest.

Above are some of the objectives of PCI. The aim of this study is to assess if PCI is living up to these objectives with respect to India press.

Theoretical Framework.

On a general note, theory is explained as a set of principle(s) on which the practice of an activity is based. It has been established that what does not have a theoretical backup cannot exist in reality. Various academic scholars have given their various definitions of theory. Mc Quail (1994) as cited in Folarin (1998) ^[6] explains the term as various ideas used in explaining phenomenon(s). Daramola (2012) describes it as “A statement of prediction or a symbolic construction based on individuals’ viewpoints about an aspect of reality”. Kerlinger (1973) quoted in Daramola (2012) ^[3] is of the opinion that theory or theories are interconnected ideas that gives clear perspective about a phenomenon.

This paper is premised basically upon 3 theories of the media two of which are categorized under the theories of media effect and the last one based on the gatekeeping role expected to be played by the media and the supervisory agencies or councils respectively as the case maybe. These theories are well elaborated upon below and explanations are also given on how it relates to this present study.

Framing Theory

Categorized under the theories of media effect, framing theory in social sciences involves set(s) of concept(s) and idea on how people reason and exchange opinions about a particular fact.

Framing with respect to media and communication can be viewed with a subjective mind in the form of positivity or negativity – depending largely on audience type and the kind of information being presented.

Various academic scholars have also given their own definitions of framing theory just as Alawode and Adesanya (2016) ^[1] posit that the concept of framing cannot be detached from the agenda setting theory. The scholars posit that it broadens a study by concentrating on the essence of present issue(s) as the fact remains that the "frame" of an issue can alter the perception of readers.

Alawode and Adesanya’s view was also supported by Bradley (2010) ^[2] as the scholar considered the theory as the form of second level agenda-setting. Bradley describes it as the thought of influencing the audience's perception of the news. Postulators of framing theory just like the agenda setting theory are of the opinion that the media not only tells the audience what to think, but how to think also.

This theory is relevant to this study as it is believed that the kind of reportage given to the COVID 19 pandemic by the selected newspapers goes a long way in shaping the audience's perspective about the virus. The mannerism of the report given to the virus can positively or negatively affect the perspective of the audience.

Cultivation Theory

As postulated by George Gerbner, cultivation theory is another theory categorized under the media effect theory.

This theory argues that constant revelation of media content to the people tend to influence their perceptions of social reality. Though according to the theorist that introduced the theory, it applies basically to television viewing as it suggests that audiences that often view television content have the tendencies of having a reflection of what they view in the real world.

Better explained, Gerbner according to Cynthia V. (2019) proposed that “over time, repeated exposure to media cultivates the belief that the messages conveyed by the media apply to the real world. As people’s perceptions are shaped by media exposure, their beliefs, values, and attitudes are shaped as well.”

This theory best underlies this study just like the first theory of media effect explained above as continual exposure to COVID 19 content (positive or negative content) goes a long way in shaping the perspective of the audience about the virus and goes a long way in determining the level of panic and agitation among the people. This accounts for the reason why the Press Council of India gives clear rules of engagement while writing reports on issues in this category. It is however worthy of note to state that notwithstanding cultivation theory has mostly been used for television study, newer researchers according to Cynthia V. (2019) have also related the theory to other media as well, hence its relevance to this present research.

Gatekeeping Theory

Broadly explained, gatekeeping theory has its centre focus on the information filtering strategy. The theory according to Elina E. (2018) ^[4] is explained as “the judgment or decision making about what information should be gathered, evaluated, and ultimately shared or disseminated.” One of the fundamental beliefs of gatekeeping is the fact that “whoever controls the flow of information can influence social reality.”

In communication, it is expected that there should be gatekeepers at various points to ensure that information being disseminated for public consumption is not capable of triggering unrest of any form as this is deemed to play significant roles in strengthening or disrupting the harmony that exists in the society. The gatekeeping process starts from the reporter that decides the sources of news to be included in his report. The process goes further to the editor who decides on which report to be disseminated to the audience, and doing this, it is mandatory for him to bear in mind the ethics that guide the profession.

This theory is largely relevant to this research as the Press Council of India based on their statutory responsibility are expected to play the role of a gatekeeper in ensuring that media content are not deviating from the established ethics of the profession.

Review of Literature

Within the Asian continent, Yan M. (2016), in the study titled ‘*The First Five Years of the Hong Kong Press Council: A Case Study of the Desirability and Feasibility of Media Self-Regulation*’ examined the Hong Kong Press Council and attributed its establishment to the realization of the quest for self-regulation. The paper discusses the wide difference between state regulation and self-regulation. While the former is said to be synonymous with government-oriented control, the latter is with respect to self-control.

The study finds out that, Hong Kong Press Council, just as the case is with most self-regulatory media agency in other parts of the world, has not lived up to expectation as the result of the research posits that since its establishment, print media have done little to regulate themselves, promote media ethics or uphold the professional standard as expected to be done by the council.

Furthermore, according to another study titled '*Holding Nigerian Press to account: An evaluation of models, milestones and sustainability*' conducted by Emmanuel I. (no date), the Nigeria Press Council (NPC) was established in the year 1992. This was said to be about seven years before Nigeria returned to democratic system, meaning that the military government in collaboration with other press associations in Nigeria established the council. The council is saddled with the responsibility of receiving complaints from dissatisfied members of the public as well as complaints from aggrieved members of the media and finding a means of resolving these grievances.

The scholar argued that two decades after its official inauguration, the council received over 150 complaints but resolved only 17 out of the total complaints received (five by ordering rejoinder, eight by ordering apologies, two by withdrawal and two by retraction) respectively. This implies that a total number of 133 cases could not be resolved for reasons said to have suggested lack of public trust and political interference.

The methodology and design adopted for the study is evaluation while interview and examination of case files, newspapers, magazines, books and other official records were used as primary and secondary sources of data respectively.

At the end of the study, it was discovered that the press seeks to achieve accountability through two means (government/ press collaboration and press self-regulation); a model the scholar says will not be effective. The study however concluded that the second model, (i.e., press self-regulation) if refined to include open, fair hearing and free procedure for registering grievances, might be more successful and sustainable than using both models simultaneously.

Moreover, the study on '*Regulating Contradictions: The Australian Press Council and the Dispersal of Social Control*' was conducted on the Australian Press Council by Pat O. (1987) ^[10]. In this paper, the scholar posits that while representing some aspects of a social control institution, it is better that the council comprehended in terms of the contradictory characteristics of the social field in which it is located, rather than in terms of a broad strategy of state expansion saying "the dispersal model should be recast to take account of such variations and to recognize the extent to which social fields may generate their own forms of institutionalized control, which bear a highly problematic relation to state regulation."

The study could however be said not to be detailed enough as no effort was made to appraise published content vis à vis the approved professional codes of the council.

An Analysis conducted on the Press Council of India with the title '*Press Council of India: A Critical Analysis*' by Kumari (2015) ^[8] is another study to be reviewed as the paper examines the powers of the Council vis à vis its statutory responsibilities. The paper argues that PCI is saddled with the responsibility of supervising the press in India with the mandate of maintaining a great level of

professionalism and journalistic decorum in the print media industry.

The study however stated that though PCI is meant to oversee the affairs of the print media Industry in India, the council's powers is limited when it comes to taking actions against erring journalists or newspapers as it maintained that the council can only issue warning, admonish and also censor.

With the conclusion that PCI is nothing but a "toothless tiger," saying "PCI is more teeth and less byte," the writer opines that the council will continually remain ineffective until it is granted the power to fine and also be constitutionally allowed to institute further punitive measures against erring journalists and newspapers.

In the advent of the outbreak of the present novel coronavirus, this study conducted by Mark D. (2020) ^[9].

titled, '*The role of media and mass communication theory in global pandemic*' examined the role of theories of mass communication with respect to the global pandemic.

With the objective of showing how mass communication theories can be said to be instrumental with respect to its roles regarding COVID 19 pandemic, the study reviewed media and mass communication as a field of study based on seven fundamental theories (Mass Society, Social Construction, Mediatization, Political Economy, Social Constructivism, Functionalism, Communication Determinism Technology).

The study concludes that media and mass communication theories are continually relevant in the media discourse. It states further that media studies and communication science speak volumes about the current state of the pandemic. This is the reason why media men must be weary of what they report as it could cause panic, fear and more unrest if the reports are exaggerated.

Though this paper did not consider the aspect of press council or any regulatory agency, it is however very relevant to this present study as it dwelt extensively on media reportage of pandemic which is one of the focus of this study.

Having reviewed these numbers of literature, it is pertinent to highlight a few points that give this present study an edge over the existing studies conducted with respect to press regulation and media professionalism which as a matter of fact serves as addition to existing knowledge in this regard.

- None of the researchers got the perspective of top officials of the Council in any of the reviewed studies, hence the result of the studies could be said to be unbalanced.
- None of the studies was done specifically on the level of professionalism with respect to newspapers' reportage of the COVID 19 pandemic.
- The utilization of the combination of content analysis and interview in this study is an edge over other existing literature as the majority of them did not make use of this approach. Hence, the results of this study could be said to be more reliable and considered as holistic.

Research Objectives

- A. To know which of the two newspapers gave the highest level of coverage to the pandemic.
- B. To understand the extent at which the selected newspapers adhere to PCI codes of ethics with respect to their reportage of the COVID 19 pandemic.

- C. To know the extent at which Indian Press adheres to PCI ethical codes of ethics.
- D. To examine the extent at which PCI is empowered to institute legal action against erring journalists.
- E. To understand the extent at which PCI has lived up to expectation in discharging its duties and responsibilities over the Indian Press.

Research Questions

- A. Which of the two newspapers gave the highest level of coverage to the pandemic?
- B. To what extent does the selected newspapers adhere to PCI code with respect to their reportage of COVID 19 pandemic?
- C. To what extent does Indian Press as a whole adheres to PCI ethical codes of conduct? To what extent is PCI empowered to sanction or institute legal actions against erring journalist(s)?
- D. Has PCI lived up to expectations in improving the performance of Indian Press?

Methodology

This study is based on the qualitative research method. It utilizes content analyses and in-depth interviews as means of data collection. While the content of the two newspapers were analyzed according to the PCI code for reporting pandemic, an extensive interview was conducted with the PCI Chairman. The content analyzed for this study includes all the editions of *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times newspaper* from March 1 to June 30 2020 (4 months) when reports on the pandemic were considered to be high. Hence, the study population totals at 244 editions (122*2).

Since it is practically impossible for the researchers to sample the entire 244 editions for this study as it is a large number, systematic sampling was used by the researchers in adopting a sizable number for the study. Hence, selection of the editions of the newspaper used for the study was done at regular intervals from the sampling frame. The intervals are chosen to ensure an adequate size that could be a representative of the entire population giving each member equal chance of selection. Thus, a total of 120 editions were selected in both newspapers in a systematic order. For each of the months, the researchers selected publications between 1st to 5th, 11th to 15th and 21st to 25th (15 editions per month multiplied by 2 making a total of 120).

Unit of Analysis

For this study, the researchers identify and use only five units of analysis which includes units under the following categories: news stories, feature articles in form of: (opinions, analysis and columns), editorials/letters-to-the-editor, pictures, and cartoons.

Categories of Analysis

Content analysis categories are the system used to classify media content under investigation. For this research, the categories of analysis include; frequency, prominence and direction of COVID 19 related content in the selected newspapers.

Frequency

The frequency was measured by the amount or total number of reports presented on the pandemic in the two newspapers.

Prominence

This considers the importance given to COVID 19 reports in the newspapers which was determined through the positioning of content.

Position: This involves the placement of the news stories in the entire newspaper layout. The page that carries content on COVID 19 pandemic in the newspapers under study will to a great extent assist in determining the importance attached to stories that bothers on the pandemic just as stories on front page were regarded as the most important, the back-page stories was regarded as important while the inside page stories were seen as less important.

Direction

This involves the tone, angle or language in which the reports were presented. It may be positive, negative or neutral.

Positive reports: include those content that are favorable and in line with the codes of professional practice as prescribed by the Press Council of India.

Negative reports: are those content that are unfavorable. Unfavorable in this regard implies that they are deemed to be against the standard of professionalism according to PCI code.

Neutral reports: are the content that are neither favorable nor unfavorable. These are kinds of content that cannot be said to be for or against the code of PCI, they are reported accordingly as it is.

According to the Press Council of India's Norms of Journalistic Conduct (2019) published on the council's website, the following are the norms meant to be followed while reporting epidemics or natural disasters which also applies to reporting pandemic:

1. Facts and data relating to spread of epidemics or natural calamities shall be checked up thoroughly from authentic sources and then published with due restraint in a manner bereft of sensationalism, exaggeration, surmises or unverified facts.
2. Natural or manmade hazards become disasters through acts of commission and omission of the society. Therefore, the disastrous impact can be minimized by preventive action taken by all the stakeholders including the media.
3. Media should give wide publicity to the do's and don'ts and the potential benefits of disaster mitigation so that the society follows them before, during and after the occurrence of the disasters. People should be detailed on standard guidelines. The issues of children and women which are the most vulnerable groups during and after disaster should be handled carefully by the media.
4. It is necessary to have complete cooperation between the media and all governmental and non-governmental agencies. The extent of the coordination and cooperation between them determines the nature, the degree and the scale of the preparedness to prevent or meet the disasters.

Hence, as said earlier, reports either in forms of news stories, features, editorials/letters to the editor, pictures or cartoons that are in line with the above norms of journalistic practice are categorized as positive reports. On the other way round, report(s) that goes contrary to these norms in

any of the units of analyses were grouped as negative reports while those that are normally and neutrally reported were grouped under the neutral reports.

Data generated with respect to this was used in providing answers to the second research question. The result was also generalized to the entire Indian press; hence it was used to answer the third research question on ‘To what extent does Indian Press as a whole adheres to PCI ethical codes of conduct?’

Moreover, positioning was also used in determining the prominence given to reports on the pandemic by the two newspapers.

Method of Data Presentation and Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using frequency distribution tables, simple percentages, pie charts and bar charts. The data were presented in percentages, tables and charts according to the frequency count of occurrences of units in each of the categories adopted. The responses of the PCI Chairman to the questions asked during the interview session was also discussed.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This section dealt with the presentation, analyses and interpretation of data obtained from the study population through the use of coding sheets and interviews respectively. The analysis of the data obtained is immediately followed by interpretation of the findings.

As explained earlier, to obtain accurate information for this study, a total of 120 (60 each) editions of the paper were selected across the stipulated period under study at regular intervals. The purpose of studying the content of the newspapers for these four months is to have a thorough and holistic analysis of the newspapers’ coverage of the pandemic as it was considered high during this period.

The presentation, analysis as well as interpretation of data in this session is in a bid to properly meet the research objectives and also provide the answers to the various research questions of the study. Basically, while the first three research questions and research objectives were addressed through the data generated from the content analysis, the other two research questions and research objectives respectively were addressed based on the response provided by the PCI Chairman to the questions asked during the interview.

Research One

- Which of the two newspapers gave the highest level of coverage to the pandemic?

This question sought to understand the level of reportage given to the pandemic by the two newspapers. In order to determine this, the analyses of coverage given to COVID 19 related content in terms of frequency and prominence (by placement) is considered. This is done as it is believed that content that appear on the first page were regarded as the most important, back page content are regarded as important while content on the inside page is regarded as less important.

Table 1: Showing distribution of reports according to frequency of coverage

Story Type	Times of India	Hindustan Times
News stories	1,659 (66.1%)	2,008 (65.4%)
Features	522 (20.8%)	816 (26.6%)
Editorials/letter-to-the-editor	5 (0.2%)	3 (0.1%)
Pictures	246 (9.8%)	233 (7.6%)
Cartoons	77 (3.1%)	9 (0.3%)
Total	2,509 (100%)	3,069 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2020

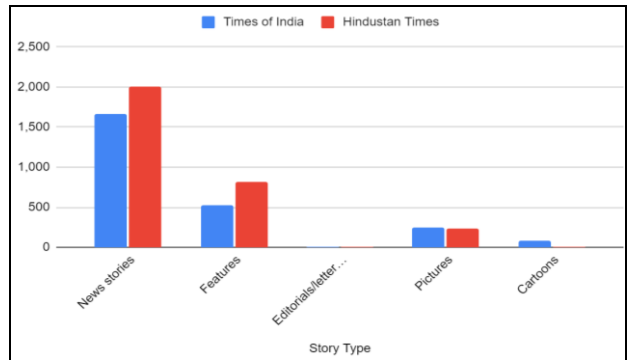


Fig 1: Bar Chart showing distribution of reports according to frequency of coverage

The Data as presented and analyzed in Table 1 and Figure 1 respectively shows the percentage and the sum of reports of the pandemic by the two newspapers under consideration. As presented in the table, *Hindustan Time* had the highest coverage of the pandemic with respect to frequency as it had a total of 3,069 story types with 2,008 (65.4%) news stories, 816 (26.6%), 3 (0.1%) feature articles, 3 (0.1%) editorials/letter to the editor, 233 (7.6%) pictures and 9 (0.3%) cartoons.

Table 2: Showing distribution of reports according to prominence (By Placement)

Prominence (By Placement)	Times of India	Hindustan Times
Front Page	357 (14.2%)	285 (9.3%)
Inside Page	2,107 (84.0%)	2,729 (88.9%)
Back Page	45 (1.8%)	55 (1.8%)
Total	2,509 (100%)	3,069 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2020

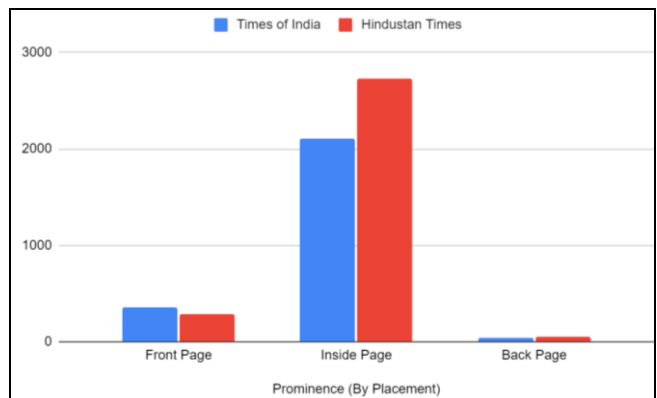


Fig 2: Bar Chart showing distribution of reports according to prominence (By Placement)

With respect to the prominence given to COVID 19 related content in the two newspapers, the data generated as presented and analyzed in table 2 and figure 2 above revealed that *Times of India Newspaper* gave more prominence to COVID 19 content compared with the level of prominence given by *Hindustan Times Newspaper*. This is such that a total of 357 (14.2%) content appeared on the front page of the *Times of India Newspaper*, 2,107 (84.0%) was on the inside page while 45 content which is 1.8% was placed on the back page.

On the other hand, 285 content (9.3%) was placed on the front page of the *Hindustan Times*, 2,729 (88.9%) was on the inside page, and 55 (1.8%) content was on the back page.

In line with the objectives and research questions of this study, it was discovered that *Hindustan Times Newspaper* with a total report of 3,069 (55%) gave the highest level of coverage to the pandemic. The result is such that with respect to frequency, out of 5,578 reports, 2,509 which constitutes 45% of the reports was given by *Times of India Newspaper* while 3,069 which is 55% of 5,578 was given by *Hindustan Times Newspaper*. The difference here is 10% i.e., the report by *Hindustan Times Newspaper* is 10% higher than that of *Times of India Newspaper*.

But with respect to prominence, *Times of India newspaper* took the lead as explained above with a difference of 4.9%.

Table 3: Showing the total frequency of coverage of the pandemic by the two newspapers.

Story Types	Frequency	%
News stories	3,667	66%
Features	1,338	24%
Editorials/letter-to-the-editor	8	0%
Pictures	479	9%
Cartoons	86	1%
Total	5,578	100%

Source: Field Survey 2020

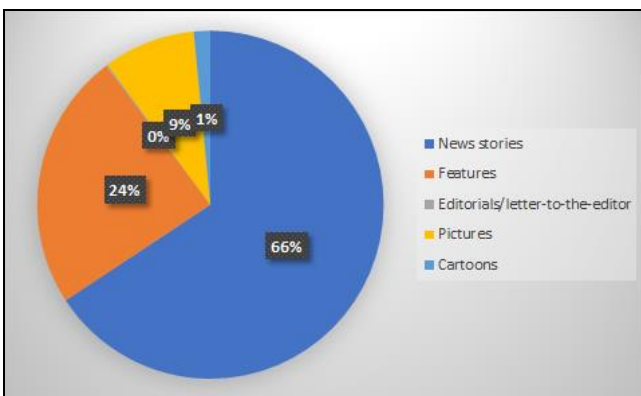


Fig 3: Pie Chart showing total reports with respect to frequency of coverage of the pandemic by the selected newspapers.

The data from the table and chart as presented and analyzed above revealed the aggregate of reports as presented by the two newspapers under consideration with respect to their coverage of the COVID 19 pandemic. It indicates the differences among the reports in various categories under consideration i.e. (news stories, features, editorials/letter-to-the-editor, pictures and cartoons respectively) presented in *Times of India and Hindustan Times Newspapers* in relation to their overall coverage within the same period.

The highest reports on COVID 19 in both newspapers was

news stories with 3,667 which represents 66% of the overall percentage. This was followed by feature articles with 1,338 which represents 24% of the overall percentage, reports with pictures constitutes 479 (9%), while cartoons were next on the list with 86 report (1% of the overall percentage) and editorials/letter-to-the-editor took the last position with 8 reports which is just 0%.

The findings according to the above presentation, analyses and interpretation is an indication that more attention was given to news stories by the two newspapers while reporting the pandemic.

Table 4: Showing the prominence (by placement) given by the two newspapers in their coverage of the pandemic.

Prominence	Frequency	%
Front Page	642	11
Inside Page	4,836	87
Back Page	100	2
Total	5,578	100%

Source: Field Survey 2020

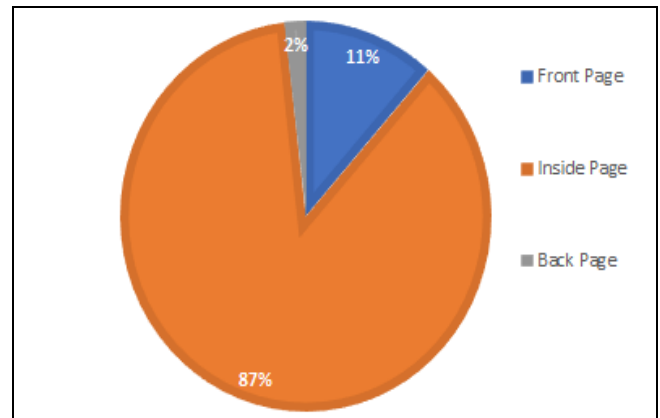


Fig 4: Pie Chart showing the prominence given by the two newspapers in their coverage of the pandemic according to the placement of report.

Considering the total reports on the pandemic with respect to prominence by placement in the two newspapers, the result as presented and analyzed above indicates that content relating to COVID 19 appeared more on the inside page of the selected newspapers. This is such that a total of 642 content which represents 11% were on the front page, 4,836 content which represent 87% of the total reports were placed on the inside page, while 100 reports which represent 2% were placed on the back page. This result is an indication that much prominence was not given to COVID 19 related content.

Research Question Two

- To what extent does the selected newspapers adhere to PCI code with respect to their reportage of COVID 19 pandemic?

As earlier explained, this question was answered according to the guidelines of the Press Council of India in reporting pandemic. The analysis here was done based on the direction of reports i.e., positive, negative and neutral reports. As discussed earlier, reports either in forms of news stories, features, editorials/letters to the editor, pictures or cartoons that are in line with the norms of journalistic practice as mandated by Press Council of India are

categorized as positive reports. On the other way round, report(s) that goes contrary to these norms in any of the units of analyses were grouped as negative reports, while those that were normally and neutrally reported were grouped under the neutral reports.

Table 5: Showing the direction of reports by the two newspapers

Direction	Times of India	Hindustan Times
Positive	327 (13%)	274 (9%)
Negative	141 (6%)	19 (1%)
Neutral	2,041 (81%)	2,776 (90%)
Total	2,509 (100%)	3,069 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2020

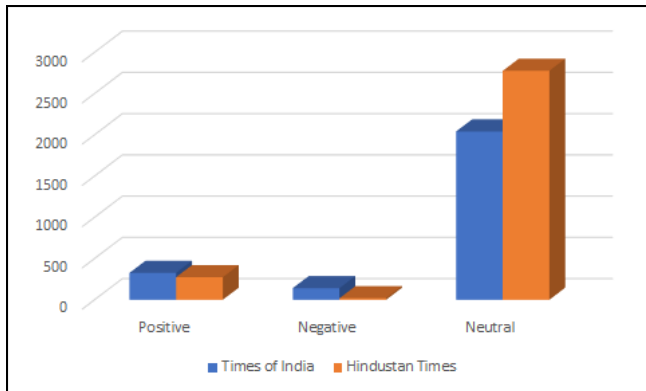


Fig 5: Bar chart showing the direction of reports by the two newspapers

As presented and analyzed above, the result from the content of the two newspapers revealed that the majority of reports on the pandemic were neutral while negative reports take the least percentage. This is such that 327 reports which constitute 13% of the total 2,509 COVID 19 content seen in *Times of India newspaper* were positive, 141 (6%) are considered negative, while 2,041 which represents 81% were considered as neutral reports.

Moreover, with respect to COVID 19 related content in *Hindustan Times newspaper*, 274 (9%) reports were categorized as positive, 19 (1%) content were considered as negative reports, while 2,776 which represents 90% of the total 3,069 were considered as neutral report.

This result is an indication that the selected newspapers have lived up to the spirit of professionalism as the number of negative reports by both is infinitesimal. The number of contents categorized as positive in the two newspapers (327 which represents 13% and 274 which represents 9%) respectively is also encouraging. The researcher observed that to a great extent, the selected newspapers were able to create awareness of the presence of the pandemic without necessarily creating fear in the minds of the people.

This result gives credence to the response of the Chairman of the Press Council of India when asked if the Indian press have given full adherence to the dictates of the code with respect to their reportage of the pandemic. Based on the above analyses, the second research question of this study is answered.

Research Question Three

- To what extent does Indian Press as a whole adheres to PCI ethical codes of conduct?

The data presented and analyzed in research question two

above with respect to the two newspapers under consideration is generalized to the entire Indian press. Hence, the data generated from the two newspapers are presented, analyzed and interpreted as follows.

Table 6: Showing the total reports by the two newspapers with respect to direction.

Direction	Frequency	%
Positive	601	11
Negative	160	3
Neutral	4,817	86
Total	5,578	100%

Source: Field Survey 2020

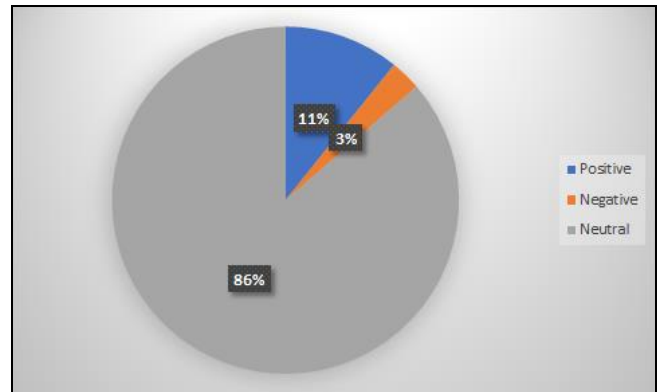


Fig 6: Pie chart showing the total reports by the two newspapers with respect to direction.

As presented and analyzed above, this section represents the entire content on COVID 19 as reported by the selected newspapers. Out of the total 5,578 reports on the pandemic as seen in the two newspapers, 601 which represents 11% is being categorized as positive report as they are found to be in conformity with the tenets of PCI codes with respect to reporting pandemic, 160 content (3%) are categorized as negative as they negate the tenet of the code. While the largest percentage of the reports in the two newspapers which constitutes 86% (4,817 reports) are neutral.

From the data generated by the researcher from the two newspapers under consideration, the result indicates that the two newspapers adhere to the dictates of the PCI codes. This result is however generalized to the entire Indian Press as it is believed that the result represents the level of professionalism among Indian Press since the two newspapers are seen as pace setters. Hence, Indian Press to a reasonable extent adheres to the PCI ethical code as observed in the two newspapers analysed and confirmed by the response of the PCI Chairman when asked about his overall rating of the Indian Press during the Interview.

Answer(s) to the fourth and fifth research questions respectively were generated from the responses given by the Chairman of the Press Council of India to the questions asked during the interview.

Research Question Four

- To what extent is PCI empowered to sanction or institute legal actions against erring journalist(s)?

During the course of obtaining data for this study, the researcher had an extensive interview session with the Chairman of the Press Council of India with the aim of achieving the fourth and fifth research objectives as well as

providing answers to the fourth and fifth research questions respectively. Four as listed below out of the many questions posed to the Chairman during the interview addressed this question:

1. It has been alleged that the Press Council in some other nations of the world is not free from governmental control. Sir, how will you rate the level of the freedom of the Press Council of India with respect to government control?
2. It has also been alleged that the Press Council generally is nothing but a toothless tiger and that it does not have the power to institute legal sanctions against erring newspapers or journalists. Sir, what is your view on these widespread assumptions specifically with respect to the Press Council of India?
3. What are some of the proactive measures put in place by PCI in ensuring full adherence of newspaper outlets to the PCI codes?
4. In case of violation of these codes, what are some of the mechanics for sanctioning erring press members or newspapers? (Examples of some of these sanctions will be of great help for this research.)

The above questions were asked in order to have a clearer perspective above the Press Council of India and its activities in relation to the Indian Press as allegations such as; PCI is not free from governmental control, the council is just a toothless tiger that cannot bite, it has no power to sanction any newspaper amongst others have been levied against it over the years.

The Chairman during the course of the interview took time to explain the stand of the council on these allegations. With respect to governmental control, the Chairman stated clearly that members of the council are stakeholders in the Indian Press. He said, "as far as the Press Council of India is concerned, it is absolutely free from government interference. Government has no role in the constitution of the Press Council, it is by the association themselves."

"It comprises different Association of Journalists, Association of Editors, Association of Owners and the few members are nominated by the speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Bar Council...all these are not by the government, it is by the body in which there is no interference by the government."

He continued by saying, "there is this old saying that the Press Council is a toothless tiger, the stand of the Press Council is that it does not want to be a tiger to kill somebody...therefore, we do not want to be empowered to stop publication of newspapers and all those things." The Chairman further made it clear that stopping the publication of any newspaper or putting it under any form of subjugation is not the role of PCI and that the council would not want to be saddled with such responsibility.

He stressed further that the council in India is by an act of parliament and members of the council are those nominated by the press itself which he said makes it a little different from what the council might stand for in other countries as he was of the opinion that in other countries, it is an association which regulate or looks after the press.

With respect to measures of sanctioning erring press members or newspapers, the Chairman said the council admonishes and warns the newspapers concerned. He said further that there are a large number of cases where the council had censored newspapers, details of which he said

are all available on the council's website for public consumption.

With respect to the fourth research question, the response of the Chairman to the questions asked is a pointer to the fact that the council can sanction and institute legal actions against erring journalists or newspapers but these sanction(s) as explained by the Chairman cannot take the form of subjugating such newspaper or stop it from further publication as he said doing so is not part of the roles of PCI and hence the council is not empowered for such.

However, some other sanctions, especially in the form of censorship are said to be within the confines of the powers of the council and he said the council has been effectively and efficiently doing this. This elaborate response however answers the fourth research question of this study on the powers of the council to institute sanctions, though these powers are limited, (as the council is not empowered to stop newspaper publication or put it under subjugation).

Research Question Five

- Has PCI lived up to expectations in improving the performance of Indian Press?

The below listed questions were asked during the interview in order to provide answer(s) to the fifth research question. However, the researcher did not only rely on the response of the chairman to determine the answer to this research question, data generated from the analysis of the four months editions of the two newspapers were also considered. The following are the questions asked with respect to the fifth research question.

1. Despite all these measures and sanctions, would you say that the performance of the Indian press is satisfactory enough?
2. Sir, will you say that Indian Press have given full adherence to the rules of reporting pandemic so far in their reportage of COVID 19 Pandemic.?

Based on the responses provided to the above questions amongst other numerous questions asked during the course of the interview, it was made abundantly clear to the researcher that the council in India has lived up to expectations in improving the performance of the press. This is just as the Chairman said the council has left no stone unturned in this regard. The above questions were asked with respect to the fifth research objective and research question of this study. The response of the Chairman is as well not too far from the result obtained from the analyses of the two newspapers.

This study in detail accessed the adherence of Indian Press to the Press Council code with special reference to two prominent national daily newspapers' reportage of the COVID 19 pandemic. The study also considered the performance of Indian Press Council in order to ascertain if the council has been satisfactorily performing its statutory responsibilities.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the two newspapers and responses of the PCI Chairman to the questions asked during the interview, the following are the conclusion of the study:

- Indian Press to a reasonable extent has been giving adherence to the PCI codes except with few exemptions.

- Adherence to the code has been of significant help in increasing the level of professionalism of the Indian press.
- The Press Council of India is limited in its powers when it comes to sanctioning erring newspaper(s).
- PCI is not established to play the role of a tiger as it has no power to stop publication or subjugate any erring newspaper.
- The Press Council of India has lived up to expectation in performing its statutory roles with respect to the Indian Press.

It is worthy to note that the two qualitative methods of data collection for this study (content analysis and in-depth Interview respectively) from which the above conclusion was drawn based on the data generated, presented and analyzed are not independent of each other.

The researchers utilized the methods so as to generate a comprehensive and unbiased result for the study. Hence, it is essential to point out that the results that emanates from the analyses of the two newspapers are proves to the response of the Council's Chairman to questions asked during the interview.

Recommendations

Based on the result of the study, it is obvious that Indian Press has been up to the standard with respect to their level of professionalism. The Press Council of India according to the council's Chairman has also been said to have left no stone unturned with respect to discharging its responsibilities over the India Press.

Nevertheless, this study recommends that more attention should be given to the Press and PCI should as well improve on its various successes with respect to supervising the Indian Press.

Suggestions for Further Study

As the fact remains that no study could be said to be all encompassing, there will always be room for improvement in subsequent studies, hence the need for the suggestions for further studies. These suggestions are believed to serve as a hint for media scholars interested in taking up study in this area. For better improvement in subsequent studies, researcher should consider the following areas;

- Audience's assessment of newspapers' coverage of COVID 19 pandemic: This could be done through the use of questionnaire or focus group discussion or the combination of both methods. This will enable the researcher to obtain the perspective of the audience on the reportage of the pandemic which will further give credence to the result of the study.
- Analysis of more newspapers: This study is restricted only to two newspapers, researchers who wished to conduct research in this area may as well consider the analysis of more newspapers with respect to their reportage of the pandemic so as to get a wider insight.
- Inclusion of Magazines: Moreover, reportage of COVID 19 related content in magazines should as well be considered since magazines also fall under the jurisdiction of the Press Council of India.

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