

# COMMERCE OR COMMUNICATION: THE RELEVANCE OF SUPPLEMENT PAGES IN CONTEMPORARY NEWS PAPERS.

**Akhileshwari. A**

*Department of Media Studies, CHRIST (Deemed to be University)*

**Dr. Suparna Naresh**

*Department of Media Studies, CHRIST (Deemed to be University)*

## ABSTRACT

The newspaper is one of the oldest and most important forms of mass media, which plays a central role in the economic and cultural aspect of modern society. The print media house has also become wise in strategically contributing to the economy of the newspaper organisation through a news medium by publishing supplement pages on weekends and sometimes even on the weekdays. Sometimes there is nothing more significant than a well-crafted full-page newspaper advertisement when compared to a well-planned mobile/digital and PR strategy. It is, in fact, curious to study and understand if the display of advertisements, issuing of supplement pages or newspaper magazines are actually meant for diligently making money by the newspaper organizations and on the other side, it is intriguing to know if the content on the supplement pages are meant for providing information to its audience. The present research is directed towards the study of the relevance of commerce and communication through supplement pages in contemporary newspapers. The main aim of this research is to find out if the supplement pages are produced/issued to communicate information to its audience or to commercialise for the benefit of the newspaper organisations. The research uses the qualitative method of an approach involving an expert interview and a focus group discussion which are the principal instruments for this study.

Keywords: Advertising, Commerce, Communication, Newspaper Supplements, Weekend Pull-outs.

## 1. Introduction

Media are the hub of social life in the twenty-first century in India and all over the world. The extent to what the media influences in what we take to be the reality in this modern world is indeed a matter of dispute. However, what is irrefutable is that the mass media functions as a big business today. They are economic institutions seeking profits. They are engaged in the production and dissemination of content targeted towards a large number of consumers or readers. We may, therefore, consider that media organisations are, in the first hand, business firms whose behaviour is governed by economic considerations.

The media content is created to fascinate not only the end consumers but also the advertisers who want access to these consumers to sell their products. Thus, advertisers are also closely connected and are interested in the content that the media houses produce and subsequently succeed in influencing them. As a symbolic product, media content is linked to economics through complex processes. The newspaper is one of the oldest and the most important forms of mass media, which play a significant role in the economic and cultural aspects of

modern societies. Moreover, the print media house has also become wise in strategically contributing to the economy of the newspaper organisations through a news medium by publishing supplement pages on weekends and sometimes even on the weekdays.

It is in fact that, every day in addition to the proper daily papers, their supplements reach a vast number of readers or consumers in the world and India. In the formal discourse about the media organisations, the supplement pages are designed and issued to fulfil communication the needs better and meet the demands of the readers to quench the public thirst and interest. However, whatever may be the motive of the media organisations, what is marketed and sold is the media content. In other words, during this process, "images and discourses through which people make sense of the world" are produced and disseminated to large audiences with far-reaching ideological effects and influences. In this connection, an analysis is realised to get an insight concerning the aspects and the purpose of the supplement pages and also to find out the journalistic approach to supplement pages in cases where the lifestyle news is pushed to the supplement pages.

## 1.1 Objectives

- To understand the purpose of the supplement pages.
- To understand the commercialisation in supplement pages.
- To understand the journalism in supplement pages.

## 1.2 Research questions

- Why is lifestyle news pushed to supplement pages?
- Are supplement pages published to attract the advertising agencies which indirectly is meant to increase revenue?
- Are supplement pages meant for publishing entertainment news alone?

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. Commerce

#### **Newspapers will have major share of ad pie for three years.**

In this article (Laghate, 2017), the author writes on how the print media has slowed down in the developed economies, and that digital and television medium has surpassed print in many markets. However, Indian newspapers command the lion's share of the advertising pie. He quotes a report from the Zenith, an ROI (Return of Investment) company which stated that the newspapers would continue to be the dominant media portal for the next three years. The author, from the global report, points out India to be one of the top markets contributing to global ad spend. India will be No. 4 in the top 10 contributors to global ad spend growth from 2017-2020, after the US, China and Indonesia in that order, suggests the report. Between 2017 and 2020 Zenith forecasts the global advertising expenditure to rise by \$72 billion in total. As per the report, US will set to contribute 27% to the rise, while China will contribute 20%, followed by Indonesia, India, the UK and Japan, that will contribute 4% each. Indonesia, India, Brazil and Russia are few of the ten largest contributors that will boost the rising in the markets.

#### **National advertising in newspapers.**

In this paper (Borden, 1946) The authors have taken an admirably neutral attitude towards the various problems of newspapers in obtaining national advertising revenue. The setting of the problem is portrayed by pointing out to the fact that national newspaper advertising volume has gone down, not only in dollars but also in the relative proportion of total advertising expenditures allocated to the newspapers.

In their analysis of the market for national advertising in newspapers, the authors record their emphasis on their observations that during the past two decades there has been a strong tendency, particularly among large advertisers and their agencies, to seek objective evidence

of consumer response to advertising programs. It is implied that this trend imposes on newspaper management, a need for obtaining more objective facts about the performance of their medium and for helping advertisers to use the medium more efficiently.

### 2.2. Design of Supplements

#### **Supplemental income: british newspaper colour supplements in the 1960s.**

In this paper (Farmer, 2018), the researcher explains that the colour supplements attracted an unusual degree of attention and hostility, often because of the dissonance visible between editorial and advertising content. He says that the placing of serious editorial content and photojournalism alongside advertisements for supposedly sophisticated consumer goods (alcoholic drinks, clothes, furniture, cars) and services (airlines, holiday destinations), the colour supplements embodied something of the uneasiness with which the affluent, consumer society continued to be viewed in Britain in the 1960s, about a decade or so after it first emerged. The number of pages and advertisements in colour tended, in the early years, to grow entirely rather than proportionally, but then there were instances where advertisers were so keen to reach the readers of the quality Sundays that they placed advertisements in black and white for products that would have benefitted from being in colour—including colour televisions. The researcher says that the television commercials promoting colour supplements were, of course, also broadcast in black and white until November 1969.

#### **Why do national newspapers sell more copies on saturdays than sundays?**

In this article (Greenslade, 2012) The author in his article mentions that as the years moved on, with Saturday circulations improving as the Sundays continued to fall, media buyers and planners caught on to large audiences reading Saturday issues. When they started placing more and more ads on Saturdays, the publishers were able to increase pagination (to increase the number of pages). Multi-section Saturday papers, imitating their Sunday stablemates, soon started to emerge and flourish.

The author also feels that with extra space available in the newspaper, editors began to steal the clothes of the Sunday titles - with long features, round-ups of the week, a plethora of lifestyle content in supplements. The author tells "Saturdays became, in newspaper terms, the new Sundays". It was an advantage for both daily editors and circulation directors. With sales of the daily newspapers in decline, booming Saturday sales helped the six-day headline sales figure.

### 2.3. Market Rise

#### **Why india's newspaper business is booming?**

In this article (A.A.K, 2016) the author says that, in India, there are more than 82,000 newspapers in publication. He questions the management of the country's newspaper industry to buck the global trend. The author explains by saying that, in the year 2015,

India's newspaper industry grew by 8%. Elsewhere, sales and advertising revenues are contracting. Enders Analysis, a research outfit, estimates that between 2014 and 2018 revenues from advertising in newspapers in Britain will fall more than one third from £993m (\$1.4 billion) to £625m. In India, print publications account for an enormous 43% of all corporate advertising. The author quotes that between 2010 to 2014 advertising revenues from newspapers in India rose by 40%. This partly explains why yearly subscription of a few newspapers in India cost 399 rupees (\$5.80), which is roughly the cost of a Sunday edition of the New York Times.

### Why india's newspaper business is booming.

In this article (Vaidyanathan, 2011), the author in his article mentions that advertisements are the essence of the local newspaper and the pages are filled with classified postings for careers and services. The BBC editor Vincent D'Souza says that the revenue through advertisements in newspapers is growing and it keeps the paper operational. Mr D'Souza says that the localisation of content and the introduction of specific pull-outs (supplementary papers), such as wedding supplements and women's sections, is one reason why newspapers continue to pull in advertisers. According to the World Association of Newspapers, more than 107 million copies of newspapers were circulated daily across India in 2009 and is estimated that one in every five daily newspapers in the world is printed and published in the country.

## 3. Methodology

Research methodology concerns with the process of collecting data. The current research draws its strength equally from the secondary and the primary sources on the relevance of commerce and communication on supplement pages in contemporary newspapers. It also grasps support from the available online journals, newspapers, magazines and mostly online articles. The current research also takes its strength from the primary sources in terms of the researcher conducting two research methodologies, i.e. Expert Interview and Focus Group Discussion.

### 3.1 Data Collecting Methods

#### Qualitative Research Methodology

Quantitative research is the systematic process of gathering quantifiable data and performing statistical, mathematical or computational techniques. Qualitative research methodology focuses on obtaining data through open-ended or conversational communication. The researcher uses expert interview and focus group discussion under qualitative research analysis. These two methodologies enable the researcher to understand the study from a broader perspective with deep insights drawn from the experts and the general public.

#### 3.1.1 Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion (FGD) is an excellent way to gather people from similar backgrounds and experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. The

participants are guided by a moderator who introduces the topic for discussion and helps the group to participate and discuss. The present research has made use of the focus group discussion since the researcher at this point seeks open-ended thoughts and feelings from the media consumers (especially newspaper readers) on what drives the supplementary papers of contemporary newspapers – commercials or communication?

#### 3.1.2. Expert Interview

An interview with an expert is yet another way to draw more profound insights from the field expert. It opens up the doorway to know and critically think over the issue from the experts' point of view and as well how in real life a particular issue/topic is perceived. The field expert is invited for the interview, and the researcher aims to understand the various dimensions involved in the issue by interacting with the expert.

## 3.2. Research Theory

### 3.2.1. Media Dependency Theory

Media Dependency Theory is that people in the modern world highly depend on media to comprehend and understand the world around them. This idea was developed and introduced by Melvin Defleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach in the mid-1970's.

### 3.2.2. Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda Setting Theory is the process whereby the mass media govern what we think and worry about. The theory defines the "ability to influence the significance placed on the topics of the public agenda"

### 3.3. Absence of Hypothesis

Since the researcher has based the study entirely on qualitative research methodology, the current research on "Commerce or Communication: The Relevance of Supplement Pages in Contemporary Newspapers" is not guided by any hypotheses.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

### 4.1. Focus Group Discussion

The group was an enthusiastic one consisting of eight people of which four of them were between the age group of 20-25 who were college goers pursuing their degrees in various fields apart from media and communication and the remaining were businessmen of the age 27 plus. This was done to understand how people of different age groups and professions had their viewpoints towards the issue of supplement papers. According to the Agenda Setting theory formulated by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, it explains the relationships between the emphasis that the mass media plays on issues and the importance that media audiences attribute to those issues. The theory has inspired hundreds of subsequent explorations into the ways that media and other institutions prime and frame issues and events for their audiences and therefore influence and shape public opinion, either intentionally or unintentionally (Stephen W. Littlejohn, Karen A. Foss, 2009).

To hail the success of this theory to the present research paper, the media consumers involved in the researchers focus group discussion, when observed prove that they choose to be as passive audiences to the information provided by the newspapers despite knowing the fact that the contemporary newspapers are not transparent in exhibiting the information. To the question, what could be the reasons for not being an active audience by questioning the media house for not being transparent, majority of the media consumers said that they are either scared to question the media as the upper hands like politics and corporates are involved or they are not willing to become 'the talk of the town' which media apparently proves to do so.

To the question, if supplement pages are issued for commercial benefits of newspaper agencies or for providing information to the target audience, all of them felt that the supplement pages are designed primarily for advertising and that the information is filled to cover-up the gaps and spaces. The media consumers in the group also questioned and answered to the fact that all most all the entertainment and lifestyle news are pushed to supplement pages to fill the spaces and that no supplement page of any newspaper puts the important news in the supplement pages. One of the businessmen in the group expressed that it has also become an advantage for all the corporates, entertainment industries and advertising agencies to make the best use of the supplement pages of the newspapers to create engagement and attract their target audiences which in turn providing such a platform by the newspaper organizations has become beneficial in minting money i.e.; commercialization.

To the question posed on what brings to the conclusion that the supplement pages are for commercialisation? This was asked to know how, as media consumers, they are influenced by the media. One of the businessmen quoted that "the newspaper organisations are creating propaganda of consumerism among the audience indirectly through articles on entertainment and lifestyle. The fact/view that commerce through advertisements as the main agenda of the supplement pages is overlapped with the view that supplements are meant for information and entertainment, i.e., infotainment". The other person added by saying that the target of the supplement pages geographically has always been only the local cities and places whereas the main newspaper targets its audience at the state and national level geographically in terms of advertising.

The next question asked was on the lifestyle news, on why it is pushed to supplement pages and not considered to be published in the main newspaper itself. One of the college students said that "it is important to know what is happening in the country and the world, we live in than gathering information about lifestyle and entertainment. Hence, the newspapers maintain the order of publishing, prioritising and placing the news accordingly, depending upon their importance". On further stressing on the question as to why is it necessary to have a supplement paper when there is no much importance or when there is

a little consumption of lifestyle news, one of them in the group said that "it is obviously for commercial benefits of the newspaper organization" and rest of them simultaneously agreed to the statement. It was evident from this study that to any question posed on supplement pages and its content on lifestyle, entertainment or advertising, the consumers had a common thought that the relevance of supplement pages in contemporary newspapers was towards sheer commercialisation and not communication mainly.

#### 4.2. Expert Interview

Mr Swaminathan was a district reporter at Ananda Vikatan and is now working as a Special Correspondent with more than six years of experience at The Hindu (Tamil) for three districts, Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli and Tuticorin. When asked if supplement pages of the newspaper organisations are issued for advertising or for providing information to the media consumers, he replied, 'just like how the main newspapers have its readership, the supplements also have its readership. However, though it has gained readership, it is also a fact that newspaper organisations depend on advertising through supplement papers for commercial benefits. Mr Swaminathan explains how the newspaper organisations are becoming economically unstable, and it will make no economic sense. He further explains that a 20-page broadsheet newspaper costs about Rs. 15-20 to produce -- that is just for the paper and printing, and it sells for Rs. 4 or Rs.5, of which a part is spent on distribution.

On a deeper analysis, Mr Swaminathan quotes that, to meet the expenditures and earn a profit, the newspaper organisations are invariably dependent on advertising, and that is the only way for them to make money. To know more, the researcher had asked about the advertising pattern in supplementary pages and the expert clearly explains that advertisements on supplementary pages depend on the content of the supplement pages i.e.; if the content on the supplement pages is on health and fitness, the advertisements posted are most likely to be on hospitals, gyms, sports equipment, etc.

The researcher was also intrigued to know about the future of supplement pages, and to its surprise, the expert explains that since the future of the print media itself is a question, the existence of the print media (newspapers) for the next 10-15 years would be largely due to the issue of supplement pages and advertisements.

#### 5. Analysis

On analysing the experts' views and points, the researcher was able to draw a substantial relation to the Agenda Setting Theory and the Media Dependency Theory.

### 5.1. Media Dependency Theory

The central point of the Media Dependency Theory is that people in the modern world highly depend on media to comprehend and understand the world around them. This idea was developed and introduced by Melvin Defleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach in the mid-1970s in their article "A dependency Model or Mass-Media effects" Dependency theory conceives of dependency as a relationship in which the fulfilment of one party's needs and goals is reliant on the resources of another party. The focus of this theory is about the relationship between the media and its audiences. In the present modern world, one will be able to find that people highly depend on media to satisfy a wide range of their needs. These needs could be political, to fashion to entertainment. (Syallow)

### 5.2. Agenda Setting Theory

According to the agenda-setting theory, the information on the supplement pages is strategized, and the print media provides information and news based on the interests of their target audience and also according to the media dependency theory the audience are somehow forced to be dependent on the media for the consumption of information and the happenings around the world. This keeps the audience in tact with the media they choose to believe in. The companies who wish to advertise their services and products in the print media are also greatly dependent on the media. Hence, this proves that the print media is largely dependent on its audience both on its news consumers and on the companies, who wish to advertise. Therefore, this keeps both the parties interdependent for their benefits.

### 6. Conclusion

How long do you think newspapers can survive? My guess is another five to seven years. The newspaper will have lost the 'paper'. There are discussions and debates going on about the dying print media (newspapers). It is because of the advertising on newspapers that the print media is thriving today for which the supplement pages have been of a significant contribution for the newspaper organisations to attract consumers and also in providing the space for the companies to promote themselves, i.e., advertisements. Advertisements, for which the newspaper organisations are dependent on, also pay for the other costs like journalists and staff salary plus the other things a business need.

It is pretty much evident that the newspapers are dependent on advertisements through supplement pages as the expert and the public point out that the print media survives because of the advertisements and this dependency cannot be constant as people are shifting from offline to online media sources. In helping the newspapers thrive for the next few more years or so, the supplement pages, news magazines, weekly newspapers, etc. remains as the backbone by providing space mainly for advertising and publishing content that which their audience might like and drop their eyeballs at.

### 7. Limitations of the Research

- The research is not specific to any particular newspaper organization.
- The researcher conducted her expert interview with an expert from a particular newspaper organization only.

### 8. Scope of the Research

The research could be conducted for any select newspaper organization for deeper and clear understanding.

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