

Module name/ title: Community Newspaper

Paper: Community, Media and Society

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### Component II: Description of the Module

Items	Description of Module
<b>Subject Name</b>	Media & Communication Studies
<b>Paper Name</b>	Community Media and Society
<b>Module Name/Title</b>	Community Newspaper
<b>Module ID</b>	P5-M20
<b>Pre-requisites</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	
<b>Keywords</b>	

### 1. Module: Community Newspaper

#### 2. Introduction

In this module you will understand the concept, need, status and the role of community newspapers with the help of some case studies and examples. You might be well aware about various media vehicles being used to voice the concerns of a community. Community newspaper is one of such vehicle. Once you understand the concept of community and need for media vehicles, it is imperative for you to understand the roles being played by specific media vehicle, its uses and potential.

The word 'community' gives a sense of a big family in which everyone is associated with a common thread. Though within the communities too, members have varied issues and interests, the community newspaper binds them together by providing a platform to address all their issues. It also gives an identity to the community by highlighting their name as well as concerns.

However many people are still confused that which newspapers would be called community newspaper and what are its advantages. Through this module, you will have a clear understanding of these issues.

#### 3. Learning Outcome

After reading this module, you will be able to identify which types of publications are community newspapers, their evolution and growth both in national and international context, their roles in upliftment of communities and their significance. This module would try to address all possible queries related to community newspapers.

#### 4. Defining and Understanding Community Newspapers

From the word 'newspaper', we understand a broadsheet or tabloid publication which carries an account of all the important local, national and international news of the day. Also it caters to the general audiences, not to the specific audience, thus the issues of specific audiences do not get space in a national and regional newspaper unless it has an impact on a large number of people.

In such situation, if any community or group of people with common interest wishes to highlight their issues, concerns, knowledge, practices, they will have to look for alternate arrangements such as community media. This media can be radio, video, television, theatre, blogs and of course newspapers too.

Earlier in 20<sup>th</sup> century, community newspapers were defined as 'a small newspaper with a circulation of 15,000 or less'. However in today's digitally advanced world,

community newspapers cannot be defined on the basis of circulation rather it should be identified and defined by its vision and mission towards a community.

Jock Lauterer in his book *Community Journalism: Relentlessly Local* (2006) defines Community Newspapers as "... a publication with a circulation under 50,000, serving people who live together in a distinct geographical space with a clear local-first emphasis on news, features, sports and advertising."

Here the emphasis is more on the local geographical place which means issues related to that place.

He also gave a more liberal definition of community newspapers as those which not just serves the "communities of place" but also the communities of faith, ethnicity, ideas and interests. Here, he has not only incorporated the vision and mission of a community but also gave it more importance than the geographical area. Geographical dimensions are not so important in today's digital world, where communities even float in virtual dimensions. However in case of newspapers, geographical identity applies since its reach is limited and it would be relevant only when it would cater to a particular locality.

According to the definition given by UNESCO, 'Community newspapers are defined as Newspapers published by a community media organization. A community media organization is a domestic broadcasting or publishing entity, generally serving the interest of a community and community is group of people sharing common characteristics or interests. This derives that community newspaper are publications, which serve the political, social and commercial interest of the community which is united with a common interest or located in a common geographical space with common demographic compositions. Just like the newspapers, the predominant medium of community newspapers is newsprint and they are published at regular intervals like every week or every month. The main characteristics of community newspaper are the high level of local engagement in bringing it out.

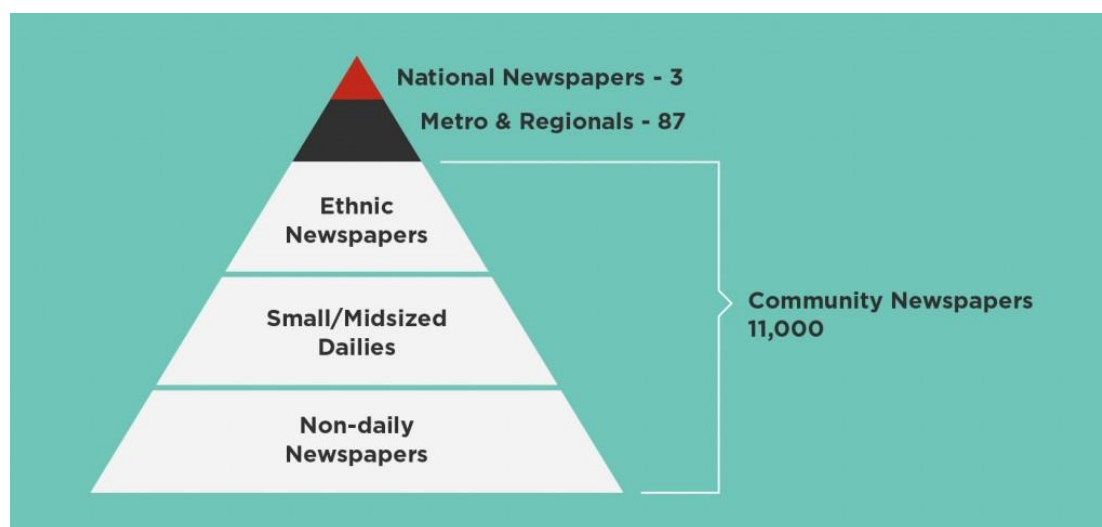
This definition re-emphasizes the point that the success of a community newspaper does not lie in escalating its circulation rather inspiring the community to actively engage in the production of the newspaper and generating a sense of ownership and belongingness among them.

### 4.1 Community Newspapers in the world

In the international arena, there are few countries where community newspapers have evolved and thrived. Following sections highlight the status of community newspapers in these countries.

### 4.1.1 USA

Now-a-days it is considered that circulation of a community newspaper does not matter much rather it is the mission of the newspaper that matters and due to its mission a newspaper is called a community newspaper. Under this new definition, the term “community newspapers” covers the small and midsize dailies, non-dailies, and ethnic newspapers. This is a large group, comprising almost all of the United State’s 11,000 papers.



According to Jock Lauterer, an award winning North Carolina community newspaper editor in 2006, out of the 9,321 newspapers in United States, about 97 percent were considered small or community newspapers. These included weeklies, dailies, ethnic newspapers, papers devoted to religion coverage, gay and lesbian papers and papers targeted to parents, senior citizens, military personnel and other special interest groups. Within few years this figure has risen and reached 11,000 only in USA. This shows the rapid growth of community newspapers in USA.

### 4.1.2 Philippines

Some scholars assume that the first research study on community newspapers worldwide started in Philippines (e.g. Hatcher, 2012) with a study as early as a 1967 survey on the Philippine community press (in Maslog, 2012).

According to a research paper titled ‘*Philippine Community Journalism: Roles, Status and Prospect*’ published in *Grassroots Editor & Community Journalism* (2015) by Opiniano et al, “Nearly five decades since the Maslog surveys (1967, 1971), Philippine community newspapers have grown in terms of the number of publications that are circulating. Established community newspapers, such as *The Sunday Punch* (Pangasinan in Ilocos region) or *The Bohol Chronicle* (Bohol in Central Visayas region), persist to this day. There are also long-running chains of community

newspapers, such as the SunStar Group, which started out in Cebu province and now publishes SunStar community newspapers in 11 provincial cities plus a news service in Metro Manila. There are also younger chains of community newspapers in Mindanao such as the *Businessweek Mindanao* group of newspapers. The reach of the newspaper copies for some community newspapers is expanding; the *Mindanao Gold Star Daily* now covers 24 provinces (including 20 cities) in Mindanao. Newer, independent community newspapers are also coming up. Metro Manila's national newspapers have either bought majority shares of community newspapers (e.g. *The Freeman* of Cebu, which *Philippine Star* bought) or have set up community newspapers as part of the national media's newspaper groups (e.g. *Cebu Daily News* of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *Daily Tribune Mindanao/Mindanao Insider* of the hard-hitting *Daily Tribune*).

### 4.1.3 South Africa

The South African community newspaper market is also thriving, reflecting audiences' growing need to access localized and relevant information (McLachlan, 2007; NAB, 2007). The Audit Bureau of Circulations' figures indicate that free community newspaper circulation increased by 34.9% in the last 6 years, and that of paid for community papers by 35.4% (McLachlan 2007). Moreover, initiatives like the Media Development and Diversity Agency (aimed to facilitate the diversity process) benefited community and small commercial media significantly (Addison 2006; Sidego 2002: 12). However, according to some scholars, it is yet to take a plunge in Nigeria unlike other countries in Africa.

### 4.1.4 Canada

According to Canadian Newspapers Association, community newspapers touch all the key communities; there are more than 1,100 community newspapers in Canada, which have a strong readership. About 74% of adults read a Community Newspaper. Community newspapers are spread all over the region with a strong readership such as, Atlantic 59%, Ontario 69%, Quebec 61%, Manitoba 77%, Saskatchewan 83%, Alberta 76%, British Columbia 80% and Northwest Territories/Yukon/Nunavut 80%. Approximately one-third of Canadians only read community newspapers and not other newspapers.

## 4.2 Community Newspaper in India

Community newspapers in India have been few and successful ones even fewer. In the clutter of mainstream commercial media, there have been a few bright spots that are highlighted in sections below. Community newspaper have been progressively moving towards digital platforms to leverage cost effectiveness in reaching out to a larger audience and also heard in the corridors of power.

### 4.2.1 Mahila Dakiya

Community newspaper in India owes its birth to the resilience of women folk in some of the most backward regions of the country. Very often, attempts of the marginalised sections become the more powerful medium of change. One such initiative of women's collective in the villages of Uttar Pradesh can be said to be the beginning of community newspaper in India. Mahila Sikshan Kendra (MSK) was specifically a literacy campaign of the marginalised sections in the rural areas of UP.

*Mahila Dakiya*, a community newspaper is a direct output of the initiatives of MSK, the local women of Banda would contribute to the fortnightly broadsheet published by these women. This was a women's collective unparalleled in India's print media history run by women, news gathered by women and made for the local community which spread to Chitrakoot and Sitapur. "Its editorial team of village women sign at the bottom of the paper: Mamta, Asha, Meena Shanti. Mahila Dakiya prints 1500 copies and has a subscriber list of 750. It costs a rupee a copy to buy" (Ninan, 2000). Its Garwhal edition was run by different group of women and named *Rantraibar*. While *Mahila Dakiya* was a broadsheet *Rantraibar* was tabloid sized edition. The language of both the papers was not hindi but their local dialects. The contribution of Mahila Dakiya got recognition when it won the prestigious Chameli Devi Award for 'Outstanding Journalist' which is generally given to an individual. The *Mahila Dakiya* closed down around 2002 due to lack of funding, but it indeed led the way for a better part of the decade.

### 4.2.2 Khabar Lahariya

The second wave of community newspaper in India can be considered to be the direct fallout of the *Mahila Dakiya* experience. Nirantar - the NGO connected with the earlier initiative launched *Khabar Lahariya* in 2002. A community newspaper which started publication in Chitrakoot in 2002 with an eight member team to collect, edit and publish news that concern the marginalised sections of the society. Chitrakoot falls among the poorest 200 districts of India, and *Khabar Lahariya* concerned itself mostly with the issues of the Kols, Scheduled Castes and Muslim communities. In 2006, a second edition of *Khabar Lahariya* was launched from Banda district. A unique feature of the initiative was that it published news in Bundeli dialect which could connect with its readers. The sustenance of the paper depends on advertisements which was agreed to by the women after deliberations.

Some of the pages of *KhabarLahariya* had pages on themes such as *Taaza Khabar*, *Desh Videsh*, *Mahila Mudda*, *Idhar Udhar*, *Hamaar sandesh*. From 2004 *Khabar Lahariya* newspaper started to dish out political news too. Slowly, with the success of the Chitrakoot and Banda initiatives, *Khabar Lahariya* today has spread to Sitamarhi in Bihar and publishes six editions in seven dialects such as Bundeli, Awadhi, Bajjikka, Bhojpuri, etc. from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Nowhere in country perhaps has any language received such importance as is given to the language of locals in

this newspaper. The success of *Khabar Lahariya* can be judged by the fact that today it boasts of a combined readership of more than a lakh. In 2004 it received the Chameli Devi award for Women in Journalism and in 2012 won the Laadli Media Award for gender sensitive reporting.

Today, *Khabar lahariya* is flourishing on the web. It has a facebook as well as an e-paper presence taking its readership to an all-new level. *Khabar Lahariya* is perhaps the only newspaper in India which has news stories published in the local dialects on the web.

### 4.2.3 The Odisha Initiatives

The case of Community newspaper 'Namaskar' is unique which is borne out of Odisha's first community radio initiative, Radio Namaskar. *Namaskar* was started in October 2012 as a fortnightly 16-page edition. *Namaskar* is a unique newspaper where no journalist or writer is involved but the community itself is the content generator and its editor (Mahapatra, 2014). Initially news was collected through the drop boxes placed at every gram panchayat. Any person from the block could drop their grievances or stories which were then collected and decided upon by a group of editors - people from the community themselves. *Namaskar* has turned out to be a unique idea because it has done away with the idea of reporters and truly represents the community at large. Odisha's tryst with rural newspaper specifically in the western districts has been a tumultuous one. Several newspapers have started and closed down over the years such as *Gaan Mati Khabar*, *Gram Vikas Samachar*, *Grama Swarjya Abhijan*, *Gaunli Bichar* and several others.

### 4.2.4 Rural Newspaper Initiatives

Gaon Connection is another such community initiative which takes the concept of community newspaper to a whole new level. It imagines a marriage between the traditional ideas of the rural and leverages the opportunities of the new. Gaon connection encourages rural youth to take up cudgels on behalf of the society. Its founder Neelesh Misra is a journalist who wanted to give back to society and thought of a venture called 'Gaon Connection', a weekly rural newspaper reporting stories of the unheard. It was started in December 2012 with a team of 15 people mostly comprising of local youths. The only difference Gaon Connection had with other community ventures is that it encouraged professional journalists to volunteer their services to the cause. The newspaper reaches 38 districts of UP and has a print run of 10,000. In the first year itself, Gaon Connection was honoured with the prestigious Ram Nath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Award for reporting from the rural hinterland.

### 4.3 Role and Significance of Community Newspapers

According to Jerry Brown, “A community without a newspaper is like a church without a pulpit or an altar.” A voice which is familiar to the community is missing without a newspaper. A sense of home, continuity of concerning voices and in broader sense, identity to the community is missing. He further says, “The character of a place is defined and confirmed by its newspaper, and these country cousins in the great family of the democratic press are just as essential to our way of life as their more citified media relatives.”

Community newspaper not only binds a community politically, economically and socially but also gives voice to their issues and concerns. They usually perform three unique and critical roles in community:

- setting the agenda for public policy debate by informing citizens and public officials about important issues;
- encouraging regional economic commerce; and
- fostering a sense of community by highlighting their common traits and providing them geographical identity.

The relationship of community newspaper with the community also affects the readership of publication and its growth as well as sustainability. Many community newspapers are steeped in history and have survived because of the relationship they have established with their communities, reflecting accurately the community's values and being unafraid to raise the community's concerns (Kirkpatrick, Rod, 2001).

### 4.4 Neighbourhood Newspapers: an emerging concept

A new concept of neighbourhood newspapers is also emerging as a step ahead of community newspapers. This concept emerged keeping in view the local and hyper-local news with a professional touch. On one side the national and regional newspapers are serving news related to national-international-state issues, on the other side community newspapers serve news only related to community, their concerns and issues. Thus the local and hyper-local information area remained untouched and untapped. Such publications could also be used to cater to the advertisers who wanted to publish advertisement at cheaper rates and focus on only a small local population. Perhaps these were the conditions under which neighbourhood newspapers emerged and some of them have started registering their presence in South India so much so that even The Times of India Group launched one such newspaper in Chennai called Times Neighbourhood Adayar. There are some other neighbourhood newspapers existing in and around Chennai like Apollo Times, Velachery Plus.

### 5. Summary

Through this module, you must have understood that community newspapers are identified by their vision and mission as well as their geographical location. They play a great role in bringing the issues of the community to fore and are capable of kicking a debate and discussions around these issues. They can also influence the policy decisions on these issues. They can play a vital role in economic growth of the community by providing business and employment related information and highlight the local speciality like art and crafts, cuisines, etc. Simultaneously, they are capable of self sustenance due to low maintenance cost as well as capability to generate economic resources. With all these things, the community newspapers keep the community together by providing them an identity, prestige and voice which ultimately empowers the community.

