



DO LOCAL NEWSPAPERS REFLECT THE LOCALS? A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWS COVERAGE IN KHULNA

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Abstract

Local newspapers reflect the voices of the periphery as they have direct and close connections with the local community. This study aims to examine the coverage policy of local newspapers in Khulna, with a particular focus on a comparative analysis of local and national news. This study followed a sequential research design, employing content analysis and in-depth interview methods. The content analysis method was used to assess the several aspects of news coverage and six in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the explanation of content analysis. A total of 2,278 news articles from three local newspapers were scanned and manually inputted into a coding sheet. These codes were analyzed with Microsoft Excell-16 and news-theme was visualized with NVivo-11. The analysis was divided into three phases (i.e., Comparative coverage, news theme, and geographical proximity). The major findings indicate that the ratio of local and national news coverage demonstrates minimal variance in terms of both frequency and column-inch metrics. It has been revealed, however, that the majority of advertisements (96.02%) come from local sources but coverage of local news is comparatively lower, accounting for 53.90%. The most covered local news theme is crime (41.77%), while political news gets highest coverage in the national news category which is 29.81%. Additionally, Jessore district, one of the nearest districts of Khulna receives the highest coverage which is 13.74% while Meherpur district, geographically remotest district of Khulna, received the lowest coverage. The majority of local news is capital-centric, with the Dhaka division receiving the maximum coverage at 93.02%. It indicates that local news was not sufficiently prioritized in local newspapers. Even while geographical proximity acted as a significant factor in news coverage, the news is predominantly urban-oriented.

Keywords: News Coverage, Local Newspaper, Proximity, Local News, Khulna

Introduction

In Bangladesh, 705 newspapers are published every day, while the majority of newspapers are published from urban areas. There are about 366 newspapers published in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, whereas another 339 newspapers are published from the other parts of the country, among them 40 local newspapers are published from Khulna region (Department of Film and Publications, 2023).

These local newspapers have a significant influence on the region of Khulna, as Rose (2014) depicts that focusing on local news has a strong and direct impact on the local community. It helps to bridge between the lower level and upper level by covering the local news and gathering the local discourse. Generally, local newspapers provide the most comprehensive general coverage of community concerns and activities (Ray, 1999), publish social activities for local intimacy, and disseminate local issues (Perse, 1990).

Though some local newspapers played the influential role in Bangladesh, they are now in dire straits (Sardar, 2023). The local press experiences difficulties such as lack of investments, the high cost of printing equipment, rising production expenses, problems of distribution, lack of skilled personnel (Rahman, 1999), advertisement crisis (Akter, 2015), less efficient journalists, lower opportunity and salary etc. (Manju, 2015).

Ray (2015) demonstrated that scarcity of capital and poor management system affects the process of information collection and distribution of local newspapers. Therefore, weak distribution system, fewer readers, weak strategy of publicity make the local newspaper depended on national newspapers for news and information.

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Similarly, Akter (2015) shows that local newspapers publish national news byline articles collected from Dhaka correspondents and international news for the fight to survive.

On the other hand, the national news media, which covers a far larger audience, does not consider local concerns to be sufficient (Waldman, 2011). National newspapers are much concerned about political news, crime news, international and sports news but the coverage of local problems, local development issues, investigative or special news is comparatively low (Moslem, 1992).

The primary objective of this study is to examine the coverage of local issues in local newspapers, with a comparative analysis of how these newspapers address both local and national issues. Additionally, the study aimed to evaluate whether local newspapers' news coverage policies take into account proximity as a determining factor in their news stories. To achieve the best outcome to meet the objectives, research questions were designed way:

RQ1: To what extent are local and national news coverage prioritized in local newspapers?

RQ2: What are the prevailing themes of local and national news?

RQ3: To what extent does geographical proximity influence news coverage?

Review of the Relevant Literature

A local newspaper is published in a particular area and provides local news (Campbell et al., 2011). Rausch (2012) defines local news as it is produced locally for the locals and by the locals. He argues that when a local newspaper covers news regarding national policy, it gives focus on how the policy affects the local peoples, not the entire nation. Gulyas and Baines (2020) defined local news based on geo socio-political context, relationship with the community, and position in macro media ecosystems. They said the local newspaper had a relationship with the local community. Nielson (2015) stated that local newspapers are characterized by their geographical focus, serving a regional audience and market. They typically have smaller revenue, resources, and circulation compared to other publications. They prioritize content that resonates with the community's preferences and reflects their socio-cultural values, making a significant impact on the local area.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of a local newspaper, media scholars have highlighted key features that define it. By studying relevant literature (Gulyas and Baines 2020; Neilson 2015; Rusch 2012; Campbell et al. 2011) researchers of this study have agreed to some fundamental characteristics of local newspapers. It includes the geographical identity of the local press, having a regional audience and market, comparatively small revenue, resource and circulation, publishing community-preferred content and socio-cultural values, and has a very in-depth impact on the locality.

The emergence of local press into global context

Newspaper publishing originated in Germany and Switzerland during the 14th century. The United States had its first attempt at newspaper publishing in 1690, with The Boston News-Letter becoming the country's first weekly newspaper in 1704. The Daily Courant was published in London in 1702, marking the birth of the daily newspaper (Pal, 1972).

In the eighteenth centuries, the press was a powerful communication network and had a huge influence across the United Kingdom (UK). At that time, the ownership of the local newspaper in the UK was decentralized (Gardner, 2015). The local newspaper of the UK started its journey with the assistance of the local printing press. Slowly the large corporation of the cities took control of the local newspapers one after another.

In the nineteenth century, the nature of the press faced a huge change in mass production technology, and political campaigns were developed by the press (Wiener, 2015). The power of those newspapers to participate in politics in the twentieth century gave rise to the concept of the fourth estate (Matthews, 2020).

Though the most-read newspaper in the world is in Japan (Rausch, 2012), the history of the newspaper was not so smooth there. The role of local newspapers in promoting literacy has a special place in the history of Japan. The local newspaper of Japan had been started in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the middle class of Japan was the main consumer of newspapers (Rausch, 2020). However, most of the newspapers faced a challenge in that century because of the World War. Many of them were shut down at that time. After the war and in the time of democratization, the newspaper of Japan started its journey with a new enthusiasm (Rausch, 2012).

The emergence of local press in Indian subcontinent context

The local newspaper of the Indian subcontinent developed under colonial rule. In 1766, a Dutch explorer named William Bolts suggested establishing a newspaper in Calcutta for the English audience. Before carrying out the plan the British East India Company exiled him (Pal, 1972). James Augustus Hicky, an Irishman, is known for establishing the first newspaper in Calcutta in 1780. The name of the newspaper was Hicky's Bengal Gazette or Calcutta General Advertiser in 1780. The newspaper was popularly known as Hicky's Gazette or Bengal Gazette (Otis, 2022).

India's first national newspaper named The Bengal Recorder was first published in 1849 by Girish Chandra Sen. But he could not publish the newspaper in less than two couple of years. Later Harish Chandra Mukherjee bought the newspaper and changed the title of the newspaper to the Hindu Patriot in 1853 (Paul, 2004).

The evolution of the newspaper in Indian subcontinent was deeply rooted in politics. The partition of Bengal in 1947 influenced the development of journalism in Eastern Bengal, when India and Pakistan were formed, and the birth of Dhaka as the capital of East Bengal (Chattapaddhay, 2011). Since 1947, there has been a significant expansion and development in the field of journalism. The principal newspapers of the then namely The Daily Azad, Ittehad, and The Morning News were published from Kolkata. These newspapers moved to Dhaka within a year or two, in fact, to cover political reality thereafter started to appear in Dhaka (Mamun, 2018).

Though the history is splendid, but the story of the local newspaper was not linear. The then-British ruled India, government imposed the vernacular press act to control the freedom of the vernacular press. The Act required vernacular newspapers to submit their proof sheets to the police before publishing, giving the police power to decide what was seditious, not the courts (Yusuf & Salam, 2015). The Vernacular Press Act of 1878, introduced by Viceroy Lord Lytton, specifically targeted some of the Bengali newspapers, like Halihsahar Patrika and Amrita Bazar Patrika, due to their strong criticism and opposition to the government's actions (Pal, 1972).

The emergence of local press in Bangladesh and Khulna Region context

The origin and development of newspaper was full of struggle in Bangladesh (Rahman, 1999). Before 1818, no newspaper was published by Bengali people. The very first newspaper owned by Bengali people was published in 1818 named Bengal Gazette (Bagchi, 1999). The first Bengali newspaper was then published in undivided India in 1818. Three Bengali newspapers; Digdarshon from Calcutta, Bengal Gazette from Calcutta, and Samachar Darpan from Sreerampore, were all published in that year (Chattapaddhay, 2011).

Bangladesh has a prosperous history of local journalism (Hannan, 2015). The newspaper industry of Bangladesh started with regional newspapers. Rangapur Bartabaha which is regarded as one of the first Bangla newspapers of Bangladesh was originally a regional newspaper (Ferdous, 2015). Rangapur Bartabaha, published in August 1847, was a weekly newspaper. In the beginning, it published news collected from the then-national newspaper, but later it started to publish local news (Huda, 2020). The Dacca News, the first weekly from Dhaka, was first published in 1856 (Alam, 2012).

Kangal Harinath is a legendary name in the history of local journalism in Bangladesh. He published a rural newspaper named Grambarta Prakashika. Harinath took journalism as a weapon for fighting against the oppression of indigo cultivators and zamindars (Yusuf & Salam, 2015). He published the Grambarta Prakashika almost eighteen years and he was the editor, only journalist, and distributor of that paper. The Grambarta Prakashika had a firm impact on the local people in the Kushtia region (Parthib, 2017) and the prime focus of this paper was the village rather town (Akther, 2015). Shishir Kumar Ghosh is another distinguished name in the history of local journalism (Ferdous, 2015). He used to publish a paper named Amrita Probaha from a village named Magura in Jashore. Another distinguished name in the history of local journalism in Bangladesh is Monajat Uddin. Abedin (2020) mentions him as a torchbearer and inspiration for all local journalists.

The growth of local newspapers in Khulna is notable. In Khulna region, the first newspaper name was Shomaj Darpan in 1895 that was a fortnight newspaper. Joshonondo Sarker was the editor of this newspaper. In 1895, Shikkha Darpan's fortnight, and Ghoshok, a monthly newspaper was published (Siddiki & Hossain 2002). In 1909, Khulnabashi and Hungkar were published. Within some days, Gopal Chandra Mukharji and Kali Charon Bashu were arrested and newspapers were closed (Ray, 2015). In 1925, 'Khulna Barta' was published. Then Nobojug, Dhumkktu, Tokdir, and Probaho were published. In 1953 'Poygam' was published. Two weekly newspaper Purbanchal and Jonmovumi were published in 1968 and 1970 respectively.

In 1972, after the independence of Bangladesh weekly Gonobadi was published in Khulna (Khandakar, 2015). The first women-centered newspaper Banglar Meye was published by Begum Asrafunnesa. Purbanchal,

Jonmovumi, and Jonobarta were transformed daily in 1974 (Hannan, 2015). The Tribune, Purbanchal, Jonmovumi, Probaho, Proborton, Thottho, Jahanabad, Jonobarta, Kalantor, *The Daily Somoyer Khobor*, and others are among the daily newspapers in Khulna (Ahsan, 2015).

Newspaper Coverage

Newspaper coverage is not merely a description of an event on paper (Holder & Treno, 1997). Rather, newspapers report important events in society, and at the same time positively change the society (Campbell et al., 2011). Media coverage also often determines who will be empowered and who will not (Olien, et al. 1995). Changes, amplifications, or corrections of any public opinion and public policy are related to the amount of news coverage in newspapers (Oliver & Maney, 2000). Local newspaper coverage affects various institutions in the state. Research shows that the relation between news coverage of crime events and the employee number of police in a certain area is positive (Fainbarg, 2002). On the other hand, a lack of local journalism inspires local corporate to do misconduct. Heese et al. (2022) argue that the local press is an important monitory actor in the local market and the closure of the local press increases the violation of local facilities. Sometimes various community has complained that they have not gotten much coverage from the media (Greenberg et al., 1983). Generally, local newspapers, owned by national newspaper corporations, have less plurality with the national newspaper in terms of news, headline, content, and local community coverage tends to be low (Sjovaag, 2014).

National newspapers provide comprehensive coverage of national politics and capital-centric news and international affairs. Most of the time, the marginal or local events in the country is overlooked. As a result, local newspapers became the only place for local news (Akther, 2015). Seema (2015) conducted a study on regional news coverage in the national newspapers of Bangladesh. This study showed that compared to the regional news, the news of the capital occupied about 80 to 90% of the news hole of most national newspapers. Manju (2015) argues that almost 80% of the population of Bangladesh lives in rural areas and 20% in urban places but the coverage of the news is reverted. On the other hand, most newspaper selects local news in term of a quota system, so important local news does not get proper treatment.

Proximity and News Coverage

Proximity refers to the distance between the location of a news event and the location of the news organization or its audience (Morton & Warren, 1992). The closer an event is to the location of the news organization or its audience, the more likely it is to be selected by journalist and covered by the media and receive more coverage (Stevenson & Cole, 1984).

Altheide (1996) found that the proximity of events to the location of the news organization has a strong influence on the news coverage of events. The study suggests that news organizations tend to give more coverage to events that occur in locations closer to the news organization or its audience, and less coverage to events that occur in locations farther away.

Similarly, Tuchman (1978) argues that the proximity of events to the location of the news organization is a major factor affecting the news selection and the coverage of events. The study suggests that news organizations tend to prioritize and give more coverage to events that occur in locations closer to the news organization or its audience.

These studies demonstrate that the geographical proximity of news events to the location of the news organization or its audience is a key factor affecting the news selection and the coverage of events. News organizations tend to prioritize and give more coverage to events that occur in locations closer to their location or the location of their audience. However, proximity is not the only factor that affects the news selection and coverage of events. Shoemaker (2007) argues that there are other factors such as the size of the event, the scope, and the social significance of the event play an important role.

Research on local newspapers can be broadly divided into two areas. Firstly, newspaper coverage of a particular topic is measured, and secondly, whether local news is adequately covered in national newspapers. However, not much research is available on whether local newspapers are adequately covering local news. This study will fill this knowledge gap. In addition, this study assessed whether or not the local newspaper's news coverage policy considers proximity as a factor in news stories.

Agenda Setting Theory and New Coverage

This research is guided by the agenda setting theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), which suggests that media organizations have the power to influence what issues are considered important by the public and they do this by choosing which topics receive more prominent coverage, while others receive less attention (Chernov & McCombs, 2019). Media organizations have the authority to decide which news stories to cover based on factors like geographical proximity, newsworthiness, and potential impact (Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006). Additionally, Media organizations actively participate in agenda building by consistently covering specific issues, creating public discussions, and influencing policymakers (Besova & Cooley, 2009). Through repetitive coverage, they can raise the importance of certain topics and generate public pressure for action or policy changes (Reese, 2001).

While Agenda Setting theory encompasses a wide range of techniques such as news selection, news placement, framing, and agenda building, this study specifically focuses on the aspects of news selection and news placement within the framework of Agenda Setting theory.

In the framework of agenda setting, news selection is the process by which news editors and journalists choose which stories to cover and report on (Pitts, 1987; Blood, 1982). In its standard form, news selection involves assessing the relevance, importance, and interest of various events, issues, and developments to determine what information is worthy of being presented to the audience (Pitts, 1987). Factors such as timeliness, significance, proximity, impact, novelty, and audience appeal often influence news selection decisions (McCombs, 2005). However, as the process is subjective, there are long arguments that the selection of news is guided by political and ideological nature. The news selection is impacted by resource constraints, editorial guidelines, and ideological affinities (Bourgeois et al., 2018).

News placement refers to the positioning of news stories within a publication or broadcast. It involves deciding where in the newspaper, magazine, website, or television program a particular story will appear (McCombs, 2005). The placement is important as it has the ability to highlight particular issues and shape discourse, while simultaneously deflecting attention from other issues and excluding them from discussion (Bourgeois et al., 2018). In the agenda setting framework, the placement can vary based on factors such as the perceived importance or relevance of the story, the target audience, and the layout or structure of the media outlet. Stories placed on the front page or at the beginning of a news segment typically receive more attention and are considered more prominent, while those placed deeper within the publication or program may receive less visibility (Erbring et al., 1980). The study examines the selection of different news genres (such as hard news and soft news), and the overall thematic focus (such as politics, crime, agriculture etc.) of the coverage to gain insights into how local and national issues are prioritized in local newspapers. By utilizing the Agenda Setting Theory, this research also seeks to understand the factors that shape news coverage priorities, determine the prominence given to local and national issues, and explore the role of geographical proximity in shaping the news agenda.

Materials and Method

This study followed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Content analysis and in-depth interviews were conducted in a sequential research design. Content analysis method has been applied to assess the different aspects of the news coverage, as it is the most commonly used research method newspapers have long been used as a reliable data source of theses research. (Sarkar et al., 2022). This method has also been applied to examine the message, meaning, aspects, and coverage (Kothari, 2013). Applying this method, researchers may independently develop themes by assessing the newspaper's content (Roberts et al., 2013).

However, three local newspapers have been selected for content analysis based on their readership, popularity, and acceptability in Khulna. These newspapers implemented the 8th wage board for journalists (Department of Film and Publications, 2022).

Table 1. List of the newspapers chosen for content analysis

Newspaper's Name	Category	Circulation
<i>The Daily Purbanchal</i>	Print Edition	55,000
<i>The Daily Prababo</i>	Print Edition	40,000
<i>The Daily Somoyor Khobor</i>	Print Edition	20,000

The Daily Purbanchal: *The Daily Purbanchal* is a widely and popularly known local newspaper in the southwestern part of Bangladesh, specifically in Khulna. It is known for being the highest-circulated local newspaper in that region, with a daily circulation of 55,000 copies. This newspaper claimed that they implemented the 8th wage board. In 2017, *The Daily Star*, a prominent English-language newspaper in Bangladesh, honours 25 editors of local newspapers for their contribution to flourishing journalism in rural and urban areas of the country. Among the honored editors was Ferdousi Ali, the editor of *The Daily Purbanchal*. (*The Daily Star*, 2017). Ferdousi Ali is the president of editorial board, while Mohammad Ali is the editor of this newspaper. The newspaper has an online version, which can be accessed through the website www.purbanchal.com and it is being registered under the national online media policy (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2021).

The Daily Prabaha: *The Daily Prabaha* is a prominent newspaper in the Khulna region of Bangladesh. It is the second-largest circulated newspaper in that area, with a daily circulation of 40,000 copies. *The Daily Prabaha* also claimed that they are implementing the 8th wage board and ensuring fair compensation for its staff. Ashraf-Ul-Haq is the editor of *The Daily Prabaha*. The newspaper has an online version, which can be accessed through the website www.dailyprabaha.com.bd and it is also registered under the national online media policy (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2021).

The Daily Somoyer Khobor: *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* is a highly circulated and popular local newspaper in the southwestern part of Bangladesh. It has a daily circulation of approximately 20,000 copies. Similar to the previously mentioned newspapers, *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* has also implemented the 8th wage board. Md. Tarikul Islam is the editor and publisher of *The Daily Somoyer Khobor*. It has an online presence with the web portal address www.skhobor.com and it is registered under the national online media policy (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2021).

A total of 2,278 news items have been scanned from the three sampled newspapers for content analysis from 01 January 2020 to 31 January 2020. Front page of the selected newspapers has been analyzed in this study as front page is the most read and most influential page of the newspaper (Reisner, 1992). Column-inch measurement has been used for quantitative analysis as these measurements have been used for many years by communication researchers to examine newspaper coverage. This process includes obtaining hard copies of the newspapers, measuring and coding these by hand, manually inputting the measurements into a spreadsheet or database, and then doing calculations, analyses, and visualizations (Chock & Mazon, 2016). Selected news has been manually inputted into coding sheet. Advertisements and photo have also been included for analysis. On the other hand, standing matter, editorial, and column have been excluded. The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study can make a judgment regarding their impact on the external validity of the result which can assure the in-depth knowledge of the area of research (Patino & Ferreira, 2018).

Content analysis has been divided into three parts (i.e., comparative coverage, news theme and news types). Comparative coverage consists of four sub-codes including total news coverage, news lead coverage, photo and advertisement coverage. News theme consists of 12 sub-codes including diplomatic, crime, politics, sports, education, development, accident, health, agriculture, weather, entertainment and others category. News types consist of two codes including hard news and soft news. These codes have been analyzed with Microsoft Excell-16 and news theme has been presented with NVivo-11 software.

Subsequently, the authors conducted six separate semi-structured in-depth interviews with journalists and editors. Three interviews were conducted in person and another over Zoom. All interviews are recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted, on average, half an hour and followed a semi structured questionnaire inquiring about the coverage of local media. After going over the script, we presented to each participant the results of the content analysis. This way, we gathered from them possible explanations of news coverage identified in the quantitative analysis. The transcripts were then textually analyzed, searching for common themes. To protect respondent confidentiality, the names of the participants were anonymized.

Table 2. Background information of the interviewee

Participants	Age	Gender	Designation	Organization	Length of Interview (mins.)
Interviewee 1	44	Male	Reporter	<i>The Daily Purbanchal</i>	00:23:00
Interviewee 2	48	Male	Reporter	<i>The Daily Probaho</i>	00:26:10
Interviewee 3	33	Male	Reporter	<i>The Daily Somoyer Kbobor</i>	00:20:40
Interviewee 4	46	Male	Editor	<i>The Daily Purbanchal</i>	01:05:00
Interviewee 5	48	Male	Editor	<i>The Daily Somoyer Kbobor</i>	00:45:00
Interviewee 6	76	Male	Editor	<i>The Daily Probaho</i>	00:40:00

Study Area: The study was conducted within the Khulna division, which is one of the administrative divisions in Bangladesh located in the southwest region of the country. The division encompasses 10 districts, namely Khulna, Bagerhat, Norail, Satkhira, Jessore, Magura, Jhinehdhah, Chuadanga, Kushtia, and Meherpur. With an area of approximately 22,284 square kilometers, Khulna division is the fourth most populous division in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Results

Table 3. Comparative Coverage of Local and National News

Coverage (Demographic info)		
News Coverage	(n=2052)	(Column-inch)
	n%	
Local	1106 (53.90%)	5731
National	946 (46.10%)	4377
Hard News Coverage	(n=1928)	(Column-inch)
	n%	
Local	1038 (53.84%)	5165
National	890 (46.16%)	4137
Soft News Coverage	(n=124)	(Column-inch)
	n%	
Local	68 (54.84%)	566
National	56 (45.16%)	240
News Lead Coverage	(n=78)	(Column-inch)
	n%	
Local	40 (51.28%)	611
National	38 (48.72%)	635
Photo Coverage	(n=561)	(Column-inch)
	n%	
Local	366 (65.24%)	1684
National	195 (34.76%)	538
Advertisement Coverage	(n= 327)	(Column-inch)
	n%	
Local	314 (96.02%)	1143
National	13 (3.98%)	458

The ratio of local and national news, news-lead, and photo coverage indicates very little differences in terms of both frequency and column-inch measurements (Table 3). Local news (53.90%) received the highest coverage than national news (46.10%). Hard news gets maximum coverage in both local and national news categories than soft news. Though the number of local news-lead gets the highest coverage, the national news-lead is bigger than local news-lead column-inch. Additionally, local news photo coverage is also higher than national news photo coverage. But the most advertisement source is regional. It is found that 96.02% and 1143 column-inch advertisements is from local source where 3.98% and 458 column-inch advertisement source is national advertisers.

Table 4. Comparative coverage of News Themes

News Theme		Local News		National News	
		(n=1106) n%	(Column-inch)	(n=946) n%	(Column-inch)
Accident	Focus on traffic crashes, construction accident, natural disasters, fire outbreak (Feng & Chen, 2021; Goddard et al., 2019)	(112) 10.13%	366	(45) 4.76%	156
Agriculture	Focus on food, farming, crops, livestock, farmers, pesticides, agricultural policy and technology (Mohr & Höhler, 2023)	(15) 1.36%	106	(00) 0.00%	00
Crime	Focus on murder, homicide, rape, robbery, burglary, theft, arson, physical assault (Dailey & Wenger, 2016; Marsh, 1991)	(462) 41.77%	1771	(168) 17.76%	728
Development	Focus on country's development projects, events and policy (Ogan, 1987)	(134) 12.12%	1009	(70) 7.40%	408
Diplomatic	Focus on bilateral relations, international economics and trade, conflict resolution between countries (Fong & Chia, 2017)	(00) 0.00%	00	(73) 7.72%	319
Education	Focus on teacher and students affairs, educational institution, educational action and policy (Baker, 1994)	(84) 7.59%	573	(42) 4.44%	178
Entertainment	Focus on the public and personal realm of celebrity, popular culture, entertainment industry (Dubied & Hanitzsch, 2014)	(00) 0.00%	00	(32) 3.38%	98
Health	Focus on public health issues, national health policy, health epidemics, disease-related stories, and treatments (Chang, 2011; Brodie et al., 2003)	(32) 2.89%	245	(16) 1.69%	98
Politics	Focus on politicians, political parties and events (Vliegenthart et al., 2011)	(123) 11.12%	785	(282) 29.81%	1398
Sports	Focus on sports events, athletes (Hong & Oh., 2020)	(18) 1.63%	114	(112) 11.84%	505
Weather	Focus on weather forecast and conditions, disaster, climate changes (Hase et al., 2021; Harris, 2015)	(17) 1.54%	65	(21) 2.22%	71
Others	Undefined theme among the eleven mentioned theme is categorized as Others	(109) 9.85%	697	(85) 8.98%	418

Table 4 demonstrates that the most covered local news theme in terms of both frequency and column-inch measurements is crime which is 41.77% and 1771 column-inch, while political news gets highest coverage in national news category which is 29.81% and 1398 column-inch. In contrast, there was no news on entertainment and diplomatic beat in local news while agricultural news did not get any treatment in national news. However, lowest frequency in local news category is sports which is 1.63% and health-related news get the minimum frequency in national news coverage which is 1.69%. But weather news gets lowest coverage in local and news category in terms of column-inch measurement (as shown in Figure 1).



Figure 1. Comparative representation of local and national news themes

Accident: Accident-related news comprises 10.13% of the entire local news coverage, whereas accidents account for 4.76% of the national news content. This category includes stories about unexpected events such as traffic crashes, fire, construction, and natural disasters etc. For instance, *The Daily Purbanchal* reported a tragic bus collision

in Jessore resulting in the death of two women. The Daily Probaho covered about a fire at a drug warehouse in Jessore's BCDS building. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* reported a fatal motorcycle accident in Narail.

Agriculture: Local agriculture news is the least covered category, making up 1.36% of the coverage, with no agriculture news in the national news coverage. This category includes stories about farming practices, agricultural policies, innovations in the agricultural sector, and issues affecting farmers and rural communities. For example, The Daily Probaho reported an increase in potato cultivation within courtyards in Koyra. *The Daily Purbanchal* shared the optimism of farmers regarding the cultivation of IRRI paddy. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* warned about the endangerment of local fishes.

Crime: The most prominently covered local news category is crime, accounting for 41.77% of the total news coverage, while national crime news constitutes 17.76% of the total national news coverage. This encompasses stories about criminal activities, law enforcement efforts, legal proceedings, and issues related to public safety and security. For example, The Daily Probaho reported a significant drug trafficking operation involving crores of taka in Khulna. *The Daily Purbanchal* reported the arrest of three cleaners at Shahjalal Airport found in possession of two kilograms of gold. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* reported an incident of a class ten student being subjected to torture in Manirampur.

Development: Local development issues are the second most covered news theme, accounting for 12.12% of the coverage, while national development-related news covers 7.40% of the total national news. This category includes stories about economic and social progress, such as infrastructure projects, community initiatives, and efforts aimed at improving living standards. For example, *The Daily Purbanchal* featured news on the production of rare products made using coconut coir in Bagerhat. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* shared news about the completion of half the construction of 11 model mosques. The Daily Probaho reported on seven development projects implemented by KDA.

Diplomatic: There is no diplomatic news regarding local issues, whereas diplomatic news within the national news category constitutes 7.72% of the total news coverage.. This includes stories concerning international relations, such as negotiations, treaties, conflicts, and interactions between different countries. For instance, The Daily Probaho reported that a Canadian airline company has proposed selling two airlines to Bangladesh. *The Daily Purbanchal* covered a news story about a terrorist attack targeting US military members in Kenya. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* reported a US strike in Iraq that led to the death of Qassim Suleimani, the Commander of Iranian Forces.

Education: Local education news accounts for 7.59% of the coverage, while national education news covers 4.44% of the total national news. This category encompasses stories about educational institutions, policies, curriculum changes, student affairs, and issues affecting the education sector. For example, The Daily Probaho reported on 15 university students being disciplined for engaging in ragging. *The Daily Purbanchal* informed readers about the postponement of the SSC exam due to the election. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* reported the closure of coaching centres for one month before the SSC exam.

Entertainment: There is no entertainment news in the local context, whereas 3.38% of national news is related to entertainment. This category includes stories about the entertainment industry, including movies, music, television, celebrity events, and cultural happenings. For example, The Daily Probaho featured actress Tisha in a police officer role. *The Daily Purbanchal* reported on Omor Sani becoming the film club secretary. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* shared news about the release of Farin boyfriend on Valentine's Day.

Health: Local health news accounts for 2.89% of the coverage, while national health news covers 1.69% of the total national news. This category includes stories about public health, medical advancements, healthcare policies, outbreaks, and wellness-related topics. The Daily Probaho unveiled the launch of a 50-bed isolation unit for COVID-19 in Khulna. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* reported the identification of a Nipah virus patient at KMC Hospital. *The Daily Purbanchal* conveyed the growing concern regarding COVID-19 in Bangladesh.

Politics: Politics is the third most frequently covered category in local news, accounting for 11.12% of the coverage, whereas it is the most covered news theme in the national news category, making up 29.81% of the total. This includes stories about governmental affairs, such as elections, policy decisions, political campaigns, and the activities of political leaders and parties. For example, The Daily Probaho reported a conflict within the newly formed convenor committee of BNP in Bagerhat. *The Daily Purbanchal* conveyed the Prime Minister's belief in the strength of an organized political party within the government. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* covered a felicitation program for the Khulna city worker's league.

Sports: Local sports news is relatively less covered, constituting 1.63% of the news, while national sports news makes up 11.84% of the total national news coverage. This category includes stories about athletic events, competitions, player performances, team updates, and developments in the world of sports. For example, The Daily Probaho reported a successful start for Bangladesh in the U-19 World Cup, with a victory against Zimbabwe. *The Daily Purbanchal* featured Sakib's inclusion in the decade's best ODI eleven on Cricinfo. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* reported Rangpur Rangers' second win in the Bangladesh Premier League.

Weather: 1.54% of local news pertains to weather, while 2.22% of the total national news covers weather-related topics. This category includes stories about meteorological conditions, forecasts, natural disasters like hurricanes or tornadoes, and their impacts on communities. For example, The Daily Probaho forecasted rain for the next two days. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* reported how persistent rain was negatively affecting Aman paddy cultivation. *The Daily Purbanchal* reported the rise of excessive cold in Jessore.

Others: 9.85% of local news and 8.98% of national news do not fit into the above-mentioned defined themes. These undefined themes are categorized as Others. For example, *The Daily Purbanchal* covered the largest Muslim gathering at Bisswa Ijtema. The Daily Probaho reported the launch of E-passports starting from January 22. *The Daily Somoyer Khobor* featured an obituary on the passing of Bishnupad Saha.

Table 5. News Coverage inside Khulna division

Geographical Proximity (Inside Khulna division)		(n= 1106) n%	(Column-Inch)
Khulna	-	669 (60.49%)	4226
Bagerhat	39.9 km via Khulna - Bagerhat Hwy/R770 route	117 (10.58%)	492
Norail	59.8 km via N7 route	23 (2.08%)	63
Satkhira	61.8 km via Khulna - Satkhira Rd/R760 route	89 (8.05%)	273
Jessore	65.3 via N7 route	152 (13.74%)	508
Magura	88.4 km via N7 route	5 (0.45%)	18
Jhinehdhah	104 km via N7 route	24 (2.17%)	62
Chuadanga	131 km via N7 route	7 (0.63%)	18
Kustia	147 km via N7 and N704 route	20 (1.81%)	71
Meherpur	166 km via N7 and R745 route	0 (0.00%)	00

*Fastest route from Khulna district to other districts (google map, 2022)

Table 6. News Coverage outside Khulna division

Geographical Proximity (Outside Khulna division)		(n= 946) n%	Column-Inch
Barishal	117 km via Dhaka -Gopalganj - Khulna Hwy route	13 (1.37%)	56
Dhaka	221 km via Dhaka - Gopalganj - Khulna Hwy route	880 (93.02%)	4139
Rajshahi	266 km via N7 route	09 (0.95%)	31
Mymensingh	329 km via Dhaka - Mymensingh Hwy/N3 route	02 (0.22%)	06
Rangpur	395 km via N7 route	14 (1.48%)	24
Chittagong	438 km via Dhaka - Chittagong Hwy/N1 route	14 (1.48%)	84
Sylhet	439 km via Dhaka-Sylhet Hwy/AH1/N2 route	14 (1.48%)	37

*Fastest route from Khulna division to other division (google map, 2022)

Local newspaper of Khulna district mostly covered the news of Khulna district which is more than 60% and 4226 column-inch (Table 5). Bagerhat district, geographically nearest district of Khulna received the second highest

news coverage which is 10.58%, while Meherpur district, geographically remotest district of Khulna received the lowest coverage. In contrast, Jessore district gets the highest coverage which is 13.74% and 508 column-inch, though it is not the nearest district of Khulna district.

Most of the local news are capital-centric as Dhaka division receives the maximum coverage which is 93.02% and 4139 column-inch (Table 6). Additionally, Chittagong gets the second largest news coverage which is 1.48% and 84 column-inch though Sylhet and Rangpur also get second largest coverage in terms of frequency. Though the Barishal division is the nearest division, it gets third highest coverage in terms of column-inch and fourth highest priority in frequency. However, the Mymensingh division gets the minimum coverage among the divisions.

Findings from Interview

The researcher employed thematic techniques to analyze the data collected from interviews. The interviews comprised three reporters, referred to as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, and Interviewee 3. Additionally, three editors were interviewed, identified as Interviewee 4, Interviewee 5, and Interviewee 6.

Editors' Perception on Coverage

The editor of the local newspaper expresses a desire to cover more local news; however, they think that there is a demand from readers who expect both national and local news in one place, even within a low-budget newspaper. The interviewed editors state that local journalists sometimes face difficulties in sending local news. Additionally, the editor highlights the prioritization of national issues with higher news value, often resulting in national news being given preference as headlines over local news.

"I am trying to cover the local issues, but our readers demand national and international news even in a low-budget newspaper." [Interviewee 4]

"Readers want to read national and international news, even in a low-budget newspaper. That's why we cover such news on the front page." [Interviewee 6]

"The news published on the front page depends on its news value. If national news holds more news value than local news, it is published on the front page." [Interviewee 4]

Geographical Proximity in News Coverage

There is a noticeable difference in how news is covered at the local level in the Khulna division. The main city, Khulna Sadar, receives more attention because it is the center for important political, governmental, and opposition party events. This concentration of events is the main reason for the unequal news coverage. One factor contributing to this difference is that most newspapers are published in Khulna city, leading to less interest in covering news from farther districts and upazilas. Khulna's status as a publishing hub contributes to its higher priority in news coverage. Additionally, the proximity of areas like Bagerhat, Jessore, and Satkhira to Khulna also influences their news coverage. While Khulna city and its surrounding areas are given more importance, it is acknowledged that important local issues are still published, albeit with some disparity.

"Most political, governmental, and opposition party events primarily occur in Khulna Sadar. This geographical concentration is the main reason for the disparity in news coverage." [Interviewee 2]

"Newspapers show less interest in covering news from the farthest districts and upazilas. Khulna receives more attention simply because all newspapers are published there." [Interviewee 3]

"We have published local news based on the geographical ratio, with more focus on Khulna Sadar and its surrounding areas." [Interviewee 5]

Focus on Crime and Political News

The local newspaper prioritizes coverage of politics and crime over other topics such as agricultural and developmental news. This focus is based on the perception that readers have a greater interest in political and crime-related reports, as these events directly impact their surroundings. The newspaper house acknowledges the reader's demand for this type of news, leading to an emphasis on covering such stories that resonate with the local community.

"We always focus on covering crime and political news more than anything else. People want to know about politics and crimes happening around them." [Interviewee 3]

"We try to cover news related to killing, rape, and violence against women because it's important. Readers aren't as interested in development or agricultural news." [Interviewee 1]

"Our job is to cover crime news and inform people through our publications. However, we have limited space on the front page, so we can't publish all news." [Interviewee 3]

News Gathering Procedure

There is a significant difference in the sources of news between national and local news within the local newspaper house. Local news is collected from correspondents, staff reporters, and personal reporters, while national and international news is sourced from news agencies, online portals, national newspapers, and press releases. However, some local newspapers have an office in Dhaka specifically for gathering national news, and that they rely on various sources such as correspondents, staff reporters, news agencies, and online portals to ensure comprehensive news coverage.

"We collect local news from correspondents, staff reporters, and personal reporters." [Interviewee 4]

"We have an office in Dhaka from where we gather national news." [Interviewee 5]

"We rely on various sources such as correspondents, staff reporters, news agencies, and online portals to ensure comprehensive news coverage." [Interviewee 6]

Local Reporter's Challenges in Collecting News

Local reporters from the daily newspapers highlight several obstacles they face when collecting local news at the grassroots level. One of the interviewees highlights the lack of proper facilities provided by news houses for gathering local news, and the potential threats faced when reporting against individuals or organizations. Interviewee 3 mentions the difficulty in maintaining sources, especially when dealing with less-educated local individuals, which can affect the accuracy of information gathered. Furthermore, interviewee 2 points out the scarcity of sources in their locality, making it challenging to provide comprehensive coverage of local events and issues.

"I often face obstacles when collecting news. The news houses do not provide proper facilities for gathering local news.

Additionally, if the news is against a person or organization, they may threaten us." [Interviewee 1]

"One of the main challenges I face as a local journalist is when I apply the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The authorities often do not provide the required data in a timely manner, causing delays in reporting." [Interviewee 2]

"Maintaining sources can be difficult for us. Sometimes, local people are not well-educated, making it challenging to gather accurate information. It's a hurdle we frequently encounter." [Interviewee 3]

"In our locality, there are not enough sources available for us to gather news. This scarcity makes it difficult to provide comprehensive coverage of local events and issues." [Interviewee 2]

Coverage and Advertisement

The significance of advertisements as the primary source of income for local newspapers are mentioned by the editors in their interviews. Interviewee 5 and Interviewee 6 both emphasize the heavy reliance of local newspapers on local advertisements, which contribute a significant portion of their revenue. Interviewee 6 further states that the presence of local advertisements does not impact the news coverage, as news articles are published based on readers' interest. Interviewee 4 adds that while advertisements generate revenue for the newspaper, there is no direct relationship between advertisements and the content of news articles, indicating that advertisements do not influence the publication of news.

"Local newspapers heavily rely on local advertisements, which constitute a significant portion of their revenue." [Interviewee 6]

"The presence of local advertisements does not have an impact on the news coverage. News is published based on readers' interest." [Interviewee 6]

"There is no direct relationship between advertisements and the content of news articles. Advertisements may generate revenue for the newspaper, but they do not influence the publication of news." [Interviewee 4]

Discussion

Though newspaper coverage plays a pivotal role in changing society positively (Campbell et al., 2011, Holder & Treno, 1997), the national dailies of Bangladesh ignore local events and give less coverage to the locals (Seema, 2015). However, the findings of this study show that local newspaper gives somewhat minimal variance in coverage of the national and local event. In terms of quantitative measurement, the local news in the local newspaper got about 54% of coverage and the national news got about 46% of coverage. Though it seems that local newspaper gives somewhat balanced coverage between national and local news, in reality, it can be marked as a disparity for the local community. Seema (2015) found that the national newspaper gives only 10 to 20% of coverage the local news.

So, whether it is the national or local newspaper, the local news always receives less attention. On the contrary, this study revealed that the local newspaper gets advertisements mostly from local sources, with only 4% of the advertisements originating from national sources.

Most national newspaper selects local news in term of a quota system. Each district of the country gets a small portion of the news hole for their event (Seema, 2015). So, sometimes important local news does not get proper treatment. There has not been found any such quota for national news in the local newspaper. Sometimes, the national news lead gets more space than the local news lead in the local newspaper. This study found that the national news lead gets 635 column inches of coverage whereas local news lead gets 611 column inches.

The finding of this study indicates that local newspapers are interested in published news on local crime (41.78%). At the same time, the local newspaper published more news on national politics (29.81%) than local politics. The local newspaper of Khulna predominantly reports on crime including murder, homicide, rape, robbery, burglary, theft, arson, and physical assault, which aligns with the findings of Dailey and Wenger (2016) and Marsh (1991). In addition, the local newspaper of Khulna mostly focused on politics including politicians, political parties, and political events, as highlighted by Vliegenthart et al. (2011). However, most of the local people of Bangladesh are peasants by profession, it is expected that local newspapers will cover more news on agriculture. But the finding of this study shows that, whether local or national, the coverage of agricultural news gets lowest coverage. The local newspaper in Khulna featured on agriculture including food, farming, crops, livestock, farmers, agricultural policy and technology as emphasized by Mohr and Höhler (2023).

Geographical proximity plays an indispensable role in covering the news. Oppegaard and Rabby (2015) state that proximity has assisted professionals and academics in determining newsworthiness for years. This study finds that this element of news is a vital factor in selecting and publishing news for the local newspaper. The selected local newspapers for this study are all from the Khulna district. The study finds that most of the news events covered by these papers are happened in the Khulna district, which is almost 60% of the coverage. The Bagerhat district, which is the closest district of Khulna, has the third largest coverage (10.58%). Regarding divisional coverage, excluding the Khulna division, Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has received the most extensive coverage, amounting to 93.02%.

The interviewees of the study mentioned that the news selection policy of local newspapers is impacted by various factors. They stated that both human and technical resources shape their news selection process. Sometimes, they select news and issues for which information is easy to collect (e.g., press releases, copies from national agencies, or national newspapers). They also mentioned that they perceive readers to be more inclined to read crime-related stories, so they tend to give them more coverage. Occasionally, they consider the news value to decide whether to cover particular national issues or focus on local ones. This finding aligns with the agenda setting theory, where it is argued that news selection is influenced by resource constraints, editorial guidelines, ideological affinities, perceived importance or relevance of the story, the target audience, and the layout or structure of the media outlet (Bourgeois et al., 2018; Erbring et al., 1980). When it comes to the issue of news placement, interviewees mentioned that geographical proximity plays an important role. Local issues that are close to the Khulna urban area receive more space than those in distant places. Altheide (1996) and Tuchman (1978) found that the proximity of events to the location of the news organization has a strong influence on the news coverage of events.

Conclusion

Local newspaper is one of the most significant platforms to portray and publish the community pictures and peoples' voice that are rarely seen and heard in national or urban-centric media. Considering the role of the local newspapers, this study shined a light on the local newspapers' news coverage of Khulna, news selection and placement, and underlying causes of coverage. This study found that the coverage of national news was more emphasized in the local newspaper consequently resulting in local issues receiving less priority. However, this study relied on local newspapers, editors, and reporters to articulate its objectives but lacked insights from readers and academics. Future research could focus on understanding readers' expectations of local newspapers or delve into a national-level survey to provide a more holistic picture of the coverage policies of local newspapers in Bangladesh. However, this study could still be valuable for editors and policymakers to understand the priorities in news coverage by local newspapers.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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