



Research Paper

Role of Indian Newspapers in Communal Riots of Delhi: A Study of Web Editions of The Hindu

Subhash

Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication,
Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar

Dr. Umesh Arya

Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar

Abstract

This study examined the role of an English national daily; *The Hindu*, on communal riots of Delhi happened on February 2020 and how this newspaper shaped the public perception during this time. This research highlighted the various angles prepared by researchers; which had been adopted by the paper at the time of reporting these kinds of sensitive matters. By doing corpus analysis through AntConc; of news riots related news from the web edition of the national newspaper; *The Hindu*. Researcher collected the data to analyze the variables like size of news, usage of images, framing, tone of content, and sources included in news. The findings of this paper shows that while sometimes newspaper dailies prepare an objective narrative but most of the times it crafts the reality which aligns with different political ideologies.

Keywords: Communal riots, Newspapers, Dailies, Web editions, Perception, Harmony

I. Introduction:

Mob violence or riots signify moments of civil unrest within a society, characterized by chaotic and often violent public disruptions. These incidents occur when large groups of people engage in loud, aggressive, and uncontrolled behavior, frequently as an act of protest (Cambridge, n.d.). Riots not only disrupt public order but also create long-term instability and trauma within affected communities. In a diverse and multicultural society like India (Hallikeri, 1996), communal violence often emerges as a manifestation of deep-rooted communalism. India's history is marred by instances of communal riots, which reflect a broader societal issue (Khan, 2015).

This paper focuses on Delhi riots, which started on 20th February, 2020, how media, particularly newspapers, play a pivotal role in shaping societal awareness and responses to communal tensions. Historically, newspapers in India have acted as a catalyst for societal awareness, offering direction and insight (Sharma, 2020). However, their credibility has come under scrutiny in contemporary times. The coverage of communal violence by newspapers is significant in its ability to inform the public about regional variations in tensions, encouraging discussions on targeted interventions and localized conflict resolution strategies.

Researchers aim to explore the critical role of newspapers in creating awareness about communal tensions and the perspective it provides to society. Through comprehensive reporting, investigative narratives, and regional insights, newspapers stimulate crucial conversations and encourage introspection among readers. By leveraging digital platforms, newspapers extend their reach, promoting empathy and contributing to collective efforts in addressing the challenges posed by communal conflicts. The analysis of web editions of national dailies news related to Delhi riots highlights how media coverage influences public perceptions and understanding of communal events.

The framing of incidents, editorial choices, and the presence of sensationalism, bias, or misinformation in reporting are critical factors that determine whether newspapers escalate or mitigate communal tensions. Understanding the role of Indian newspapers in communal riots is essential for evaluating media responsibility and its impact on social harmony. By addressing these issues, the media can contribute meaningfully to fostering awareness, empathy, and resilience in the face of communal challenges.

II. Review Of Literature

The literature underscores the intricate interplay between media influence, historical factors, and political manipulation in perpetuating communal violence in India, emphasizing the necessity for a multidimensional approach to mitigate these tensions. Media analysis, particularly of mainstream English daily *The Hindu*, reveals a consistent negative portrayal of Muslims. Studies indicate that these portrayals, including news, photographs, editorials, and letters to editors, were statistically significant, with the year 2002 emerging as a peak period of extreme negative projection following the Godhra incident (Khaleeqe, 2018; Liyakat, 2012). This bias aligns with broader concerns about media responsibility and its role in shaping public perception, highlighting the need for inclusive and ethical journalism.

The role of the press extends beyond reporting, as it influences communal riots by shaping public opinion and either promoting societal harmony or intensifying conflicts through selective reporting (Najar, 2014). The power of the press underscores the importance of aligning journalistic practices with democratic and secular values. Furthermore, the literature examines the evolving role of judicial commissions in addressing communal violence, noting their varying effectiveness influenced by political contexts and mandates. While some commissions have restored public trust, others have faced criticism for bias, affecting their ability to hold the state accountable and instill confidence in victims (Rajeshwari, 2009).

Communal riots, such as the Bhiwandi riots, reflect systemic failures exacerbated by political manipulation and the instrumentalization of religion for electoral gains. Inadequate governmental responses, marked by insufficient accountability and judicial action, highlight the urgent need for unbiased governance and stricter enforcement of laws to address these issues (Khan, 2007). The legislative framework surrounding communal violence has also been critiqued for its inefficacy. Weak enforcement mechanisms, an absence of political will, and societal complicity have rendered existing laws and proposed bills ineffective, necessitating preventive measures and societal collaboration to tackle communal biases (Kumar, 2007).

The historical roots of communal tensions are traced back to socio-religious revivalist movements of the 19th century, such as the Arya Samaj, which fostered competition among religious groups. The British colonial policies of separate electorates institutionalized communal divisions, laying a foundation for recurring violence and a fragmented national identity (Bhardwaj, 1997). Collectively, the literature calls for responsible media practices, historical redress, legislative reforms, and impartial governance to foster national integration and address the deep-seated causes of communal violence.

Objectives of the study

1. To know the frequency of coverage given to communal riots in the web editions of major Indian dailies over a specific period.
2. To analyze the framing in the headlines of web editions of major Indian newspapers.
3. To investigate the news sources utilized in the coverage of communal riots.

III. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze the role of Indian newspapers in shaping public perception during communal riots, with a specific focus on the Delhi Riots. The research methodology is rooted in content analysis using corpus analysis, which is used to systematically examine the narratives, tone, and framing employed by the web editions of a prominent national daily, *The Hindu*.

The data for this study was collected from the web editions of the selected newspapers over one month period during the Delhi Riots. A detailed textual analysis was done on web edition of national daily in terms of word frequency, and keywords to understand recurring words or concerns of the riots occurred in Delhi. The timeline of this data collection is from 20th February 2020 to 20th March 2020. The AntConc software was used to conduct the content analysis on the news from web edition corpus. Applications of textual functions like KWIC, keywords, clusters, collocations, and N-Gram are used to probe research objectives.

Data presentation & analysis

The data has been presented below is according to the objectives of the study and it is a corpus analysis in which researcher analyse the elements like KWIC, keywords, clusters, collocations, and N-Gram among data.

Table no. 1- Keywords along with frequency in web edition of The Hindu

Sr. No.	Terms	Frequency of words
1	Delhi	165
2	Muslim/Muslims	139
3	Police	137
4	Violence	127
5	Riot/riots	100
6	Burnt	69
7	Hindu	59

8	Communal	50
9	Mosque	50
10	Government	49
11	Justice	46
12	Media	42
13	Fire	41
14	CAA	39
15	Mob	38
16	Masjid	36
17	BJP	35
18	AAP	23
19	Protest	17
20	Indian	14
21	Congress	11
22	Modi	9
23	Attack	8
24	Religion	6
25	Pakistan	5

Words Frequency – Total words- 4947

Total frequency of words-30344

Corpus analysis is a basic method to describe the discourse including the frequency of words (Vashishata & Arya, 2020). The frequency of words demonstrates a possible bias (positive as well as negative) in the text and is denotative of the kind of discourse text has. Hence, its importance cannot be undermined. Table 1 shows the relative frequency of words appearing in the corpus. The words with the highest frequency included Delhi, riots, Muslim, Hindu, government, fire, BJP, AAP, protest, Indian, Congress, Modi, CM, attack, religion, and Pakistan. While the high frequency of the first two words was expected, the word 'Muslim' appeared more frequently than its presumed counterpart, 'Hindu' (used in the context of riots). This disparity highlights the prominence of terms associated with protests that carry political and religious undertones. This trend of words indicates a discourse shaped by events or narratives with strong political and religious dimensions. The prominence of words such as *Muslim* and *Hindu* suggests a focus on communal aspects, particularly in the context of riots and protests. Additionally, the frequent appearance of political entities and figures like *BJP*, *AAP*, and *Modi* points to the political framing of the issues being discussed. The disparity in frequency between *Muslim* and *Hindu* may reflect a narrative bias or emphasis on one group over the other, potentially shaping perceptions of the events. Overall, the word frequency underscores a discourse heavily influenced by socio-political and religious contexts.

Concordance- pattern

Table 2- Key word in context or context of the word

Sr. No.	Term	KWIC	KWIC with derivatives
1	Delhi	165	165
2	Muslim/Muslims	139	140
3	Police	137	153
4	Violence	127	127
5	Riot/riots	100	173
6	Hindu	59	102
7	Communal	50	53
8	Mosque	50	60
9	Government	49	57
10	Justice	46	47
11	Media	42	42
12	CAA	39	39
13	Masjid	36	38
14	BJP	35	35
15	AAP	23	23
16	Protest	17	54
17	Indian	14	17
18	Congress	11	11
19	Modi	9	10
20	Religion	6	6
21	Pakistan	5	5

Figure 1: KWIC view of ‘Riot’ in Web Editions of The Hindu



Word Clusters- Use this when you want to explore how a particular word or phrase is used in different contexts.

Table no. 3- Word clusters along with cluster type in web edition of The Hindu

Sr. No.	Word clusters	Cluster type
1	Delhi	66
2	Muslim/Muslims	90
3	Police	80
4	Violence	74
5	Riot/riots	57
6	Hindu	43
7	Mosque	36
8	Government	31
9	Justice	24
10	Media	31
11	CAA	23
12	Masjid	27
13	BJP	18
14	AAP	19
15	Protest	13
16	Indian	12
17	Congress	8
18	Modi	6
19	Religion	4
20	Pakistan	5

Collocates- Collocation is a statistical function of corpus unlike KWIC, and word list. It is described as a pairing of two words that tend to appear near each other in natural language, i.e., co-occur. The term ‘word pair’ is used to describe such combinations of two words (Evert, 2007). [Table 3](#) Statistical strength is mutual information – 3.0 higher (-tive score tells that two items shun each other) T test- 2 or higher signifies strength.

Table no. 3- Collocates in web edition of The Hindu

Sr. No.	Term	Collocate types	Collocate token
1	Delhi	12	277
2	Muslim/Muslims	10	82
3	Police	8	235
4	Violence	8	150
5	Riot/riots	11	254
6	Hindu	2	16
7	Mosque	5	101
8	Government	2	73
9	Justice	5	49
10	Media	3	45

11	CAA	10	107
12	Masjid	4	31
13	BJP	4	30
14	AAP	3	15
15	Protest	1	5

N Gram- Co-occurrence and similarities of the word is necessary to understand the meaning of the sentence (Ramesh, 2019). It can be used for a broader analysis of frequent word sequences in the entire corpus, especially when general patterns needed to be discovered. N-Gram is a structure of the language, this kind of language model can be found in smart phone text, it suggests the next word to be written with the word which is being typed (Yash,2021).

Sentiment analysis:

The sentiment analysis of the collected news corpus, conducted using the "Text Analytics data-to text" app in Google Spreadsheet and cross-verified by hand-coding, provides insights into the emotional tone and slant of the reporting.

Out of a total of 38,591 words in the corpus (assuming the "tweets" mentioned were a misnomer for "words/entries" in the news articles, as the study is on newspaper web editions), the analysis revealed the following distribution:

- **Neutral Sentiment:** The majority of the content, specifically 54%, was found to be neutral. This is further indicated by a frequency of 4.18 for neutral words, suggesting that approximately every 4-5 words conveyed a neutral sentiment. This indicates a significant effort by the newspaper to maintain an objective or descriptive tone for a large portion of its reporting on the Delhi riots.
- **Positive Sentiment:** The frequency of positive sentiment words was relatively low at 1.79. This suggests that celebratory or overtly optimistic framing was rare in the coverage of the communal riots.
- **Negative Sentiment:** The frequency of negative sentiment words was higher than positive, at 2.39. This indicates a noticeable tilt towards negative emotional framing within the content.

Overall, the sentiment analysis of the corpus is found to be tilted slightly more towards negative sentiment, despite a strong presence of neutral reporting. This suggests that while striving for objectivity, the inherent nature of reporting communal violence leads to a significant presence of negative emotional cues in the newspaper's narrative. This aligns with the initial premise that newspapers can shape reality, as a consistent negative undertone, even amidst neutral reporting, can influence public perception of the severity and nature of the events.

IV. Conclusion

This study embarked on an examination of the pivotal role of *The Hindu*, a prominent English national daily, in its coverage of the Delhi communal riots that occurred in February 2020. Utilizing corpus analysis via AntConc software on news related to the riots from the newspaper's web edition, the research sought to understand how the publication shaped public perception during this sensitive period by analyzing variables such as word frequency, framing, tone, and sources.

The research's core objectives were to ascertain the frequency of coverage, analyze framing in headlines, and investigate news sources used during the communal riots. The findings, derived from a detailed textual analysis focusing on keywords, KWIC (Key Word in Context), word clusters, and collocates, along with sentiment analysis, collectively paint a nuanced picture of *The Hindu's* reporting.

The word frequency analysis revealed a significant emphasis on terms like 'Delhi', 'Muslim/Muslims', 'Police', 'Violence', and 'Riot/riots', which was expected given the subject matter. However, the notable disparity where 'Muslim' appeared more frequently than 'Hindu' (even when accounting for derivatives), alongside the prominence of political entities like 'BJP', 'AAP', and 'Modi', suggests a discourse with strong socio-political and religious undertones. This imbalance, as highlighted in the findings, indicates a potential narrative bias or emphasis, capable of shaping perceptions of the events, thereby addressing Objective 1 (themes, sentiments, tones).

The examination of word clusters and collocates further reinforced these observations, demonstrating how certain terms consistently co-occurred, contributing to the overall framing of the narrative. For instance, the high frequency of 'Muslim' and its cluster occurrences, often alongside terms related to violence or protest, hints at a particular focus that could inadvertently influence public understanding of the groups involved (addressing Objective 2 on polarizing rhetoric).

The sentiment analysis provided a critical layer of insight into the emotional tenor of the reporting. While a substantial portion (54%) of the news content maintained a neutral sentiment, indicating an effort towards objective reporting, the overall corpus demonstrated a slight tilt towards negativity. This suggests that even when facts are presented neutrally, the inherent gravity and tragic nature of communal violence compel a narrative that leans into a negative emotional landscape. This continuous exposure to negatively framed narratives, even subtly,

can contribute to shaping public perception and potentially deepen the sense of societal division (addressing Objective 3 on divisive language and its role in shaping public perception).

In alignment with the initial premise, the study's findings suggest that while *The Hindu* sometimes presented an objective narrative, especially through its high neutral sentiment, its overall crafting of reality often subtly aligned with or was influenced by the political and communal dimensions of the events. The differential prominence of community-specific terms and the prevailing negative sentiment underscore the powerful, albeit sometimes unconscious, role newspapers play in framing sensitive matters. This underscores the crucial need for media responsibility and the ongoing vigilance required to foster awareness, empathy, and resilience in the face of communal challenges, as emphasized in the literature review.

Ultimately, this research contributes to understanding the intricate dynamics of media influence during civil unrest, particularly in a diverse and politically charged environment like India. It highlights that beyond mere reporting, newspapers actively participate in shaping collective understanding, and therefore, their choices of framing, word usage, and narrative tone carry significant implications for social harmony.

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