

## Short Communication

# Health news coverage in India: a comparative analysis of English and Hindi newspapers

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## ABSTRACT

The media plays a crucial role in disseminating health information to the public. This study analyzes the coverage of health news in leading English and Hindi newspapers in India. A cross-sectional content analysis was conducted on health-related news articles published in four major Indian newspapers (The Hindu, Hindustan Times, Dainik Jagran, and Amar Ujala) from July to December 2022. Data on the monthly and weekday distribution, health topics covered, and sources cited were collected and analyzed. A total of 5116 health-related news articles were analyzed. Hindi newspapers (Dainik Jagran and Amar Ujala) published more health-related news (2906 articles, 56.80%) compared to English newspapers (The Hindu and Hindustan Times) (2210 articles, 43.20%). The most prominently covered topics were environmental and pollution, communicable diseases, and COVID. Government health departments and agencies were the most cited sources in The Hindu and Amar Ujala, while research institutes and scientific journals were most cited in Dainik Jagran. Hindustan Times relied more on health bloggers and influencers. The coverage of occupational health and health insurance was limited across all newspapers. Hindi newspapers in India demonstrated a greater focus on health-related news compared to English newspapers during the study period. The study highlights the importance of newspapers in disseminating health information and the need for comprehensive reporting on diverse health topics, including occupational health and health insurance. The findings also emphasize the importance of citing credible sources in health news reporting.

**Keywords:** Health news, Newspapers, India, Content analysis, Media coverage, Public health

## INTRODUCTION

The media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion, influencing policy decisions, and promoting civic engagement. Mass media interventions can be an effective tool for promoting health-related behaviors.<sup>1</sup> The rise of digital media platforms has revolutionized information access and consumption, presenting both opportunities and challenges.<sup>2</sup> In India, newspapers remain a significant source of information, particularly in rural areas. Both English and Hindi newspapers cater to different segments of society and contribute to the democratization of information.<sup>3</sup> This study focuses on

analyzing the coverage of health news in leading English and Hindi newspapers in India.

Health news coverage in India encompasses a wide range of topics, including infectious diseases, public health initiatives, healthcare policies, and lifestyle-related diseases.<sup>4</sup> The media plays a crucial role in disseminating information about disease outbreaks, public health advisories, and vaccination campaigns.<sup>5</sup> However, it is essential to critically evaluate health news sources and consider their credibility, accuracy, and potential biases.<sup>6</sup> This study aims to analyze the coverage of health-related news in leading English and Hindi newspapers in India.

Specifically, it examines the monthly and weekday distribution of health news, the dominant topics covered, and the sources cited in these articles. By doing so, it provides insights into the editorial strategies of different newspapers, the credibility of health information presented to readers, and the overall landscape of health news reporting in India.

## METHODOLOGY USED

A cross-sectional, observational content analysis was conducted on health-related news articles published in four leading Indian newspapers: The Hindu and Hindustan Times (English), and Dainik Jagran and Amar Ujala (Hindi). These newspapers were selected based on their high readership and influence, as determined by data from the Indian readership survey (IRS) and their easy availability. The study period spanned six months, from July 1st, 2023, to December 31st, 2023. All health-related articles published in national editions of these newspapers during this period were included in the analysis.

### Data collection

Data were collected from both the physical editions and e-papers of the selected newspapers. A list of keywords was developed to identify health-related articles. These keywords included: Health, COVID, communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, healthcare infrastructure, medical research, public health, mental health, alternative medicine, healthcare technology and innovation, health insurance, aging, elder care, women's health, children's health, sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, food safety, pollution, environment, health promotion, fitness and wellness, and others (sanitation, accident). Hindi translations of these keywords were used to identify articles in Hindi newspapers. Articles not directly related to health or healthcare, such as political news, sports, and entertainment, were excluded, as were advertisements and promotional materials.

### Data analysis

Collected data were entered into MS office excel 360 (2019) spreadsheets. Following parameters analysed:

**Monthly distribution:** The total number of health-related articles published each month was calculated for each newspaper.

**Weekday distribution:** The total number of health-related articles published on each day of the week (Monday to Sunday) was calculated for each newspaper.

**Health topics covered:** The articles were categorized based on the health topics covered, using the predefined keywords.

**Sources cited:** The sources cited in each article were identified and categorized (e.g., government health departments, research institutes, medical experts, NGOs, health bloggers, etc.).

## OBSERVATIONS

A total of 5116 health-related news articles were analyzed across the four newspapers during the six-month study period.

### Monthly and weekday distribution

**Monthly distribution:** October and December had the highest number of health-related articles across all newspapers (888 and 885 articles, respectively), while August had the lowest (819 articles).

**Weekday distribution:** The distribution of articles across weekdays varied among the newspapers.

Sundays had the highest number of articles in The Hindu and Dainik Jagran, while Wednesdays had the highest in Hindustan Times and Amar Ujala.

### Health topics covered

Table 1 presents the distribution of health topics covered by each newspaper. Environmental and pollution, communicable diseases, and COVID were the most prominently covered topics across all newspapers. occupational health and health insurance received limited coverage.

**Table 1: Distribution of health topics covered by each newspaper (percentage).**

| Health topic                | The Hindu | Hindustan Times | Dainik Jagran | Amar Ujala |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|------------|
| COVID                       | 0.44      | 0.12            | 0.58          | 0.36       |
| Communicable diseases       | 0.46      | 0.12            | 0.30          | 0.17       |
| Non-communicable diseases   | 0.24      | 0.10            | 0.35          | 0.12       |
| Health crises and epidemics | 0.28      | 0.08            | 0.19          | 0.15       |
| Government policies         | 0.36      | 0.10            | 0.20          | 0.27       |
| Healthcare infrastructure   | 0.12      | 0.04            | 0.05          | 0.05       |
| Medical research            | 0.22      | 0.20            | 0.93          | 0.33       |
| Mental health               | 0.19      | 0.12            | 0.38          | 0.14       |
| Alternative medicine        | 0.16      | 0.03            | 0.13          | 0.11       |
| Healthcare technology       | 0.14      | 0.14            | 0.48          | 0.04       |

Continued.

| Health topic                    | The Hindu | Hindustan Times | Dainik Jagran | Amar Ujala |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|------------|
| Health insurance                | 0.07      | 0.01            | 0.03          | 0.01       |
| Aging and elder care            | 0.13      | 0.06            | 0.07          | 0.10       |
| Women's and child health        | 0.36      | 0.18            | 0.36          | 0.20       |
| Sexual and reproductive health  | 0.24      | 0.08            | 0.19          | 0.11       |
| Nutrition and food safety       | 0.34      | 0.17            | 0.45          | 0.25       |
| Occupational health and safety  | 0.03      | 0.01            | 0.02          | 0.01       |
| Disaster response and emergency | 0.36      | 0.10            | 0.24          | 0.08       |
| Health promotion and fitness    | 0.33      | 0.29            | 0.63          | 0.49       |
| Environmental and pollution     | 0.59      | 0.25            | 0.72          | 0.27       |
| Others                          | 0.26      | 0.09            | 0.22          | 0.04       |

### Sources cited

Table 2 shows the distribution of sources cited in health-related news articles. Government health departments and agencies were the most prominently cited sources in The

Hindu and Amar Ujala. Research Institutes and Scientific journals were the most cited sources in Dainik Jagran, while Hindustan Times cited health bloggers and influencers most frequently.

**Table 2: Distribution of sources cited in health-related news articles (Percentage).**

| Source                             | The Hindu | Hindustan Times | Dainik Jagran | Amar Ujala |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|------------|
| Govt. health dept. and agencies    | 19        | 11              | 12            | 22         |
| Research and scientific journals   | 7         | 12              | 19            | 12         |
| Medical experts                    | 13        | 19              | 16            | 14         |
| NGO's in health and wellness       | 8         | 1               | 4             | 3          |
| International health organizations | 10        | 5               | 6             | 3          |
| National health organizations      | 12        | 10              | 8             | 12         |
| Health bloggers and influencers    | 13        | 27              | 17            | 18         |
| Academic institutions in health    | 6         | 8               | 9             | 8          |
| Pharmaceutical companies           | 1         | 1               | 1             | 1          |
| Others/unknown                     | 11        | 7               | 3             | 2          |

### Comparison between English and Hindi newspapers

Hindi newspapers (Dainik Jagran and Amar Ujala) published a higher number of health-related news articles (2906, 56.80%) compared to English newspapers (The Hindu and Hindustan Times) (2210, 43.20%). Dainik Jagran had the highest number of health-related articles in a single month (315 in October), while Hindustan Times had the lowest (127 in August).

### DISCUSSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of health news coverage in leading English and Hindi newspapers in India. The findings reveal that Hindi newspapers dedicated more coverage to health-related topics compared to English newspapers. This could be attributed to the larger readership base of Hindi newspapers in India and their focus on regional and local issues that directly impact the lives of their readers.

The prominence of environmental and pollution, communicable diseases, and COVID-19 as the most covered topics reflects the major public health concerns in India during the study period. The extensive coverage of COVID-19 is consistent with the global trend of the

heightened media attention on the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> The limited coverage of occupational health and health Insurance suggests a potential gap in reporting on these important aspects of public health. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that certain health topics receive less media attention than others.<sup>8</sup>

The variation in the monthly and weekday distribution of health news articles across newspapers highlights the influence of editorial decisions and readership patterns. The higher number of articles in October and December could be linked to year-end health summaries and increased public interest in health during the festive season. The prominence of Sundays and Wednesdays for health news coverage in different newspapers likely reflects strategic decisions to engage readers when they have more leisure time.

The reliance on government health departments and agencies as primary sources in The Hindu and Amar Ujala demonstrates a commitment to evidence-based reporting and the use of authoritative sources. Dainik Jagran's focus on research institutes and scientific journals underscores the importance of scientific evidence in health news reporting. Hindustan Times' frequent citation of health bloggers and influencers suggests an

attempt to incorporate diverse perspectives and cater to a broader audience, reflecting the growing influence of digital media personalities.<sup>9</sup>

### Limitations

This study has a few limitations. First, it only included four newspapers, which may not be fully representative of all newspapers in India. Second, the study period was limited to six months, and the findings may not be generalizable to other time periods. Third, the analysis relied on predefined keywords, which may have missed some relevant health-related articles. Fourth, the study focuses on major newspapers only, without including smaller regional or local newspapers. This limits the generalizability of findings.

### CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of newspapers in disseminating health information in India. Hindi newspapers demonstrated a greater focus on health-related news compared to English newspapers during the study period. While certain topics like COVID-19 and environmental and pollution received extensive coverage, others like occupational health and health insurance were relatively neglected. The findings underscore the importance of citing credible sources in health news reporting and the need for comprehensive coverage of diverse health topics to cater to the information needs of the public.

### Recommendations

*For publication houses:* Increase the overall coverage of health-related news articles. Expand the range of health topics covered, including areas like occupational health and health insurance. Ensure transparency in reporting by clearly citing the sources of information used in health news articles. Avoid/limit the inclusion of uncited information about health-related topics.

*For readers:* Actively seek out health information from newspapers and provide feedback to publishers regarding their coverage. Choose Hindi newspapers over English Newspapers to get more information about health topics.

*Future research should consider:* Expanding the scope of the study to include a larger number of newspapers and a longer study period. Analyzing the quality and accuracy of health information presented in newspapers. Examining the impact of health news coverage on public knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours.

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