



COVERAGE OF FARMERS' SUICIDES IN THE KANNADA ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA – A CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDY

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Abstract

Media coverage of farmers' suicides has drawn greater attention. Various research studies on the farmers' suicides and also on coverage of farmers' suicides have been analyzed. The change in the agricultural situation with dismantling of State support which fuelled the Farmers' suicides for the last 10 years has been captured. In 2015, the year in which the highest number of farmers' suicides were recorded in a decade, the coverage and content analysis of the same in the Top TV News Channels and online magazines have been done. The coverage and content analysis of farmers' suicides as reflected in the Kannada media is weighed vis-a-vis recorded number of farmers' suicides in the government department. With the Field study, the media coverage is compared.

Introduction

The agriculture crisis has resulted in large scale suicides of farmers in the country. Karnataka state is in the top two position in this with 13.64% in the country's share.¹ It is shocking to note that from 1995 to 2012, about 2,84,763 farmers' have committed suicides in the country.²

Though there have been significant number of research studies on farmers' suicides, hardly there is any study on depiction of farmers' suicides in the Kannada media.

Well known French Sociologist and Philosopher, Emile Durkheim looked at, not the beliefs of why someone commits suicide, but at the social factors that may influence a person to commit suicide. He focused on the level of: Cohesiveness within a society. ... A person's standing within the religious, social and occupational groups of the society.³

It is in this background that the real roots of the farmers' suicides posited in the heart of farming crisis needs to be understood. Liberalization policies pursued since 1990s have pushed the marginal and small farmers into the new terrain which is dictated by the market forces with almost no State support.

Prof. M.S Swaminathan led Farmers' Commission while documenting these causes, recommended that farming should be made sustainable by massive State support.⁴ This commission has identified that it is due to lack of market support, minimum support price, money lenders taking place of the credit system, rise in input cost, etc., the number of farmers' suicides increased.

Content analysis of the Kannada Electronic Media and Social Media in the coverage of agricultural news and farmers' suicides is studied. An attempt has been made to understand how the media works? What media covers and what the reality is? What is the Kannada Media representation of farmers' suicides? What are the factors which determine the coverage farmers' suicides?, etc.

Studies on media coverage of farmers' suicides

Various research scholars – A.R. Vasavi⁵, Prof. R.S Deshpande⁶, Institute for Socio-Economic Change, Dr. Veeresh⁷ led committee which is constituted by Government of Karnataka, Srinivasulu A⁸, Jagan Kanti⁹, Prof. S. Nagaraj¹⁰, Madras Institute for Development Studies and many others have done good number of studies on farmers' suicides.

As regards to research work on farmers' suicides as reflected in the media and content analysis of the same, very few studies – P. Sainath¹¹, Centre for Media Studies¹², etc.- have been undertaken. CMS have done very good analytical study on how the mainstream media covers farmers' suicides. There is no research work on farmers' suicides as reflected in Kannada media and content analysis of the same.

Methodology

Important Research Studies on farmers' suicides have been reviewed. Record of farmers' suicides in the last 10 years and the changing agricultural scenario is studied. In the study period, 2015, content analysis of 2 online magazines for one year were analysed and content analysis of News TV Channels : ETV-News and TV9, were done for 30 days in the month of November 2015.

The content analysis was compared with the Field studies undertaken in 3 villages each in 3 districts – Ganada Hosuru, Sanaba and Panakanahalli of Mandya District, Kannavalli, Kurugunda, Chowdaiah Danapura of Haveri district, Lakkanahalli, Kotta and Tayappana Hatti of Tumakuru District. The content analysis method adopted here is the Relational Analysis type with both quantitative and qualitative tools¹³. MS-Excel Software was used for analyzing and computation of data generated.

Media Content Analysis of farmers' suicides

About 3,722 farmers committed suicide for the years from 2003-04 to 2015-16 (excluding 3 years preceding 2015-16 as the data is not available)¹⁴. The data on number of farmers who committed suicides varies from State to Central Government. The number of farmers' suicides for 2015 June, July, and August recorded in State Government are 25, 208, and 217 respectively and data recorded by the Central Government are 20 and 152 for June and July respectively and the data is not available for August.

In the case of 2 online magazines, the space provided for farmers' suicides are measured along with content analysis. In the case of Kannada TV news channels, the farmers' suicides covered in the scroll news item and also in the prime time news in terms of number of times it covered and also the duration for which it covered were captured.

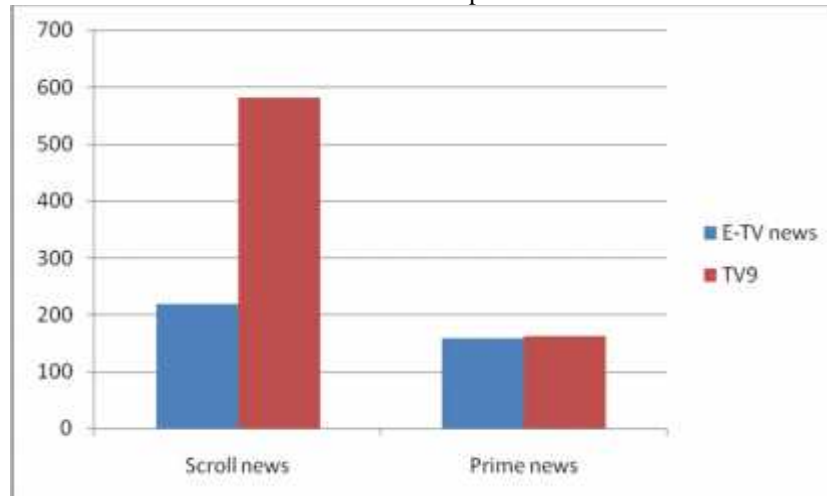
The content analysis was weighed vis-a-vis factual situation in which the family of the farmers are living and reasons for which he/she committed suicide were done in the field studies in various families in 9 villages of 3 districts – 1 in North Karnataka and 2 in South Karnataka.

Further relative analysis of the media content was done in a series of interaction held with various Leaders of Farmers's Organizations, Media experts, Agricultural Experts, Economists, Academicians and Activists.

Results and Discussions

Coverage in Kannada News Channels

- In 2015 November, TV9 news channel has covered farmers' suicides news for about 582 seconds in scroll news and 161 seconds in prime time with a total of 724 seconds. Whereas, E-TV news channel has covered farmers' suicides news for about 219 seconds in scroll news and 157 seconds in prime time with a total of 329 seconds.

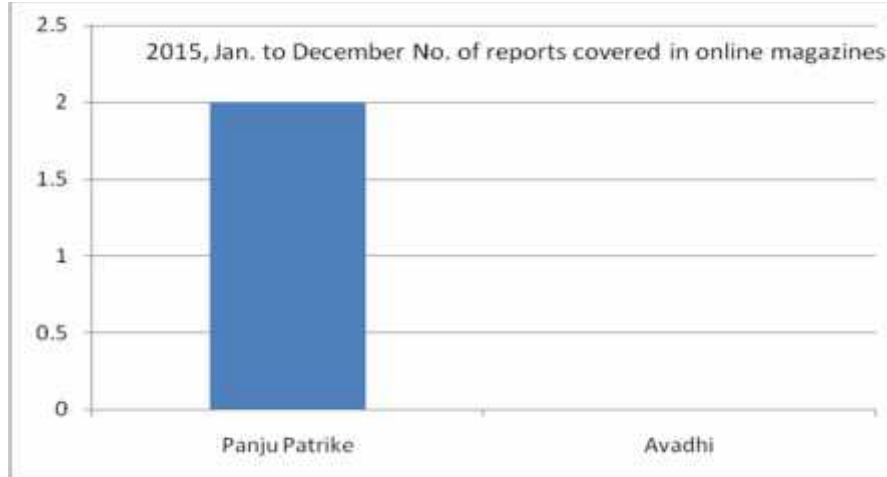


2015, Nov. Duration of farmers' suicides covered by TV channel, Seconds

- In the same period, TV9 news channel has reported 18 farmers' suicides and E-TV news channel has reported 20 farmers' suicides.

Coverage in Social Media – online magazines

- In 2015, January-December, Two Kannada online magazines – Panju Patrike and Avadhi magazines were analysed. Panju Patrike has covered 2 articles that too with agriculture related news, whereas Avadhi has not published any article on the issue.



Relative Analysis of Content Analysis with Field Studies and Interaction with Experts

- The relative analysis points out that the main stream Kannada media has not been able to cover the all the farmers' suicides recorded by the Government. The important aspect of report coverage points out that the main stream Kannada media fails to present the factual aspects in its entirety with comprehensive coverage. Agni Tabloid is an exception to this.
- The Experts from various sphere presented the argument that the media's role as fourth pillar of democracy is getting diminished as the focus of the mainstream media is getting shifted to trivial issues and sensationalism.

Conclusions

- Among TV channels, the number of suicides covered are less when compared to farmers' suicides recorded by the Government Department. TV9 has provided 582 seconds and ETV news has provided only 219 seconds.
- Among online magazines, Panju Patrike has published two articles.

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