



e content NEWS

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To understand the concept of news it is necessary to have an understanding of a few basic facts. Have you ever thought about the nature of the news? To keep ourselves abreast of the latest happenings around us we listen to radio, read newspapers or watch television. If we were asked the question that, “Why do we do so?”, our immediate reply would be—“To receive information.” Without information we feel that we have become alienated from the world around us and have not been able to gel with the society. We do not read Monday’s newspaper on Wednesday although; sometimes people do read older newspapers to corroborate certain facts. But this is not a routine or normal practice. To understand news, first we would have to understand the concept of ‘information’ as information is the building block of news.



Does all information constitute news? If it is believed that all information is news, the credibility and utility of news is bound to suffer as we are considered to be living in the age of ‘information overflow’. It means that there is an excess of information around us and we are receiving a lot of undesirable information that are useless

for us. Therefore, it becomes clear that each and every piece of information cannot be considered as news. Now who will decide that whether an information is news or not and on what criteria?

The decision regarding the suitability of any information to be considered as news is taken by the gatekeepers, who are the editors of newspapers or news channels. The criteria for considering any information as news will be 'public good' and 'news values'. Only that information will become news which has element of public good in it.

Information + Public good → News

Definition of News

The area of definition of news is quite extensive. Some definitions of news are following:

“Any information that affects a large number of people simultaneously is known as news. In other words, news is that timely report of any event, data or idea which impinges upon majority of people.”

“News is that new information which is related to current events affecting maximum number of people of a population.”

Definitions given above give a broad outline about the concept of news but cannot be regarded as comprehensive or extensive as the concept of news evolves and changes with changing times and evolving societies. News is a relative concept. When the factors affecting news change, then the concept of news also changes. Definition of news depends upon following elements:

- Size of the community (Readers)
- Periodicity of the publication (Weekly, fortnightly, etc.)
- Social character of the community and its economic basis.
- Preferences of the community. (Municipal elections in a district of Uttar Pradesh may not grab headlines in the newspapers published from Chennai or Mumbai)

John B. Bogart, editor of the 'New York Sun', had quite a long time ago famously defined news by the statement that, “If a dog bites a man then it does not constitute news but, if a man bites a dog then it becomes news.”

This aphorism of John B. Bogart did describe the concept of news correctly till a few decades ago but, has lost its credibility in the recent years with media showing an increased propensity towards more and more aggressive portrayal of even the most trivial of issues in order to achieve highest T.R.P.s and readership numbers. None of

the media wants to remain laggard in the mad race for grabbing the largest market share. Now-a-days, if the dog of the chief minister of a state bites a man; it becomes news. By making this statement about the nature of news.

Mr. John B. Bogart was trying to draw attention towards a number of unexpected events occurring in the society.

Elements and Types of News

News is the lifeline of journalism. Quest for knowledge of human beings gets sated when they hear, read or watch news. News has become an integral part of the daily routine of the people as it is a necessity of modern times in which everyone has an interest. During earlier times, favourite pastime of people was to discuss about religion or tradition. This has changed in modern times. Now news about local, national or even international events has become favourite topic of discussion in informal gatherings or meetings of people.

Etymology of News

News is derived from new and regarded by some etymologists as plural of the English word 'new'. Its origin can also be traced back to Sanskrit word 'nav' new which signifies that any information which is current and new constitutes news. News means a report of events taking place in all the four directions namely east, west, north and south.



N = North

E = East

W = West

S = South

‘Tiding’ word was used to signify information about current events before 1500 A.D. With the development of printing technology the term ‘news’ gained currency and signified collection and dissemination of information in order to generate profits. According to Emery, “Occasional transmission of information is ‘tiding’ whereas, pre-planned and well researched compilation and transmission of information is ‘news’.

Some important definitions of news

“A contemporary issue or event which is of interest to a large number of people is news. Best news is that in which the majority has maximum interest.”

William G. Blair

“News is that description of any current issue, event or dispute which entices consumers”.

Woolsey and Campbell

“News is that information which was unknown to you till yesterday”.

Turner Katliz

“Any information which arouses curiosity among a large number of people constitutes news provided it does not violate the rules of good taste and propriety.

J.J. Cindler

“News is fast moving literature. Newspapers are those spindles of the spinning wheels of time that weave colourfully embroidered fabric of history.”

Harper, Leech and John C. Carol

Following is that definition of news which won the first prize in a contest organized by ‘Manchester Guardian’ in Britain:

“News signifies immediate information about an uncommon and extraordinary event, which people generally know nothing about, but which is of immediate interest to a large number of people.”

Elements of News : Any information will be considered news only when certain specific elements related to news are embedded in it. That is, utility of news will be proved only when it contains certain special elements. Main elements of news are following:

(i) Timeliness and Novelty: News should necessarily have the attributes of timeliness and novelty. News loses these elements and consequently its validity if it is published after 24 hours in a daily newspaper and after a week in a weekly newspaper. In other words, only fresh news attracts the readers. Any delay makes any news useless and meaningless.

(ii) Proximity: An event happening in geographical propinquity holds more importance for the audiences of that area than an event taking place in remote places.

(iii) Conflict: Conflict is the most basic element of any news. Conflict is a part of modern lifestyle and augurs well for a good news story.

(iv) Prominence: Any event related to prominent personalities of places becomes news whereas the opposite of the same is not true. For instance, assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Mr. Rajeev Gandhi became international news while murder of an agricultural labourer in a small village may not become news even for local publications.

(v) Number and Size: A train accident resulting in copious deaths and injuries is bound to grab national or even international headlines whereas, a train accident resulting in minor injuries to passengers or lesser number of deaths does not hold much newsworthiness from the point of view of newspapers.

(vi) Human Interest: If a woman gives birth to quadruplets it would become news as it is basic human nature to enjoy vicariously by peering into the lives of other people. Similarly, news stories with tragic or happy endings are also related to human interest and therefore, have news worthiness.

(vii) Growth and Development: Growth and development are integral parts of any news. News depicting growth and development of a society is good news as readers reading such news will also get benefitted from it.

Besides the above mentioned elements, discord, dispute, competition, rivalry, excitement, romance, result, sensuality, immorality, dramatics, etc. are some other news elements that make news attractive and captivating for the audiences.

Types of News: To understand the types of news it is imperative to have knowledge about the factors responsible for conversion of information into news. Any information can be considered as news only if:

- (i) It is concerned with maximum public good.
- (ii) It is related to exceptional and extraordinary events of life.
- (iii) It has the attributes of novelty and newness.
- (iv) It has been compiled by the correspondent or reporter of a newspaper or news channel in a proper format.

Without the expert intervention of a reporter or a correspondent any information remains nothing but just another event. In the context of global journalism news has been classified under two heads. This classification of news holds true for Indian journalism as well as it is accepted by journalistic community across the world. This classification divides news into following two categories:

(1) Hard News: Those news items fall under this category which

hold importance for majority of readers, listeners or viewers. News from government departments, political news, news related to international affairs, educational news, industrial and commercial news, religious news, jurisdictional news, economical news, etc, come under the purview of hard news. The most distinguishing quality of hard news is that it cannot be withheld or procrastinated. They have to be communicated to the readers/listeners/viewers as soon as they are received. Most headlines of newspapers are made up of hard news. The concept of hard news can be delineated with the help of following example:

5 percent decline in intermediate results “Lucknow, 2nd June. Results of intermediate students have plummeted by a whopping 5 percent for the first time in recent years after ‘use of unfair means during board examinations’ was reinstated as a cognizable offense by the government. Results of approximately 25,000 students have been withheld on the basis of doubt regarding use of unfair means during examination. Not only the pass percentage has declined but, the number of students passing in the first class has also declined considerably.”

There is no ambiguity about the fact that daily newspapers dedicate their maximum attention towards hard news and it constitutes majority of news published in them.

(2) Soft News: Soft news is concerned with human interest news. Generally, crime, tragedy, comedy and other such elements of appealing to the emotions of the audiences constitute soft news. Basically, soft news is that news which does not demand immediate transmission to the audiences as opposed to hard news. Most news features are based upon soft news. Following is an example of soft news:

“Video conferencing is bringing about revolutionary changes in global mass media of communication. This technology has eliminated all the boundaries of space and time. This process works through digital networking.”

Although, hard news is very important but is read by only the educated or intellectual people of the society as it demands a certain perspicuity of mind and greater attention on the part of the readers. Readers normally do not have enough time to devote to them. The importance of hard news increases under certain special circumstances such as political turmoil, war, etc. The completeness of a newspaper lies in maintaining a balance between hard news and soft

news as they are complementary in nature.

News Values

Different countries have different news values. News values are also dependent upon religious, socio-cultural and economic value systems and beliefs prevalent in a country. Nature of nationality, national value systems and economic factors also determine news values appropriate for a country. An event which may constitute news in a particular country may amount to nothing but a trivial incident in another country. Something which is considered news today may lose its utility and appropriateness as news in the future. Something which forms an important part of radio or television news in a city may not be of any significance for newspapers published from the same city. News values in developed countries and developing countries vary considerably in nature and scope. Therefore, news values change in accordance with time, place and/or context.

Basic News Values

(1) Accuracy: Accuracy is a very important part of any news. If a journalist fails to justify the accuracy and veracity of her/his story, she loses her/his credibility at that very instance. Therefore, it is imperative for journalists to double check each and every fact related to their news before its publication or broadcast. Careful perusal of statistics, data, spellings of proper nouns, etc. is an important step in the process of writing news. Rumours and false news should be assiduously kept out of the purview of journalistic writing.

(2) Balance and Fairness: Typical news is based upon balanced and unbiased reporting and objectivity, accuracy and veracity of facts involved in it. Journalists writing on controversial issues should give equitable space to all the conflicting perspectives and points of view in their report. For example, while reporting about a strike, the points of view of both the officers as well as the workers should be considered, so that an impartial picture of the event can be presented in front of the audiences. The reporter should also tell the readers, listeners or viewers about the extent to which the strike has succeeded in achieving its objectives. If there is ambiguity pertaining to a particular situation then, the reporter must diligently check and analyse all the pertinent data and facts before reporting about the concerned situation. This would ensure the attribution of two important news values of balance and fairness to the report.

(3) Objectivity: News must be objective. News should not contain personal views and opinions of journalists. It should be comprised of

only the bare facts related to the issue and opinions of the people involved in it. There is no scope for subjectivity in this format of journalistic writing. Objectivity of news should be maintained at any cost as it lends credibility to the report as well as to the journalist.

(4) Clarity: News should not be embellished with fancy and esoteric words. Introductory words of news should be perspicuous. Typical paragraph of news should contain about three to four lines with three to four sentences in each line. Sentences should be simple and easily comprehensible to a common reader. Use of jargon, argot and registers should be avoided.

(5) Efficacy: A good news should be efficacious. That is, it should have some positive impact on the lives of its readers. If any news acts as a harbinger of a positive change in the future then, it is an auspicious situation.

After perusing various news values, it becomes amply clear that accuracy, balance, fairness, objectivity, clarity and efficacy are integral parts of typical news. In other words, if any information contains a concoction of all the above news values then it can be easily considered as news. If, in spite of having all the above news values there is no reporter to compile and relay the information further then, it would become impossible for the information in question to be converted into news.

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