

Is Community Press Development Conscious?: A Closer Look into the Contents of Local Tabloids in Northern Philippines

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Abstract

This study is a content analysis of four community newspapers in tabloid size, published in a northern rural part of the Philippines. Using quantitative analysis, it aimed to determine the amount of space in column inches devoted by “The Patriot”, “The Voice of Sierra Madre”, “The New Valley Times” and “The Northern Forum” to development articles and to other categories such as local politics, crime stories and sports, in four issues published in 2013. Percentage space allocations were also computed to determine which news items were emphasized or underemphasized by these newspapers. Results revealed that the four newspapers devoted most of their space to advertisement and local politics. Although these tabloids printed development articles, the space allocation was not significant enough to conclude that they gave emphasis to this category. Community newspapers need to be conscious of their social responsibility and include more development articles to contribute to the socio-economic alleviation of their readers.

Keywords: Content analysis, percentage, space allocation, development, news, politics, advertisement, sports

1.0 Introduction

Berelson (1952) defined content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Described as the scientific study of communication, content analysis is the study of content with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions in a message (Devi, 2008). As a research method, Kerlinger (1986) noted that content analysis is used to analyze communication for the purpose of measuring variables.

Content analysis has been widely used in social science and mass communication research. According to Devi (2008), one significant area of its use has been the analysis of newspaper content of election coverage and editorial treatment to mold the opinions of readers. For instance in India, Devi and Sampar (1991) analyzed the editorials and letters to the editor published in four dailies before the 1991 election to find out the prominent election related themes which figured in the news and direction of their coverage in the respective newspapers. Smith (2010) used a comparative quantitative content analysis to identify the nature of the content devoted to the 2008 US presidential election in the editorial pages of three newspapers in the US. Other important applications of content analysis include the analysis of advertisement in newspapers and magazines as well as media preferences of advertisers as in the studies of Auter and Moore (1993) and Wang (1996).

Newspapers usually give importance to politics, economics, science, social problems or a field of similar broad significance. This is so because the factors that determine news are proximity, timeliness, significance, conflict, progress, oddity, human interest, prominence or suspense (Soriano, 2000). Malinao (2003) also noted that news printed in newspapers are categorized according to novelty, personal impact, local news, money, crime and punishment, disaster and tragedies, human interest and health and science.

A handful of unpublished researches have stated that the print medium should stimulate citizen's concern with government as an integral part of the democratic process. The notion of the press as the fourth estate which emerged at the beginning of the 19th century saw newspapers as providing an extra-parliamentary platform and performing the functions of watchdog on the state. This necessitated the emphasis on issues on politics and government in the newspapers. However, community newspapers have a unique role in facilitating the economic and social development of people in the rural areas by publishing development-oriented news and articles (Maslog, 1998).

Philippine Print Media is classified into broadsheets, tabloids, business, weekly magazines and monthly magazines. In rural Philippines, community newspapers usually take the form of tabloids, with a length of around 14 inches (36 cm) and a width of around 10 inches (25 cm), and thus are cheaper and easier to produce.

An unpublished readership survey and content analysis conducted in 1990 of one of the community newspapers in the Philippines analyzed eight issues from January to August 1989. Each news item excluding the headlines and photos was measured in column inches. A quantitative analysis of the samples revealed that news categories for which more space was allocated were environment and forestry (national), politics and government (local and national), human interest (local), public health and welfare (national), business and economics (national), and crime and public moral problems (local). Comparatively, news categories which were underemphasized are business and economics (local), public health and welfare (national), education and the arts (local and national), peace and order (local and national), environment and forestry (local), agriculture (local and national), science and technology (national) and crime and public moral problems (national).

Tabloids in the Philippines have been gaining higher readership than the broadsheet, according to an unpublished study conducted in 1998. Tabloids, with an average cost of half the broadsheets seem to be preferred by readers in the C, D and E income brackets. It is essential to find out whether

developmental news stories are included in the pages of these tabloids because these stories are vital in the country's progress and people's empowerment.

In Cagayan Valley, in the northern rural part of the Philippines, four tabloids are currently published and circulated monthly. These are the "The Patriot", "The Voice of Sierra Madre", "The New Valley Times" and "The Northern Forum". The oldest among the four, "The Northern Forum" has been in circulation since 1979, "The Valley Times" for 25 years now, while the other two have only been existing for less than ten years. This study aimed to find out the amount of space allocated by these community newspapers to development news compared to other news categories. The content analysis of these local tabloids would provide a basis by which editors, publishers and the rural press in general could evaluate the extent to which their newspapers are playing their role as catalyst of development, particularly by publishing development news.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the content of community newspapers produced in Cagayan Valley, Philippines. Specifically, it aimed to:

- Determine whether local tabloids devote space to development news and articles;
- Find out the amount of column inches local tabloids allocate to agriculture, health and education, local politics, national politics, local crime, national crime, sports and advertisements
- To find out the categories that are emphasized or underemphasized by the local tabloids.

3.0 Methods

Descriptive research design was used for this study. It described in quantitative means, the amount of space allocated by the four community newspapers in Cagayan Valley, Philippines, namely, "The Patriot", "The Voice of Sierra Madre", "The New Valley Times" and "The Northern Forum". These newspapers are in tabloid size. Four issues of each tabloid, covering the months of September to December 2013, were purposively selected for this study. To determine the amount of space allocated to different news categories in each of the four issues, the articles, including advertisements, were first categorized based on their content and title. After categorizing, the space allocation for each article was measured using a 12-inch ruler. Each inch of a ruler is equivalent to a one-column inch. Then the amount of space devoted for each news item was measured in terms of its length and width, and then multiplied to obtain the amount of space allocation for that particular article. The same procedure was then applied to other news articles and advertisements in all four issues of each tabloid. Space allocation in column inches for articles of the same category were added to comprise the total column inches per category. Percentage space allocation for each category was then computed to determine which news items were emphasized or underemphasized by these tabloids. Each category's percentage space allocation was computed using the following formula:

$$\text{Percentage Space Allocation} = \frac{\text{Total column inches for each category}}{\text{Total column inches for all categories}} \times 100$$

4.0 Results and Discussion

Findings in Table 1 present the space allocation of the four tabloids in their September issue. Among the four tabloids, it is “The Valley Times” which gave the most emphasis to development articles as can be shown by the 51 % space allocation it devoted to this particular category. This is in contrast to “The Patriot” This is followed by advertisement which was given an allocation of 17 % of the space in its September issue. Meanwhile, “The Patriot” devoted most of its space on advertisement with 38%, followed by local politics with 28 %. The least emphasized news item was sports, which was given only one percent.

Table 1. Total Column Inches Devoted by Tabloids to Different News Categories in September

Tabloid	Develop- ment N* (%)**	Local Politics N (%)	National Politics N (%)	Local Crime N (%)	National Crime N (%)	Sports N (%)	Advertise- ment N (%)	Total N (%)
The Valley Times	461,061 (51 %)	122,225 (14 %)	93,425 (10 %)	21,060 (2 %)	33,300 (4 %)	13,650 (2 %)	152,225 (17%)	896,946 (100 %)
The Patriot	192,968 (7 %)	794,029 (28 %)	96,900 (3 %)	512,326 (51 %)	125,857 (4 %)	15,26 (1 %)	1,127,464 (39 %)	2,864,808 (100 %)
The Voice of Sierra Madre	59,486 (11 %)	101,861 (19 %)	43,986 (8 %)	159,200 (30 %)	63,159 (12 %)	14,850 (3 %)	90,976 (17 %)	533,518 (100 %)
The Northern Forum	308,316 (28 %)	68,910 (6 %)	12,980 (1 %)	27,700 (3 %)	26,980 (2 %)	29,520 (3 %)	621,585 (57 %)	1,095,991 (100 %)

*N= amount of space allocation

**%= percentage of space allocation

For “The Voice of Sierra Madre”, one-third of the total space was allocated to local crime, followed by local politics with 19 %. Development news was given only a minimal allocation of 11 %. Sports again was also least emphasized. In contrast, “The Northern Forum” devoted most of its space on advertisement with 57 %, followed by development news with 28%. The least emphasized news item was national politics which was given a minimal space of one percent.

In the October issue as shown in Table 2, “The Valley Times” devoted slightly less than half of its pages to development news. This emphasis on development articles is similarly observed in its September issue. This is followed by local politics where less than one-fourth of the pages for this month’s issue was devoted to this news category. The least allocation was given to local crime with just one %.

For “The Patriot”, 38 % of the total space allocation was devoted to advertisement; again this is similar to the finding in the September issue. This is followed by local politics with 29 % and local crime with 17 %. Sports again was the least emphasized in the October issue.

In the case of “The Voice of Sierra Madre”, most of its space (32 %) was allocated to local politics followed by local crime (26 %), advertisement (13%) and development news (12%). A slight increase was observed in the space allocated to development news in the October issue of this particular tabloid. Again, sports was the least emphasized.

The October issue of “The Northern Forum” mostly were used for advertisement; in fact, more than half of the total space was devoted to it. Development news was given a little more than a quarter of the total space (28%). Least emphasized was national politics, which was given only one percent.

Table 2. Total Column Inches Devoted by Tabloids to Different News Categories in October

Tabloid	Develop- ment N* (%)**	Local Politics N (%)	National Politics N (%)	Local Crime N (%)	National Crime N (%)	Sports N (%)	Advertise- ment N (%)	Total N (%)
The Valley Times	445,481 (46 %)	208,825 (22 %)	88,325 (9 %)	9,160 (1 %)	27,286 (3 %)	11,760 (1 %)	171,275 (18 %)	962,112 (100 %)
The Patriot	215,110 (7 %)	856,726 (29 %)	96,900 (3 %)	491,416 (17 %)	122,567 (4 %)	54,720 (2 %)	1,127,464 (38 %)	2,964,903 (100 %)
The Voice of Sierra Madre	78,818 (12 %)	209,556 (32 %)	26,082 (4 %)	166,550 (26 %)	67,044 (10 %)	17,525 (3 %)	87,196 (13 %)	652,771 (100 %)
The Northern Forum	277,371 (28 %)	85,868 (9 %)	13,685 (1 %)	23,500 (2 %)	28,115 (3 %)	38,320 (4 %)	532,835 (53 %)	999,694 (100 %)

*N= amount of space allocation

**%= percentage of space allocation

Table 3 shows the total column inches and percentage space allocation for the different categories in the November issue of the four tabloids. It is heartwarming to note that as in their previous issues, the most number of space in this particular issue of “The Valley Times” was devoted to development articles, covering slightly less than half of the total space (47%), followed by local politics (27 %), national politics (9%)and advertisement (9%). Crime issues were least emphasized, just like in its October issue. For “The Patriot”, an almost equal allocation was devoted to local politics and advertisement, with local politics receiving 35 % of the total space while advertisement was allotted 34 %. Sports was allocated only 1 %.

For “The Voice of Sierra Madre”, local politics was given more than a quarter (28%) of the total space, followed by local crime (24%). This is similar to the findings in the October issue of this paper. Sports was again the least emphasized, given only a 3% space.

Meanwhile, a sudden increase in the space allocation for sports was observed in “The Northern Forum”. Taking a closer inspection on its pages, it is noted that a new section was added to its pages—the sports page. It was learned from the publisher that a new sports columnist was recruited in the first part of November, which led to the publisher’s decision to add another page devoted solely for sports. Development news received also a big allocation with 29 %. Conversely, national news on politics and crime received 3 % only of the total space.

Table 3. Total Column Inches Devoted by Tabloids to Different News Categories in November

Tabloid	Development N* (%)**	Local Politics N (%)	National Politics N (%)	Local Crime N (%)	National Crime N (%)	Sports N (%)	Advertise- ment N (%)	Total N (%)
The Valley Times	288,520 (47 %)	163,375 (27 %)	54,143 (9 %)	23,715 (4 %)	7,700 (1 %)	16,800 (3 %)	54,050 (9 %)	608,303 (100 %)
The Patriot	138,962 (4 %)	1,258,310 (35 %)	160,274 (5 %)	478,385 (13 %)	275,909 (8 %)	43,909 (1 %)	1,194,762 (34 %)	3,550,511 (100 %)
The Voice of Sierra Madre	22,680 (5 %)	131,830 (28 %)	67,506 (15 %)	112,016 (24 %)	64,155 (14 %)	13,446 (3 %)	52,139 (11 %)	463,772 (100 %)
The Northern Forum	143,350 (29 %)	26,925 (5 %)	16,958 (3 %)	30,920 (6 %)	15,250 (3 %)	229,165 (46%)	38,320 (8 %)	500,888 (100 %)

*N= amount of space allocation

**%= percentage of space allocation

In its December issue, the most emphasized type of news in “The Valley Times” was again development news (36%), followed this time by advertisement (24%). Apparently, the least emphasized were national politics (6%), national crime (4%) and local crime (2%). In contrast, advertisement took the biggest share of space in “The Patriot”, covering a little less than half (43%) of the issue’s total space. News on local politics came in second, receiving 27%, while crime news on the local scene came in third (17 %). As in its past issues, this paper devoted the least space to sports news. “The Voice of Sierra Madre” devoted more than a third of its space to local politics with advertisement receiving 20%. Underemphasized were local crime (10%), national crime (9%), national politics (8%) and development news (6%). “The Northern Forum”, on the other hand, devoted a little more than a third of its total space allocation to development news (38%) and to sports (30%). Conversely, it gave little emphasis on local politics (5%), national politics (2%), local crime (6%) and national crime (1%).

Table 4. Total Column Inches Devoted by Tabloids to Different News Categories in December

Tabloid	Development N* (%)**	Local Politics N (%)	National Politics N (%)	Local Crime N (%)	National Crime N (%)	Sports N (%)	Advertise- ment N (%)	Total N (%)
The Valley Times	149,625 (36 %)	48,880 (12 %)	25,000 (6 %)	7,723 (2 %)	16,895 (4 %)	67,700 (16 %)	97,500 (24 %)	413,323 (100 %)
The Patriot	309,742 (7 %)	1,129,034 (27 %)	117,279 (3 %)	733,753 (17 %)	96,621 (2 %)	53,735 (1 %)	1,807,782 (43 %)	4,247,946 (100 %)
The Voice of Sierra Madre	28,995 (6 %)	180,546 (35 %)	39,372 (8 %)	50,381 (10 %)	48,120 (9 %)	58,821 (12 %)	102,961 (20 %)	509,196 (100 %)

The Northern Forum	276,036 (38 %)	36,271 (5 %)	15,810 (2 %)	41,745 (6 %)	8,610 (1 %)	213,868 (30%)	131,271 (18 %)	723,611 (100 %)
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*N= amount of space allocation

**%= percentage of space allocation

Table 5 shows the total space allocation per category for each tabloid. “The Valley Times” devoted most of its space to development news (47%), followed by local politics (19%). On the other hand, “The Patriot” gave way to more advertisements, allocating 39 % of its space to it while deciding to give only 30 % to local politics and 1 % to sports. In contrast, “The Voice of Sierra Madre” gave emphasis to local news covering local politics (29%) and local crime (23%). Advertisements were also given a bigger space of 15% while devoting only 9% to articles pertaining agriculture and other development-related articles.

Similarly, advertisements were given more space in “The Northern Forum”, allocating most of its space to this bread and butter of the newspapering industry. It is ,however, noteworthy to mention that this paper gave due attention to development articles, allocating 30% for it. News of national importance was given the least space (2%). Glancing from the results, there is an observed pattern in the space allocation for the different categories in the four tabloids.

Table 5. Total Column Inches Devoted by Tabloids to Different News Categories from September to December

Tabloid	Development N* (%)**	Local Politics N (%)	National Politics N (%)	Local Crime N (%)	National Crime N (%)	Sports N (%)	Advertisement N (%)	Total N (%)
The Valley Times	1,344,687 (47 %)	543,305 (19 %)	260,893 (9 %)	61,658 (2 %)	85,181 (3 %)	109,910 (4 %)	475,050 (16 %)	2,880,684 (100 %)
The Patriot	856,782 (6 %)	4,038,099 (30 %)	471,353 (3 %)	2,215,880 (16 %)	620,954 (5 %)	167,628 (1 %)	5,257,472 (39 %)	13,628,168 (100 %)
The Voice of Sierra Madre	189,979 (9 %)	623,793 (29 %)	176,946 (8 %)	488,147 (23 %)	242,478 (11 %)	104,642 (5 %)	333,272 (15 %)	2,159,257 (100 %)
The Northern Forum	1,005,073 (30 %)	217,974 (7 %)	59,433 (2 %)	123,865 (4 %)	78,955 (2 %)	510,873 (15%)	132,4011 (40 %)	3,320,184 (100 %)

*N= amount of space allocation

**%= percentage of space allocation

Table 6 shows the total space allocation for all types of categories for each of the four tabloids. It can be gleaned that among the four tabloids studies, it is “The Patriot” which gave the biggest space allocation to local politics with 74 %, national crime with 60% and national politics with 49%. It is also “The Patriot” which has the biggest allocation for advertisement (71%).

Comparing the space allocation of the four tabloids to development articles, it is “The Valley Times” that gave it the most emphasis with 39 %. In contrast, only a quarter of its total space was given by “The Patriot” to this particular category.

Table 6. Total Column Inches Devoted for the Four Tabloids by Category from September to December

Tabloid	Develop- ment N* (%)**	Local Politics N (%)	National Politics N (%)	Local Crime N (%)	National Crime N (%)	Sports N (%)	Advertise- ment N (%)
The Valley Times	1,344,687 (39 %)	543,305 (10 %)	260,893 (27 %)	61,658 (2 %)	85,181 (8 %)	109,910 (12 %)	475,050 (6 %)
The Patriot	856,782 (25 %)	4,038,099 (74 %)	471,353 (49 %)	2,215,880 (77 %)	620,954 (60 %)	167,628 (19 %)	5,257,472 (71 %)
The Voice of Sierra Madre	189,979 (6 %)	623,793 (12 %)	176,946 (18 %)	488,147 (17 %)	242,478 (24 %)	104,642 (12 %)	333,272 (5 %)
The Northern Forum	1,005,073 (30 %)	217,974 (4 %)	59,433 (16 %)	123,865 (4 %)	78,955 (8 %)	510,873 (57 %)	132,4011 (18 %)
Total	3,396,521 (100%)	5,423,171 (100%)	968,625 (100%)	2,889,550 (100%)	3,396,521 (100%)	893,053 (100%)	7,389,805 (100%)

*N= amount of space allocation

**%= percentage of space allocation

Table 7 shows the total number of space allocation to different categories. Results show that in the four issues of the four tabloids, more attention was devoted to advertisement (34%) and local politics (25%) compared to the other categories.

On the other hand, the least emphasized were national crime (5%), national politics (4%), and sports (5%). It is lamentable that a meager 15% was devoted to development news.

Table 7. Total number of column inches by category

Tabloid	Total Column Inches	Percentage
Development	3,396,521	15
Local Politics	5,423,171	25
National Politics	968,625	4
Local Crime	2,889,550	13
National Crime	1,027,568	5
Sports	893,053	4
Advertisement	7,389,805	34
Total	21,988,293	100

Findings in Table 8 show that, among the type of development articles printed in the four tabloids, less than half (44 %) was devoted to stories on agriculture, followed by items on health (33%). Since farming is still the main source of income for most in this part of the country, the emphasis on agriculture is commendable.

Table 8. Type of Development Articles Printed in the Four Tabloids

Type of Article	Total Column Inches	Percentage
Agriculture	686,169	44
Health	511,577	33
Education	353,641	23
Total	1,551,387	100

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The four tabloids devoted most of their space to advertisement and local politics, with least emphasis given to national crime, national politics and sports.

In general, although the four tabloids allocated space to development articles, such space is not considerable enough to conclude that they gave emphasis to this category. As to the type of development articles printed in these papers, more attention was devoted to agriculture and health. Articles on education were given less emphasis.

It is understandable that tabloids solicit advertisements to finance their operation, nevertheless, there should still be conscious effort on their part to cater to the readers' needs. As their social responsibility to the communities, these tabloids should make it their primordial function to educate and inform, and not just to earn a huge profit in the newspapering industry. They should be more responsible and allocate a bigger space to stories that contribute the the socio-economic alleviation of the communities where they circulate.

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